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DOCTORAL FIELD: THEOLOGY

**ROMANIAN CHURCH ICONOGRAPHY
FROM THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD.
THE IMAGE OF THE HOLY TRINITY**

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

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Keywords: *iconography, icon, Holy Trinity, Philoxenia of Abraham, dogma, Hypostasis, church art, fresco, miniatures.*

SUMMARY

The work entitled "Romanian church iconography from the medieval period. The Image of the Holy Trinity" is the result of a scientific research effort undertaken over a period of more than three years, under the guidance of the scientific coordinator – honorable Rev. Prof. Univ. Habil. dr. Claudiu Constantin Cotan, director of the Doctoral School of Theology within the "Ovidius" University of Constanța.

This doctoral thesis represents the fruit of a sustained systematic effort to discover, identify, research and create an anthology of Trinity representations in the Western European space, in the Pan-Orthodox space, and especially in the Romanian space, but it also represents a polysemantic literary journey in areas such as iconography, iconology, church history and art history, in an interdisciplinary manner.

The chosen theme is not a random one, but results from a personal preoccupation with Romanian medieval art, with Byzantine iconography and iconology, with the circumscribability of the Holy Trinity, an interest "sparked" from the benches of the Art High School in Suceava, continued during the two undergraduate studies and concretized during the master's studies. We opted for the analysis of the Trinitarian representations of Romanian iconography from the medieval period until the painting of the "Descent of the Holy Spirit" church from Dragomirna (1612-1613), for the synthesis of triadic images from Orthodox church painting and in the antithesis of the naturalistic and desacralized art of the Western Renaissance. The period in question is one of political and administrative disquietude, of the crystallization of Romanian state formations, but it is also an exemplary, fruitful and defining one for church art, especially for the iconography of emblematic, courtly or noble monuments. In order to have the possibility of discerning artistic characteristics that particularize or accentuate the unitary aspect of Byzantine art, we joined these national ecclesiastical edifices with some significant monuments from the South-Eastern European Orthodox heritage, approaching in this broader context also examples from Western European art.

Based on ecclesial dogmatics and the theophanies reported in the Holy Scriptures (explained by the Church Fathers), the icons of the Triune Hypostases have well-defined artistic coordinates, their circumscribability being well established in the teaching of the Church. The alteration of the spiritual life and the non-respect of the iconographic canons decided over the centuries constituted the premises of iconographical deviations regarding the representation or, better said, the possibility of representing the Persons of the Holy Trinity. The iconurgical mode of the icon acquires dogmatic significance according to the way it expresses, describes, explains and delimits the truths of the Church, thus delimiting itself from the risk of being a source or appanage of wanderings or heresies. Any schism and any heresy in the Church represents an alteration of the image of the Holy Trinity, an image that vivifies and perpetuates the unity of the Church, and these alterations are also felt in the representations of the Triadic Hypostases, as artistic echoes of heterodoxy.

The actuality of the theme is highlighted by the very concepts and social ideologies promoted today by a non-religious, nihilistic society, accepting of a soft, relative, fortuitous and permissive spirituality, with repulsion towards the icon, but which surrounds itself with a diverse gallery of *icons* and pictographs, from conventional street signs, to *logos*, brands and even emoticons¹ that suffocate every display, every social network and our everyday life. So, in an aniconic and atheistic present, a study about icon, iconology, iconoduly and triadology, can represent at least a curiosity, if not a clarification, explanation and argument both of the binomial image-icon, or of the binomial sign-symbol, as well as the antinomy One-Three - One God-Three Hypostases.

The main framework objectives of this work consist in proving the synonymy between the dogma of the Holy Trinity (of Their Hypostases) and the iconographic expressions, as well as the possibility and the way of the iconographic circumscription of the Trinitarian Persons, in explaining and arguing the iconographic canonicity of the Trinity representations and in the imagistic exemplification of the felurites triadic images from our country and beyond its borders. Moreover, the similarities between the patristic exegesis and their iconic, chromatic counterparts – the icons, make up one of the major objectives of the Report. The information and explanations reported are conclusive and useful to compare and parallel the written expression and the plastic expression of the same immutable truth of the Church. Considering the proposed objectives, the scientific research used turns out to be

¹ *Emoticons* = emotions + icons

exploratory (denoting the familiarization, knowledge and experience of the subject) as well as descriptive (describing the constitutive parts of the subject that have been studied), not omitting the analytical research either, because the scientific material documentary is consistent and varied.

Regarding **the content** of the thesis, I have structured the work in five chapters, providing a theoretical framework, explanatory information vital in terms of the comprehensibility of theological messages, and a narrative thread to the iconographic analysis. If the first chapters deal with the theological framework - dogmatic, patristic and hymnological – of the icon, then the canonicity and non-canonicity of some triadic representations, both from the West and from the East, the following chapters and subchapters deal with the proposed theme in detail and objectivity.

The first chapter is dedicated to the research stage of medieval Romanian iconography, from the pioneering period to the present day, to the evolution of research in the field, depending on the context of research possibilities, premises, motivations and discoveries in the field. In the Romanian area, the Orthodox artistic spirit coming from Constantinople – the normative center of the Byzantine-Orthodox area – will last as long as Orthodoxy does not acquire major Western influences in its religious life, in theological conceptions and in art (in the case of the Romanian Principalities this means until during the period of the "wise paintings" from Sucevița and Dragomirna, viz. the end of the 16th century – the beginning of the 17th century). The scientific research and iconography studies of many European and national art historians span over 100 years, with revisions, additions, annotations, contradictions, re-evaluations and clarifications resulting in the concise information we now have, in the context of an interdisciplinarity that also involves archaeology, restoration-conservation, epigraphy, paleography, etc. In the texts of art historians about iconography, the theological aspect is often neglected or mentioned by analogy, so quasi-used, and in the texts of theologians about the icon there are too many iconological generalities, scriptural and/or patristic references, but the artistic-aesthetic valence is almost completely absent.

The second chapter represents the foundation of this doctoral thesis: the triadological dogmatics of the Church – "pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3, 15), the Old Testament and the New Testament sources of the dogma of the Holy Trinity, patristic exegesis regarding the unity, trihypostasis and perichoretic perfection of the Holy Trinity, as

well as the lyrical reverberations of the triadology included in the hymnography of the Church, with a brief generalization foray into the history of the concept of the *Trinity*. The dogma of the Holy Trinity is the absolute superlative of mysteries – the Mystery of mysteries, to which all revealed teaching is reduced, expressed through words, deeds, signs, symbols and divine visions, so that the Holy Trinity is confessed as "the mystery of the most pure theology". The dogma of the Holy Trinity applies to human life and demonstrates that the only true philosophy, the Christian one, can only be "Omnousian", mean *consubstantial*; only starting from the dogma of the Holy Trinity, the Truth illuminates and floods with grace the man who tends ascetically towards Tabor (cf. Pavel Florenski)².

The dogma about the Holy Trinity was formulated and exemplified in the course of several centuries, it was revealed by the exegesis of numerous Holy Fathers and Church writers, it was vivified by a blessed pleiad of pious and venerable monastic faces, so that later it was decided, at The Seventh Ecumenical Synod, the place of the icon in relation to the other main elements of worship and Christian Tradition, namely the Holy Cross, the Holy Gospel and the holy relics. Obviously, I could not fully include the sources of the Church regarding the teaching about the Holy Trinity (nor did I set out to do so), but with certainty the presented ones are conclusive and useful to report later and compare written expression *versus* plastic expression, or metaphorically speaking, painting in words *versus* writing in colors and lines of the same immutable, unique and totally uncircumscribable truth.

Thus presented, defined and explained the dogma of the Holy Trinity - the triadology of the Orthodox Church, according to the truth opined by the Holy Fathers and other church writers, as well as its inmographic echo in the worship of the Church, the foundation of the representation of the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity can be realized: scriptural, patristic, hymnological and iconological exegesis of the most famous icon researchers and theologians. Triadic Persons cannot be represented in any way, with any appearance, nor in any historical context or iconographic ensemble; One of them cannot be represented in any way (the Father), and the Other can only be circumscribed under three forms/faces (the Holy Spirit – and this in well-established evangelical-iconographical contexts). As for the circumscribing of the Son in icons, it is inadequate and inappropriate to try to explain the possibility of the iconization of Jesus Christ, as if abstracting from the history of iconoclasm, from the

² Pavel FLORENSKI, *Stâlpul și temelia adevărului, Încercare de teodicee ortodoxă în douăsprezece scrisori*, în românește de Emil Iordache, pr. Iulian Fripetu și pr. Dimitrie Popescu, Iași, Edit. Polirom, 1999, p. 50.

elucidations of the Synod of Hieria, and even worse, from the definitions and expositions of the iconodoulous Fathers, especially since iconography it finds its source in the very Incarnation of the Son of God. So, the hypostatic idioms (attributes) are those which differentiate, define, circumscribe, but which in no way endanger the essential unity and/or that of glory, power or latreutics, nor do they bring any harm to the inter-hypostatic / intratrinitarian perichoresis.

The representation of the Persons of the Holy Trinity is sometimes more difficult to express plastically than literally, although both modes are insufficient, clumsy, and imperfect in hypostatic circumscription. Any deviation from these iconological principles fuels misinterpretations, grounds schisms and heresies, and moves iconography away from the Orthodox Tradition towards obsolescence. Allegorical plastic solutions, plastic slippages that satisfy only the artistic and emotional interest of people, based only on mundane, scholastic or aesthetic criteria, are neither acceptable nor desirable.

The third chapter treats from a hermeneutical point of view the canonical representation of the Holy Trinity, starting from the simple renderings of the angelophany from *Creation* (18, 1-8), to the completion of a theophanic, triune circumscription, in the "Troitsa" of the Venerable Andrew Rubliov, as well as analogies with other canonical triadic images, belonging to the three *typos* proposed by Father Gabriel Bunge: angelological, *christological* and *triadological*. The icon of *Abraham's Philoxenia*, scripturally based on a concrete historical event, presents us with the first post-Edenic appearance of the Trihypostatic God, thus a theophanic mirroring or an Old Testament epiphany. The dogmatic core of this unique Trinitarian representation is the summation of several constitutive dogmatic elements: the hypostatic multiplicity of the mystical reality of the Holy Spirit, His deity and equality with the other Trinitarian Hypostases, the concise exclusion of any subordinationist interpretation ("Arianism" – "papism") with filioquist or Judaizing valences, as well as any rationalistic exhaustiveness of the "eternal secret hidden and unknown to angels" – trinitarian dogma.

A subchapter presents theologically, pertinently and objectively some non-canonical trinitarian representations from an iconographic point of view and, above all, from a theological point of view, that is, having a heterodox iconology. The main non-canonical, fanciful, even phantasmagoric "triune" are presented, who "made a career" in religious art, in the anlums and frescoes of the West, but who also disturbed the orthodox iconographic

canonicity, with the wide competition of innovative artists and patrons (more) *open-minded*. The alteration of the spiritual life and the non-respect of the iconographic canons decided over the centuries constituted the premises of iconographic deviations regarding the representation or, better said, the possibility of representing the Holy Trinity. Every schism and every heresy in the Church represents an alteration of the image of the Holy Trinity, an image that enlivens and perpetuates the unity of the Church, and these alterations are also felt in the representations of the Holy Trinity, like artistic echoes of heterodoxy. Undoubtedly, the only canonical representation accepted in iconography is the typos of the *Filoxenia of Abraham*, as a foreshadowing of the hypostases of the Holy Trinity and of the paphoretic intersubjectivity of These, the only defining historical-scriptural moment for the essential unity and tri-hypostasis of the Holy Trinity.³ The deviation from Orthodoxy of various heresies, schisms and Christian denominations, also materialized in the field of iconography. The Kakodox imagination distorted including the face of the Most Holy Trinity, giving birth to triadic iconographic "monsters" – which spread their tentacles in Orthodox ecclesiastical painting as well. Thus we have a so-called "*New Testament*" *vision of the Holy Trinity* (in fact, an illustration of filioquism, of the consubstantiality between the Father and the Son and of the arbitrary presence of a dove that is meant to be a physical representation of the Holy Spirit); *The Holy Trinity "Paternity"* exaggerates the Father's monad, His monarchy to the detriment of the triadic unity, an iconization of subordinationism; *The "trimorphic" Holy Trinity* gives us a hideous representation of a character with three faces, like a Janus with not two, but three faces, most of the time it is a triplicity of the face of the Son; *The "triandric" Holy Trinity* presents us with three men (often identical in appearance), an unfortunate circumscription of the Hypostases against the triune unity; and *the Holy Trinity "Throne of compassion"* or "*Throne of grace*" can be defined as a paternal Pietá, an iconographic illustration of the legal satisfaction brought to the Father by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, - the leitmotif of scholastic theology issued by Anselm of Canterbury.

All these unfortunate triadic iconographic typologies make up the most unfortunate sum of the non-canonical representations of the Holy Trinity, unacceptable in Orthodoxy, but tacitly allowed through the frequent use of some of them (for instance, the "*New Testament*" Trinity), through the insufficiency of iconographic knowledge and/or of the Byzantine ermine

³ The epiphanies of the Baptism of the Lord and the Transfiguration cannot be enlightening in rendering the equality, deofinity and syntrony of the Triune Hypostases.

of patrons, beneficiaries and church painters, or by exaggerating the allegorical and/or symbolic aspects of the subject treated with too much artistic fantasy.

Another vast subchapter deals with the researched theme in the context of European and Western art, starting from the common treasury of Christianity, from the art of the ancient Greek colonies in southern Italy with their Byzantine mosaics, to the miniatures of Western manuscripts with predilections for artistic novelties (as themes, manners, typologies, technologies, etc.), and the Piedmontese frescoes that announced the sunset of iconography in the West and welcomed the dawn of naturalism and humanism of the Renaissance.

Ecclesiastical iconography, once common in the Christian East and West, closely followed the chancellery theology issued by the two poles of influence of the Church – Rome and Constantinople. In the West, all social, cultural and ecclesiastical centers contributed to the idolatrous image of a political-religious megacenter – Rome, where the tone of all the actions of the Church was set, in scholastic dogmatics, hymnography, mysticism, monasticism, political relations, including in iconography, changed then in simple plastic art with religious subjects. Just as in dogmatics, liturgy, mysticism and asceticism, politics, morals, diplomacy, society, and in art, implicitly in iconography, innovations were embraced with bewildering nonchalance; any fantasy revealed in graphics and colors was received as correct and acceptable (therefore canonical), anyone could paint anything and anyway, as the meaning of the whole Western theology and society indicated.

If in Rome iconography obediently submitted to the deviant dogmatic path of a Caesaro-papism maintained until today, transforming a sacred and mystical art into an aesthetic and pedagogical accessory of a socio-political Church identifiable today by the term *Vatican*, in the East iconography developed, crystallized, defined and conformed to the Tradition and its scriptural and patristic sources, receiving a centralized form in the capital, but also a fund with national specificities, which does not disperse the artistic unity, but diversifies and enriches it according to its own ethos each national Church.

The fourth chapter represents only the geographical, historical and stylistic⁴ context that could influence the creation of sources for the Trinitarian representations also found in our country.

⁴ The term iconographic style is inappropriate for the icon. The style designates some particular, singular, aesthetic characteristics in a certain period and in a certain space of ecclesiastical art, and its relativism is compressed only in the formal expression of the theory and history of art, tributary to scholasticism. However,

”In iconography there are many schools and artistic currents, but it cannot be said that some are more authentic, truer than others. The differences are largely determined by the geographical coordinates and represent the natural expression of the evolution of the style over the centuries”, affirmed Venerable Sophronius of Essex⁵. The particularities of the national iconography of each country strengthen Byzantine unity in multicultural diversity, because Byzantine art still knows echoes long after the fateful year 1453. There is a predilection for certain typologies depending on the iconographic school, the geographical space, the historical period of the execution of the painting, but and the requirements of the beneficiary, the level of theological knowledge of both the artists and the patrons, the harmful influences of other religions and/or confessions, all of which define and contribute decisively to the evolution of iconography: ”each people that enters the Church brings with it its own national traits , develops within it according to its nature, both in terms of holiness and in its outward expression – sacred art. (...) Unlike Rome, Orthodoxy has always developed the national aspect of the Church from the heart of each people.”⁶

So, these are the framework coordinates in which the premises of the Trinitarian iconography were created, which also influenced Romanian icon art. We can find many similarities between the triadic representations within our country and in the territories of neighboring countries, because the masters of church painting have always traveled for training and information, to copy and find iconographic interpretations of various scriptural subjects, to correct and correlate information in what regarding technique, technotropy, iconology, trends, novelties and other constitutive aspects of iconography.

The fifth chapter of this thesis – has as its preamble a subchapter reserved for the church painters of the Romanian Middle Ages, having the role of an anamnestic encomium for the calophilic people of ecclesiastical art. Although for the most part they remained in historical anonymity, the names of some painters who placed Romanian iconography in the pantheon of Byzantine art have been preserved until today, bringing their indisputable contribution to the development of church painting, to the beautification of holy places, to the completion of the cultural endowment and in defining the national ethos. The main theme of

we can speak of a history or a phasing of the iconographic schools, not of a differentiation of the unitary corpus of iconography, but of its background.

⁵ sora GABRIELA, *Căutând perfecțiunea în lumea artei: calea artistică a Părintelui Sofronie*, Edit. Bizantină, București, 2017, p. 159.

⁶ cf. G. MORAVSCIK, „Byzantinische Mission im Kreise der Türkvölker an der Nordküste des Schwarzen Meeres”, în *Documentele principale ale celui de-al XIII-lea Congres de bizantinologie de la Oxford*, 1966, p. 14, apud Leonid USPENSKY, *Teologia icoanei în Biserica Ortodoxă*, stud. introd. și trad. Teodor Baconsky, București, Edit. Fundația Anastasia, 2009, pp. 212-213.

the work – the trinitarian representations of Romanian feudal art – is divided into three subchapters, both according to the number of divine Hypostases and according to the number of the main historical Romanian provinces: Transylvania, Wallachia (Ungrovlahia) and Moldova.

Transylvanian Orthodox iconography, although local, rusticized, shows obvious influences of the Serbian paleological school, but then the influences of Catholic ecclesiastical art are also evident – an consequence of the unfortunate process of Hungarianization and Catholicization (then Calvinization and/or Lutherization) of the Romanians from the western part of today's Romania. Based on what has been presented, we can state that in Transylvania, depending on the orthoexomology of the faith of the Romanian nobles – founders of Transylvanian holy places, the Trinitarian iconographic type used was (or not) the canonical one, means *Abraham's Feast*. If at The Cândești's church at Râu de Mori we find the only representation of the Holy Trinity of the *Philoxenia* type in the whole of Transylvania before the 17th century, this says a lot about the possibilities of preserving the Orthodox faith unaltered in the face of the offensive of Catholic propaganda, then of the iconoclastic influences of Calvinists and even Lutherans. Already in Densuș, in 1443, the Catholic artistic influence in Romanian art is evident – leaving aside the rusticizing style of the mural painting – through the unfortunate adoption of the triadic *Paternity* type. We find this Trinitarian representation suitable for the catechetical implementation of the *Filioque* addition in Catholic art from Transylvania.

Although the information regarding the ecclesiastical mural painting in Wallachia is extremely poor, incomplete, although the iconographic ensembles before the 15th century are fragmentary and incomplete, those from the 15th century are completely missing, and those from the 16th lea are iconurgically and technotropically varied, therefore diverse in style, manner, technique, chromatics, composition, symbolism, etc., however, the representation of the Holy Trinity was not among the favorite iconographic themes of the autochthonous or allogeneic painters who worked in the territory North Danube. This could be explained not by a defective theological training or by an iconological minimization of triadology, but rather by a stable situation of the Orthodox faith in these places, without fierce proselytizing by papal missionaries, without notable actions of South-Danube Bogomilism, without the oppressive activities and constraints of the newly hatched Christian dissidence generally called Protestantism. I believe, therefore, that the few representations of the Holy Trinity (which, fortunately, are canonical or on the edge of acceptability) are the fruit of some welcome

Byzantine reminiscences, the fruit of some painters coming from the Hellenophone Balkan space, perhaps even from Constantinople or Thessaloniki, and the fruit of a healthy vision local theological and iconographical. That is why I think that the summarization of the iconographers from Muntenia only to the triune representations of the iconographic type of *Abraham's Filoxenia* and the triadic type suggested by the *Ancient of Days + IC XC – Emanuel + St. Spirit* as a dove, does not denote theological ignorance or lack of eidetic qualities, but orthopraxy and iconurgical orthodoxy, artistic anchoring in authentic Byzantine art, iconodular and orthoexomological.

Medieval Moldavian iconography from the 15th-16th centuries includes the richest, most prodigious and diverse dower of trinity representations, diverse in types, but also in particular stylistic ways of plastic rendering. The evolution (or involution?) of the representations, from the classic *Philoxeny of Abraham* to the innovative hymnological analogy in colors – *One Born...*, belongs to the time of painting, the school of painting and the influences of academic theology foreign to the patristic and preacher spirit of Orthodoxy. Thus, in the Stephanian period of Moldavian iconography, the only hieroplasty (sacred configuration) used was the one established by the tradition of Byzantine art – *Abraham's Hospitality (Mamvri Dinner)*. In the period before and during the reign of Petru Rareş (and even after), in addition to the classic and orthodox iconic circumscription of the Trinity already used, the presence of the triadic typologies Paternity (in Moldoviţa) and the New Testament Trinity (Humor, Moldoviţa, "St. Dumitru" – Suceava, etc.), in the context of the proliferation of the Protestant current which is repugnant to the icon, the cross, the holy relics, the priesthood and everything related to the Church's Tradition; in this conjuncture, the need to diversify the iconography of the Holy Trinity was felt, for a better display, explanation and understanding of the Godhead, of the uniqueness, unity and perichoresis of the Trinity, since "the icon is a common language for the Church as a whole, because it expresses the Sobornic Orthodox teaching, the common experience of the right faith and the Orthodox liturgy everywhere."⁷ Although the intentions are laudable, the effect was disastrous: the use of other triadic representations apart from that of Hospitality gave rise to numerous theological interpretations and extrapolations, foreign to the orthoexomology of the Church, slipping into filioquism, subordinationism, pneumatomachism, zoomorphism, patripasianism and other kakodoxies. This iconographic trend flourished at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century (during the Movileşti period), when both the Trinitarian

⁷ L. USPENSKY, *Teologia icoanei în Biserica Ortodoxă*, cap. 9, ..., p. 190.

circumscriptions and iconographic themes and programs diversified, using dogmatic-allegorical iconological proposals of Western provenance (*Coronation of the Virgin, How shall we call thou...?, They enjoy thou..., One Born...*), via Novgorod, Pskov or Transylvania, at the expense of preserving the iconographic tradition of Byzantine origin.

Unfortunately, the historical evolution of religious art starting from the 17th century, not only in Romania, meant a theological involution of art, a tacit iconoclasm in which the icon "inadvertently" turned into a painting with a religious subject, into a simple religious image, naturalism and artistic fideism stifling authentic iconography and deviating from its canonicity, with the condescending and encouraging input of the higher clergy.

The conclusions of the paper are intended to complete the scientific approach of the researches necessary for the elaboration of the doctoral thesis.

Today the iconographic renewals find their echo in the conceptions of some artists, theologians, clerics, so that they cannot even understand clearly the Trinitarian mystery of Filoxenia, but are more attracted to the Western, filioquist and pietist "*New Testament*" *Trinity*, something that denotes a superficiality in the definition of the icon, a distance from the Patristic Tradition, an emotional exultation produced by aesthetic impressions, so that the statement that "the decay of the iconographic tradition resulted from the weakening of the strictness of good church order becomes tenable."⁸

Personally, I consider that the inclusion of the image of the Holy Trinity in the iconographic program represents a *conditio sine qua non*, because it would epitomically express the entire confession of faith painted on the facades of churches, the history of salvation, the dogma of the Incarnation of the Son of God, the continuity of the glorious presence of Christ in the Church, Holy Tradition in colors. The icon of the Holy Trinity plastically expresses the union of all in the Church, "as the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity gather in one divine Being - this is the fundamental theme to which all other themes are subordinated in our ancient religious painting."⁹

From the point of view of the **methodology**, in the scientific approach of this theological and iconographic research, we appealed to interdisciplinarity, to plurivocity, as

⁸ N. M. TARABUKIN, *Sensul icoanei*, trad. și postfață de Vladimir Bulat, ed. îngr. de Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas, București, Edit. Sophia, 2008, p. 130.

⁹ Evgheni N. TRUBETKOI, *3 eseuri despre icoană*, trad. de Boris Buzilă, Edit. Anastasia, București, 1999, cap. I.2, p. 16.

incursions were needed in the fields of systematic theology, biblical theology, but also patristics, as well as in the sphere of activity of history church, art history, iconography and iconology. *On-site iconographic analysis* is the main research method (which also resulted in a vast collection of photographs, some of which are reproduced in the appendices of the main chapters of the work), but of course I also used the *method of documenting* Trinitarian iconography in the context of church history, as well as on the current state of contemporary iconology and iconography, the *method of bibliographic research* (and the patristic sources of icon dogma are multiple and varied, spanning many centuries full of apologies, interpretations, theological opinions, starting with the Trulan Synod – 692), as well as and the *method of analysis* of holy, patristic, hymnographic and iconological texts. I used the case study method for the general presentation of each individual monument, according to chronological, geographical and stylistic criteria, and according to the theological interpretation of the Trinity representations.

Convinced that Byzantine art is not overtaken by the ecclesiastical reality nor outdated, but is current and perpetuable, I sought to be original in this work (but citing the sources used, researched and appropriated), to be complete (without the possibility and intention to be exhaustive), bring up to date and argue the iconography of the Triadic Hypostases. The abundance of illustrative images and some detailed explanations denoting a possible grammar of the icon, further emphasize and argue the idea that the image tends to complement and replace words, and the sacred image, that is, the icon, can better express the truths we believe in the context in whose words prove to be insufficient, silent and inadequate to approach the Holy Trinity.

Far from exhausting (and even summarizing) the subject of the representations of the Holy Trinity in iconography and the dogmatic teachings revealed by them, some conclusive ideas are still required, which could increase the general culture and the dogmatic and artistic knowledge, but would somehow contribute and to the development of aesthetic sense, refining the characteristic *esprit de finesse*:

- The canonical and truly dogmatic icon of the Holy Trinity is the model of Rubliov's Trinity, because it is the only one that "represents the unity of the Trinity as the unity in love

of the Three Hypostases,”¹⁰ and the concept of unity in God must be perceived in hypostatic perichoresis.

- It is difficult for any iconographer to reproduce plastically a subject so well defined by hermeneutic and dogmatic canons, by symbols and chromatic obligations; in addition, artistic talent and knowledge must be correlated and corroborated with a moral life pleasing to God – origin of the absolute Good and Beautiful. The innovators in the Church, whether we mean the dogmatic, liturgical, hymnographic, iconographic ones, are outside the ”wedding chamber” (cf. Mt. 25, 1-12).

- Just as one can reach heresy through theological mistakes said or written, broken from the truth and the preaching Tradition of the Church, so easily one can deviate through the iconographic illustration of dogmatically unsustainable theological mistakes, so that the iconographer becomes a heresiarch out of pride or artistic originality, out of ignorance or artistic-theological indolence: ”Iconography is truly a holy art, but a Christian holy art, closely related to the Bible, to Christ and to the tradition of the Church.”¹¹

- The most faithful to the Scriptures, the closest to the truth and the only one accepted in Orthodox iconography as an illustration of the Holy Trinity, is the representation of the *Philoxenia (Hospitality) of Abraham*, as a glimpse of the Trihypostatic God in the form of the three traveling angels feasted by the Patriarch Abraham. Under the guise of ”People”, only at this biblical moment can the Hypostases of the Holy Trinity – the One God – be homothymically represented. The Old Testament trinitarian representation ”expresses as fully as possible the dogmatic confession of the Most Holy Trinity, and we may even say that it was born of this confession.”¹²

- The icon of the Savior Jesus Christ can be considered to be also an icon of the Holy Trinity, revealed through the incarnation and naming of the Son of God, as, ”in the sanctification of the spirit and in the faith of the truth” (2 Thess. 2, 13), Christ Himself - let us deduce: ”He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14, 9).

¹⁰ Constantin CAVARNOS, *Arta sacră bizantină*, trad. din lb. engleză de prof. Paul Bălan, Edit. Doxologia, Iași, 2017, p. 93.

¹¹ Stéphane BIGHAM, *Icoana în tradiția ortodoxă*, trad. Diana Preda, Cornel Apostol, Edit. Theosis, Oradea, 2016, p. 87.

¹² monah Grigoire KRUG, *Cugetările unui iconograf despre sensul și menirea icoanelor*, trad. Carmen și Florin Caragiu, București, Edit. Sophia, 2002, pp. 93-94.

In this sense, we consider that the icon has not lost its meaning, nor diminished its importance, nor endangered its importance in the life of the Church due to iconoclasms of all kinds and the dilution of its canonicity through innovations and fanciful expressions, but she remained the same witness of the immutable truth of the Incarnation of the Only-begotten, the same exhortation to the communion prayer of the Church, the same prophetic search of the glory from the heavenly Jerusalem. That's why iconographers must be well anchored in Tradition and in ecclesial life, in the life of the Spirit, because they are not simple "decorators" of walls and boards, but are theologians of the Beautiful, priests of color, silent missionaries of the named Logos, who they announce the Gospel of the Kingdom through plastic means to an Areopagus world, testifying not to a bizarre and confused god, but to God-the Word incarnate.

The icon of *Abraham's Philoxenia* can be mysteriously re-imaged in each of us, those who, through ascetic effort and mystical contemplation, strive towards perfection, towards deification through divine adoption, thus illustrating in our personal spiritual life the true promise of the Savior: "If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him" (Jn. 14, 23). Each of us, receiving and feasting on our neighbor, with the same love with which Patriarch Abraham received three "strangers" travelers, we can be worthy to receive God (cf. Mt. 10, 49).

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