

LUVAH

JOURNAL OF THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION



Edited by Farasha Euker
and Maja Pašović

Luvah: Journal of the Creative Imagination

Luvah, ISSN 2168–6319 (online), is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal of philosophy, theology, and literature. Luvah provides a space to reflect on modernity, tradition, and metaphysics.

Executive Editors

Farasha Euker, *Editor-in-chief*

Maja Pašović, *University of Waterloo*

Editorial Board

Keith Doubt

Wittenberg University, Ohio

David Fideler

Concord Editorial & Design

Angela Voss

Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

Amy L. Washburn

City University of New York

Copyright © 2011–2015 Farasha Euker

All rights reserved. Unless indicated otherwise, all materials are copyrighted by Luvah and its editors.

<http://luvah.org>

Aesthetics of Deification

Hieromonk Silouan

January 21, 2015

Contents

Introduction	2
Philokalia	2
Iconography of Soul	3
The Mystery of Divine Embodiment	6
Postmodern Deceptions	9

...God is the only Being that truly is – the only eternal and immutable Being – who neither receives being from non-being nor returns to non-being; who is Tri-hypostatic and Almighty, and who through His Logos brought forth all things from non-being...

Gregory Palamas, /Topics of Natural and Theological Science/, Chap. 21

The Beautiful is the principle of all things, as making cause and moving and holding together the whole by the love of its proper beautifulness, and limit of all things, and cherished, as final cause, since for the sake of the Beautiful all things come to be... —St. Dionysius the Areopagite, *Divine Names* IV.7, 704 AB

He who is deified through grace will be everything that God is without possessing identity of essence. —St. Maximos the Confessor, *To Thalassios* 22, *Ambiguum* 41

Introduction



MONASTICISM ACTUALIZES the integration of the sacred, life and art. This unfolds in accordance to Tradition: the ever new, ever renewing life of the Holy Spirit in the Church.¹ The monk is a craftsman. Monasticism is an iconography of the soul, the means of return to supreme Beauty. It is an oasis in a spiritual desert of self-deception, a finding of our grounding in divinity. It is a restoration of our divine likeness, a method leading to deification. The monk is a warrior. Monasticism is a spiritual war on the alluring idols of the spectacle of postmodernity. It is a return to the Real, the Archetype of man. As it has been said, “Beauty has to do with cognition.”² Yet we look in the mirror and at each other’s countenance, but fail to re-cognize our true selves. Meanwhile Creation groans, for in lacking self-knowledge, our blind intellects fail to re-cognize the Sacred in all things. But how does monasticism bring about integration, wholeness, beauty? And, what does the icon offer to the contemporary predicament?

Philokalia

We find the answer in the classic of Eastern Orthodox Hesychast spirituality, *The Philokalia*.³ In this anthology of writings on pure prayer and the contemplative life, based on the experience of spiritual masters, we find a wealth of traditional wisdom centered not only on the Jesus Prayer, but also on a theology of beauty. *Philokalia* is a Greek word meaning the “Love of the Beautiful.” Sherrard trans-

1. According to Lossky, “The pure notion of Tradition can then be defined by saying that it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, communicating to each member of the Body of Christ the faculty of hearing, of receiving, of knowing the Truth in the light which belongs to it, and not according to the natural light of human reason...The dynamism of Tradition allows of no inertia either in the habitual forms of piety or in the dogmatic expressions that are repeated mechanically like magic recipes of Truth, guaranteed by the authority of the Church. To preserve the ‘dogmatic tradition’ does not mean to be attached to doctrinal formulas: to be within Tradition is to keep living Truth in the Light of the Holy Spirit; or rather, it is to be kept in the Truth by the vivifying power of Tradition. But this power, like all that comes from the Spirit, preserves by a ceaseless renewing.” As quoted in C. A. Tsakiridou/, *Icons in Time, Persons in Eternity: Orthodox Theology and the Aesthetics of the Christian image*/, Ashgate Pub. Lim. Surrey, UK, 2013, pp. 64-65. All of this presupposes *participation in the life of the Holy Spirit through baptismal initiation*. The various sacraments, rites, and supports of contemplation in the Orthodox Church are life giving sacred symbols, and as such not arbitrary. That is, they arise from the *actualization of life in the Spirit*, their outward forms being a reverberation of divine energy. Therefore, although there should be no attachment to outward form or doctrinal formula (fundamentalism, legalistic formalism or phariseeism, etc.), given that they cannot exhaust the plenitude of the Mystery, nevertheless, this does not mean a willful innovator or dismissive approach to the exoteric form should be cultivated. Nor does it mean allowance for religious syncretism. Tendencies that commonly arise from subjectivism and lack of commitment to the life of initiation. The form is not above the Church, she determines the form according to Tradition. However, She does this not merely as a “human authority,” but rather as truly the Body of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, applying changes organically according to the pastoral needs and circumstances that arise. Yet, these contingencies always remain connected and subordinate to the immutable principles of Tradition.

2. “The older view of art had been that the work of art is the demonstration of the invisible form that remains in the artist, whether human or divine; that beauty has to do with cognition; and that art is an intellectual virtue.” Annanda K. Coomaraswamy, “Imitation, Expression, and Participation,” in *The Essential Coomaraswamy*, World Wisdom, Bloomington, Indiana, 2004, p. 181.

3. *The Philokalia* contains texts expanding from the 4th - 15th centuries. It was first translated to the Greek and published in Venice in 1782 by St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth. The texts center on the practice of *Hesychasm*, or “stillness,” in which the contemplative life is cultivated through the recitation of the Jesus Prayer. From henceforth all references to this anthology will be from the English translation: G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, *The Philokalia*, Faber and Faber, London & Boston, Vol. I, 1979; Vol. II, 1981; Vol. III, 1984; Vol. IV, 1995.

lates it as, the “love of the beautiful, the exalted, the excellent, understood as the transcendent source of life and the revelation of Truth.”⁴ Hence, what we have in *The Philokalia* is the traditional understanding of the inseparability of Beauty, Goodness and Truth, as names of God. Herein we discover that sanctity- acquiring of the divine likeness- involves the regaining of that primordial beauty that once clothed Adam in Paradise, and that monasticism provides the principles and method, the “craftsmanship,” to get there.⁵ Yet, it is not simply a matter of a return to the primordial state, it also means a partaking of uncreated Beauty in unprecedented ways Adam had not yet tasted before the Fall. Being a spiritual infant, he blunted his growth when he transgressed. Now we can grow to a fullness of stature and maturity that fulfills his calling to become god.⁶

In short, sanctification is not to be confused with juridical pietism or moralism. Rather, it has to do with participation in the divine nature, being conformed to the uncreated energies of God, and beauty as an ontological category.⁷ Therefore, the sacred art of iconography entails much more than the crafting of objects and images, the *outward* veneration of icons and performance of rites in church cult. More precisely, it is a way of life, the dynamic personal struggle towards deification- becoming god by grace- man’s mystical marriage, “the unconfused but real and fulfilling mixture and commingling of the divine and the human natures.”⁸ Herein lies the powerful *inner* significance and convergence between monasticism and the icon. As some Fathers like to say, monasticism is the art of arts and science of sciences, the philosophical life, through which, in cooperation with divine energy, the monk depicts within himself the divine likeness with the vivid colors of the virtues. Thereby becoming a living icon of God- a “real *authentic* being.”⁹

Iconography of Soul

Primordial man iconized God, but this iconicity lost lucidity, became marred and disfigured by the ugliness of sin. Hence, man, forgetting his Archetype, became more and more a “simulacrum” of himself, lacking in resemblance to God.¹⁰ Still, primordial man, fashioned as son of God, bore a fundamental resemblance to Him, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our Likeness’.”

4. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 13.

5. Monasticism’s “craftsmanship,” its path of asceticism, is a paradoxical coincidence of opposites, where the pain of struggle and tears become imbued with consolation and joy. All of this unfolds as a life of *philokalia*. As Archimandrite Vasileios says, “The monk’s life is beautiful because it is associated with that awesome hour of judgment and liberation. The monk’s life is a life of repentance and in the final analysis, is also a life of transfiguration. It is a life of asceticism, labour, pain, endurance, and tears. For this reason, it is crowned with divine and mystical consolation, and the beauty of spontaneity, truth and stillness. It is a life of *philokalia*, the love of beauty.” Archimandrite Vasileios, *Beauty and Hesychia in Athonite Life*, Alexander Press, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 1996, p. 13.

6. “God became man, so that we might be made gods.” St. Athanasios, *Concerning the Incarnation of the Word*, 54. P.G. 25, 192B.

7. As to the fundamental role beauty plays in the life of man Nasr says, “We are as much in need of beauty as of the air that we breathe...We need beauty as much as the food we eat and the air we breathe. It is part of our basic needs in order to live normally as human beings...We live below ourselves in ugliness, unaware that the need for beauty is as profound in the human being as the need for food, water, clothing, and shelter.” Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr On His Life and Thought*, Praeger, Santa Barbara, CA, 2010, pp. 242-45.

8. Panayiotis Nellis, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*, SVS, Crestwood, NY, 1987, p. 37.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Gilles Deleuze explores this idea in *Plato and the Simulacrum*. See the journal *October*. Vol. 27., Winter, 1983, pp. 45-56. Also see note 41 below.

¹¹ The divine “image,” although it can be obscured it cannot be destroyed, it is an indissoluble gift connecting us to God. ¹² It is what makes man a whole human being, a person, and distinguishes him from the animals. ¹³ Whereas the “likeness,” as understood by the Fathers, designates that which man strives towards and is called to actualize. According to St. John of Damaskos, the divine “image” in man designates, among other things, “intellect and soul...the quality in man that cannot be scrutinized or observed, is immortal and endowed with free will, and by virtue of which he rules, begets and constructs.” ¹⁴ Whereas “likeness” pertains to man’s “possession of the principle of virtue...his imitation of God through virtuous and godlike action.” ¹⁵ First the image, marred by the Fall, is restored by initiation in Baptism. Then, within its restored “outline,” the divine likeness is gradually “colored in” through asceticism, making of man a participant in uncreated Beauty. As St. Diadochos Photiki describes:

Just as painters clearly establish the resemblance of the portrait to the model by first tracing the outline in one color, then filling it in a little by little, with different colors...so also at baptism, the grace of God begins to remake the image to what it was when man came into existence. Then, when we begin to strive with all our will power towards the beauty of the likeness...divine grace makes virtue flourish upon virtue, elevating the beauty of the soul from glory to glory, bestowing upon it the mark of likeness. ¹⁶

In portraiture, when the full range of colors is added to the outline, the painter captures the likeness of the subject, even down to the smile. Something similar happens to those who are being repainted by God’s grace in the divine likeness: when the luminosity of love is added, then it is evident that the image has been fully transformed into the beauty of the likeness. ¹⁷

Throughout this process the *nous*, the intellect, is renewed- illumined. ¹⁸ First, the scales that formerly obstructed *noetic* vision fall, lucidity of vision increases gradually in the practice of the virtues, then man begins to apprehend the inner principles of created beings, finally, in the highest levels of perfection, he enters into theology- a true experiential knowing of God in ineffable union. An “unconfused mingling” unfolds, man is wholly transfigured, permeated with the aroma of incorruption and uncreated light. The body is spiritualized, he shares in the coming resurrection now. It is a nuptial encounter between the soul and the beautiful Beloved, from which are born the mystic utterances and

11. Gen 1:26. In the use of the plural “our” and “us” of this passage, according to patristic consensus, we find one among many revelations in the Old Testament of the trinitarian mystery of the Godhead.

12. “According to most of the Greek Fathers, the term image and likeness do not mean exactly the same thing... The gulf between creature and Creator is not impassable, for because we are in God’s image we can know God and have communion with Him. And if we make proper use of this faculty for communion with God, then we will become ‘like’ God, we will acquire the divine likeness...” Met . Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, Penguin Books, London, 1997, p. 219.

13. *Ibid.*

14. St. John of Damaskos, “On the Virtues and the Vices,” *The Philokalia*, / Vol. II, p.341

15. *Ibid.*

16. Ch. 89, /Dioadoque de Photice, ovres spiritualles,/ Sources chretiennes, Paris, 1995, p. 149. As quoted and translated in, Leonid Ouspensky, /Theology of the Icon,/ SVS Press, Crestwood, NY, 1978, p. 185.

17. St. Diadochos of Photiki/, / “On Spiritual Knowledge,” Chap. 89., /The Philokalia Vol. I,/ p.288.

18. The *nous* is the “eye of the heart.” In the English translation of *The Philokalia* the word *nous* has been translated as *intellect*. In the glossary of *The Philokalia* we read that it is, “the highest faculty of man, through which - provided it is purified - he knows God or the inner essences or principles of created things by means of direct apprehension or spiritual perception. Unlike the *dianoia* or reason, from which it must be carefully distinguished, the intellect does not function by formulating abstract concepts and then arguing on this basis to a conclusion reached through deductive reasoning, but understands divine truth by means of immediate experience, intuition or ‘simple cognition’.”

sacred verses of gnosis.¹⁹ The Fathers describe the stages as purgation (from passions), illumination (natural contemplation) and perfection (union).²⁰ For those who have attained to perfection, who “recognize themselves in God and God in themselves,” who bear the “mark of likeness,” all things are pure and have attained perfect love.²¹ They only seek after the Good and overflow with mercy.²² They know that “nothing belonging to the visible world is unclean. For by nature all things were created good.”²³ They see all things, from a grain of sand to a human countenance, as radiances of the Sacred, imbued with heavenly Beauty.²⁴ They see *in* God.²⁵ This Iconography of soul is guided by the purified *nous*, “For through its power of perception the intellect regains all the virtues.”²⁷ A process that can be likened to the Prophet Moses ascending Mount Sinai. The *nous* entering the divine darkness sees beyond vision, in unknowing, the Unseen, and in this contemplation finds the model, archetypal Beauty, which he is to depict in himself. St. Maximos parallels St. Diadochos imagery of the painter as he describes this mystery:

The darkness is that formless, immaterial and bodiless state which embraces knowledge of the prototypes of all created things. He who like another Moses enters into it, although

19. V. Lossky notes on this regard, “Unlike Gnosticism, in which knowledge for its own sake constitutes the aim of the gnostic, Christian theology is always in the last resort a means: a unity of knowledge subserving an end which transcends all knowledge.” Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, SVS Press, Crestwood, NY, 1998, p. 9

20. These stages have been described in various ways by the Fathers. Sometimes the definitions overlap, what is said of one stage can be said of the other, the terms are flexible. Although the scheme is useful, providing “signposts” along the way in the spiritual struggle, these are not to be seen as isolated from each other. As if when going up a ladder we leave rungs behind, one after the other, until deification is finally reached at the top. In fact, they all coincide as if in concentric circles, forming one unified life of progressive deification. Although to different degrees, the first stage partakes of deification as much as the third. This is a progression that is endless since the Divine is inexhaustible. St. Maximos describes this process as unfolding through the activity of the Holy Spirit, “Through fear, devotion and spiritual knowledge the Holy Spirit *purifies* those blessed with the purity of the virtues. Through strength, counsel and understanding He *illuminates* those worthy of light with the knowledge of the inner and quickening essences of created beings. Through radiant, simple and complete wisdom He grants *perfection* to those honored with deification, leading them directly towards the Cause of created beings by every way that men can be so led.” (Emphasis added) St. Maximos the Confessor, “Fourth Century of Various Texts,” Chap. 79, *The Philokalia Vol. II*, p. 255.

21. Photiki, *op. cit.*

22. This renewed state of man is partially described by St. Isaac the Syrian, “What is a merciful heart? It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals, for demons, and for all that exists. By the recollection of them the eyes of a merciful person pour forth tears in abundance. By the strong and vehement mercy that grips such a person’s heart, and by such great compassion, the heart is humbled and one cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in any in creation. For this reason, such a person offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm her or him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner such a person prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in *a heart that is in the likeness of God.*” (Emphasis added) As quoted in Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian*, Cistercian Studies 175, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 2000, p. 43.

23. St. Maximos the Confessor, “First Century of Various Texts,” Chap. 92, *The Philokalia Vol. II*, p. 185.

24. “Beauty unites all things and is the source of all things. It is the great creating cause which bestirs the world and holds all things in existence by the longing inside them to have beauty.” St. Dionysius the Areopagite, DN 4:7, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, Trans. Colm Luibheid, Paulist Press, NY, 1987, p.77.

25. This way of seeing, not merely generated by the “ordinary” mind or aesthetic thinking, but rather arising from union with God (*theosis*), is paradoxically described by St. Symeon the New Theologian as follows, “The person blind to the One is utterly blind to everything; but he who sees in the One contemplates all things. He abstains from the contemplation of all things and at the same time enters into the contemplation of all things while remaining outside what he contemplates. Being in the One he sees all things; and being in all things he sees nothing. The person who sees in the One perceives through the One both himself and all men and all things; hidden in the One, he sees nothing of anything.” St. Symeon the New Theologian, “Practical and Theological Texts,” *The Philokalia, Vol. IV*, p.31. Also see the parallels found in Plotinus: En 6.7²⁶.35. 7-16; En 6.9⁹.11. 17-23.

26. Rev 21:1; I Cor. 15:12-34.

27. Photiki, *op. cit.*

mortal by nature, understands things that are immortal. Through this knowledge he depicts in himself the beauty of divine excellence, as if painting a picture which is a faithful copy of archetypal beauty. Then he comes down from the mountain and offers himself as an example to those who wish to imitate that excellence. In this way he manifests the love and generosity of the grace he has received.²⁸

This “grace he has received” is nothing other than the lineaments of the divine likeness- the radiance of his deified countenance. Having attained perfection he shines in Beauty, “the attractive power of perfection.”²⁹ But this ascent towards the divine darkness, this iconography of soul, is not a path solely relegated to the likes of Moses, or monastics- it is for everyone. Not all are given the same vocation but all are called to be deified. Since, “The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist.”³⁰ Those who have attained to this goal are the ones depicted in icons- the saints- gods by grace.

The Mystery of Divine Embodiment

The icon proclaims and calls all, even the whole Cosmos, to deification. As St. Maximos the Confessor says, “For the Word of God and God wills always and *in all things* to accomplish the mystery of His embodiment.”³¹ This mystery of “embodiment,” intended from “beyond the ages” as the destiny of man, is fulfilled in the Incarnation of the Logos- Jesus Christ, Son and Word of God.³² It is actualized in becoming one with Him through *initiation* into the mysteriological life of the Church- His *Body*. The initiated partake of the Great Mystery- the Holy Eucharist- in which they consume the Body of God. God becomes edible. In partaking thereof they are nourished by Him, united to His Body, and formed after His likeness- “Oh taste and see that the Lord is good...”³³ For the Logos incarnate is the divine Archetype for man, after whom he is to model himself, and become a living icon.³⁴ He is Archetype of Archetype, the “Icon of the Father.”³⁵ In Him we see, handle, and taste God. He is Beauty. In short, “Man finds in the Archetype his true ontological meaning.”³⁶ About Christ as the Archetype, St. Nicholas Cabasilas tells us:

It was for the new man that human nature was created at the beginning, and for him mind and desire were prepared. Our reason we have received in order that we may know

28. St. Maximos the Confessor, *First Century on Theology*, Chap. 85, /Philokalia,/ Vo. II, p. 133.

29. Annanda K. Coomaraswamy, “The Nature of Medieval Art,” in *The Essential Coomaraswamy*, World Wisdom, Bloomington, Indiana, 2004, p. 174.

30. /Ibid.,/ p. 175.

31. St. Maximos the Confessor, Ambiguum 7, in *On the Cosmic Mystery of Jesus Christ: /Selected Writings from St. Maximos the Confessor,/* Translated by Paul M. Blowers and Robert Louis Wilken, p. 60. Elsewhere St. Maximos also says, “This is the great hidden mystery. This is the blessed end for which all things were created. This is the preordained divine goal of the origin of beings, which we define as the preordained end for the sake of which all things exist, although this end itself depends on nothing. It was with a view to this end [Christ, the hypostatic union of divine and human nature] that God brought forth the essence of all things.” St. Maximos the Confessor, *To Thalassios: On Various Questions* 60, PG 90, 621 A. As quoted, with bracketed additions, by Nellas, /op. cit.,/ p. 36.

32. St. Paul call the Incarnation, the *mystery hidden from the ages*, Col 1:26.

33. Psalm. 34: 8.

34. “Hence the original creation of man, formed in the image of God, was for the sake of Christ, so that man should be able one day to make room for the Archetype; and hence the law laid down by God in paradise was on His [Christ’s] account.” St. Gregory Palamas, *Homily 7*, in *Grigoriou tou Palama Omiliai* 22, ed. S. Oikonomos (Athens 1861), 259. As quoted, with bracketed additions, by Nellas, *op. cit.*

35. John 14: 8-9; Hebrews 1:3. Beholding the Logos we behold the Father, for He is “the radiance of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the operative power of God and the image of His goodness.” Wisdom 7:26.

36. /op. cit.,/ Nellas, p. 37.

Christ, our desire in order that we may carry Him in us, since He Himself is the Archetype for those who are created. It was not the old Adam who was the model for the new, but the new Adam for the old...the Saviour first and alone showed to us the true man, who is perfect on account of both character and life and in all other respects as well... We must, then, regard Christ as the Archetype and the former Adam as derived from Him... To love anything besides Him or meditate on it is a manifest aberration from duty and a turning aside from the first principles of our nature.

The “embodiment” of the Logos pertains not only to man but also, through him as microcosm, consisting of matter and spirit, to the whole of the Cosmos. “...For we know...,” as St. Paul tells us, “that the whole of creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now...eagerly waiting for the adoption, *the redemption of the body.*”³⁷ That is, the attainment of incorruption through deification. Therefore, insofar as man fails to actualize his deification in Christ, to embody God in himself, man in turn abuses his own nature and desecrates the material world. He deforms and defaces himself and Creation, since, as St. Nicholas says, he has turned aside, “from the first principles of our nature.” In his deformity he fails to build a civilization clothed in the garment of beauty, harmonious and integrated, arising from the Sacred. Therefore, not only personal fragmentation, civil strife and war, but also, as pointed out by the English iconographer Aidan Hart, an “ecological crisis” is inextricably tied to our failure, or refusal, to become gods by adoption- to acquire uncreated Beauty.³⁸ A crisis the icon prophesies against, calling us back from sleep and forgetfulness.

In the icon we have an “ark” containing a traditional wisdom of “Christian ecology.” An often unnoticed corrective to the distortions of the Christian doctrine that have caused the exploitation of Nature, technocratic aggression and the rampant consumerism, which some would like to think of as “advancements” of humanity. As a liturgical vehicle of divine energy, a sacramental object, the icon serves as a model of reverence towards matter, a true Christian vision of Creation according to first principles. The iconographer in a priestly fashion takes raw matter, from the organic and mineral worlds, mixes and blends with water, warms with fire, and in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, slowly transfigures them through craftsmanship, offering them back to God in thanksgiving and adoration. In this transfiguration of matter through divine energy the icon then becomes a foretaste of the Resurrection and the “new heaven and new earth” of the Eschaton, when God will be all in all.³⁶ The icon reminds us that in spite of the fall and its consequences- suffering, death, corruption, strife, the passions- there is a sacred core in all things, their ontological grounding in divinity. Everything is rooted and is a symbol of the Logos. He “is multiplied and made known in all beings, which are like a field of manifestations...”³⁹ As Dionysius would say, He is “all things in all and nothing in any.”⁴⁰ Both the Being that truly /is,/ and beyond all limitation of being, as the ground of beings. The Cosmos is at once theophany and ontophany.⁴¹ It is the glistening garment, tent- “body”- of the Logos, in a lower level than the Incarnation. This “body” declares His glory in its multifarious and lush beauty. Yet, even in all its radiance and beauty Creation groans for a partaking of Beauty in unprecedented ways- it groans for deification.

37. Rom. 8:21-23.

38. Aidan Hart, “Transfigured Matter: The Icon as Paradigm of Christian Ecology,” in *Beauty, Spirit, Matter: Icons in the Modern World*, Gracewing Publishing, Herefordshire, UK, 2014, pp. 79-91.

39. Nicholas Constas ed. and trans., /On Difficulties in the Church Fathers, The Ambigua, Vol. I./ Maximus the Confessor, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2014, p. xvii.

40. St. Dionysius the Areopagite, DN VII. 3, 872A. As translated and quoted in Eric D. Perl, *Theophany*, SUNY Press, NY, 2007, p. 31.

41. See Mircea Eliade, /The Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religion,/ Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., NY, p.16-17.

As we learn from Genesis, the Divine Craftsman uttered the word and beings came into existence, and “Then God saw everything He had made, and indeed it was very good.”⁴² The creative words (*logoi*), inner essences or ordering principles, of the Logos, “through whom all things were made,” are what gives each being their unique mode of existence, sustaining, and leading them to their intended ultimate fulfillment (*telos*).⁴³ This fulfillment is nothing other than a return back to their Source- uncreated Beauty- out of intense longing (*eros*), thanksgiving and love.⁴⁴ It is a return of love for love in ecstatic union.⁴⁵ Beings are beautiful insofar as they live up to their intended purpose or nature, their *logos*. In failing to live according to the truth of our being, we slip back into the chaos, dispersion, and formlessness of non-being. Instead of a return to the beloved Other we revert to ourselves, and slowly die in the misery of egotistical self-love. Ugliness overtakes us. Hence, in not attaining Beauty we fail to impart it to Creation, in the unique way that only man can as microcosm, in whom Creation hopes to be liberated from corruption. The longing to return to Beauty means nothing other than our innate unquenchable desire for fullness of being in the Good.⁴⁶ For desire would not be in us if there was no goodness to long for, rest to be attained, and fulfillment to be found in partaking thereof.⁴⁷ In short, in this cosmic dance of procession and return of beings, Truth, Goodness, and Beauty converge, and through man transfigure the Cosmos in deification. St. Maximos the Confessor explains the identity of the good and beautiful as follows:

The beautiful is identical with the good, for all things seek the beautiful and good at every opportunity, and there is no being which does not participate in them. They extend to all that is, being what is truly admirable, sought for, desired, pleasing, chosen and loved. Observe how the divine force of love- the erotic power preexisting in the good- has given

42. Gen 1:31.

43. *Logoi* is plural for *logos*. As Sherrard notes, the *logos* of each thing is “the spiritual energy issuing from the Divine according to which a thing receives its existence, an energy manifesting itself in visible form.” Philip Sherrard, *Christianity: Lineaments of a Sacred Tradition*, Holy Cross Press, Brookline, Mass, 1998, p.7. The *logoi* can also be referred to as the “thought-images” of the Logos, the plans or predetermination of his divine will. St. John of Damascus says, “There exist in God images and plans of what will be accomplished by Him, i.e., His pre-eternal and never-changing council... These images and plans (*paradeigmata*) are predetermination (*proorismoi*), says St. Dionysius, for in His council is sketched everything that is predetermined by Him and unchangingly exists before its being. Likewise, if one desires to build a house, he will first sketch it in his mind and forms its image.” St. John of Damascus, /First Oration in Defense of Icons/, X, p. 351. Furthermore, in the fact that each thing is given individuation by its archetypal *logos*, we find that when the contemplative enters the divine darkness and unknowingness, the depths of union with the Divine, this individuation is not dissolved. Sherrard explains, “Yet even when transmuted into this uncreated and infinite state, beings still have a positive and individual status. To deny individuation in the divine realm is to deny the archetypal theophanic dimension specific to every visible thing. Gnostic contemplation does not consist in proceeding from a visible form to a pure absence of form, or to pure formlessness in the sense that implies a complete absence of individuation. Such conclusion would be to posit a conception of the supreme metaphysical essence that is reached by denying that this essence possesses any positive qualities or any individuation whatsoever- in other words, that it is negatively conditioned. In that case the divine image of every manifest being ceases to be a theophanic symbol and becomes instead no more than mere allegory.” /op.cit./ Sherrard, pp. 18-19.

44. In St. Dionysius words, “Beauty unites all....And there it is ahead of all as Goal, as the Beloved, as the Cause towards which all things move, since it is the longing for beauty which actually brings them into being. It is a model to which they conform.” In Luibheid’s translation, /op. cit./, p. 77.

45. As Conſtas tells us, “the principles (*logoi*) of beings are not simply formal causes and teleological finalities but are themselves grounded in the person of the Logos...No longer Origen’s disembodied “rational entities”(Amb 7.2), and still less emanations of Neoplatonism, the *logoi* are the free, personal expressions of divine love, the “wills” of God to love the world, the divine passion to “love and be loved” (Amb 23.3-4).”/op. cit./, Conſtas.

46. “Man yearns for Christ, not only on account of His Divinity, which is the goal of all things, but also for the sake of His human nature.” St Nicholas Cabasilas, Discourse VI, *Patrologia Graeca*, /Vol. CL, col. 681/AB. As quoted by Nellas, /op. cit./ p.35.

47. See St. Maximos the Confessor, Ambiguum 7, *op. cit.*, Blowers & Wilken.

birth to the same blessed force within us, through which we long for the beautiful and good in accordance with the words, ‘I became a lover of her beauty’ (Wisd. 8:2), and ‘Love her and she will sustain you; fortify her and she will exalt you’ (Prov. 4:6, 8).⁴⁸

This passage describes the mystery unveiled in the icon- Creator and Creation in nuptial embrace. The icon depicts Nature from this ontological perspective/,/ having attained to its fulfillment in deification and incorruption, as God intended, according to its *logos*. Hence, the icon, in its pictorial symbolism, surpasses the transitory and sensible appearance of Nature, its corruptible form, and unveils it transfigured, immersed in Beauty and the Good. It invites us to fullness of being and return to our Source. It reveals Nature and the saints permeated with uncreated energy. In bearing the likeness and name of the deified it is linked to them, thereby becoming a sacramental vehicle of divine energy. Therefore, in this sacramental affirmation of the inherent goodness of matter, the body and Creation, and in the icon’s emphasis on our ontological grounding in divinity, we find refuted the common accusations against Christianity as being a religion that disdains the body and condones the abuse of natural resources for selfish advantage. Accusations that can be seen as nothing more than a justified resistance towards true errors, distortions and divergences, rather than a derision for the authentic Christian Tradition itself.

Postmodern Deceptions

But what about the dizzying artificiality of our postmodernist predicament? In a world subsumed with a plethora of images, the notion of a “holy image” seems ridiculous. The word “icon” is so overused that it has become almost meaningless, its connection to the Sacred has been virtually forgotten. An icon for most does not designate a *real* person, but just the glitter and allure of a celebrity, perhaps a flashy logo, or a character we click on as we surf in the computer from window to window. Images have become pervasive, determine social relations and how we interpret the world around us. We lose grasp of reality. Social media becomes the lens through which we design our public image. The images we choose as representatives of ourselves get in the way. Instead of revealing they create a veil. Altered and manipulated images, blurred copies of copies lacking concrete referents, become the basis from which we construct our self-understanding. Our desires are projected out into the virtual world of images, we then consume these as embodied in products. In this consumption we attempt to arrive at a self-image to re-present to the world, and end up considering the distortion to be our true selves. It reminds me of what St. Andrew of Crete says, “I have become an idol to myself.”⁴⁹ It is a world of *appearances*, a world of manufactured simulacra, where fantasy is taken as reality, and we aspire towards the non-existent environments we create for ourselves in the screen. It has been called the “society of the spectacle,”⁵⁰ and described as, “...a social relationship between people that is mediated by images.”⁵¹ Where, “All that was once directly lived has become mere representation.” And as Metropolitan Nicholas of Mesogaias says, “The extravagant (and extravagantly wasteful) hegemony of appearances has destroyed the essence and distinctive presence of that which *is*.”⁵²

Some tend to embrace this seeming destruction, the collapse of distinction between model and image, archetype and icon. Postmodernist skepticism and relativism would prefer to see the simu-

48. *op. cit.*, *Philok.* Vo. II, p. 280.

49. The Great Canon of St. Andre of Crete, a service perform every Great Lent in the Easter Orthodox Church.

50. Guy Debord, /The Society of the Spectacle,/ translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith, New York: Zone Books, NY, 1994, Thesis 1.

51. /Ibid.,/ Thesis 4

52. A privately translated version from the Greek of a writing by Metropolitan Nicholas (Hatzinikolas) of Mesogaias, *Anthropos Metheoros*, Athens, 2005, the source of which unverifiable by this author.

lacrum prevail completely as if inaugurating a deliverance from the supposed “oppressive constraints” of archetypal determinants. Some would prefer to have no ontological reference point, to do away with an Other, meaning and *telos*. Under this predicament the choice to jump into non-existence, to find “bliss” in self-obliteration, would appear to be logical, for some even a preferable option. Be that as it may, Plato saw how the “view point” of the beholder looking up determined for the craftsman the distortion he needed to implement, in order to make the colossal sculpture *appear* “correct” from the ground.⁵³ Even so, with every shift of “view point” there was inevitable change. Distortion was hard to escape. Moreover, the image was a third removed from its original archetypal idea and therefore “blurred,” a dim reflection in the realm of contingencies. Hence, there was a sense of deception he pointed out as problematic, since there is more than surfaces, more than meets the eye. But not all images are alike. For him the image was to tap into things intelligible. It was to surpass the limitations of appearances and subjectivity, by being grounded on the *noetic* intuition of the Ideas or archetypes-being rather than becoming.⁵⁴ He spoke of *eikons*,/ *likenesses*,/ something “other but like,” rather than phantasmic simulacra, something that “appears to be.”⁵⁵ The Eastern Orthodox icon continues this tradition.⁵⁶ On the other hand, postmodernism would prefer to make all “subject positions” equal, to have “no longer a privileged point of view,” as a guarantee of deliverance from the original versus copy problem, which has led to the tyranny of hierarchies and ideologies that posit and impose “the true point of view.”⁵⁷ This at first seems to just be a harmless attempt to get rid of the deception of appearances, arising from a colossal “distorted model” of reality, and the erroneous interpretations of it that lead to the abuse of power, bigotry, fundamentalism, colonialism, etc. Nevertheless, it only ends up in the multiplication of deception, by both embracing subjectivism, subverting first principles, and making of the simulacrum the only relevant “common point of view.” Ironically, the simulacrum ends up being the only “true” self-referential model, as oppressive as any other false ideology. It stops in itself, leads to nowhere, what you see is what you get- a dead end. In short, without Immutable Reality, then only surfaces matter and we end up with nothing more than a fetishism of commodities. Gilles Deleuze is one who has explored and embraced this postmodernist attempt to erase distinctions, seeing the simulacrum not as a degraded copy, but rather as good as the model itself:

The simulacrum is not a degraded copy. It harbors a positive power which denies the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction. At least two divergent series are internalized in the simulacrum- neither can be assigned as the original, neither as the copy. There is no longer any privileged point of view except that of the object common to all points of view. There is no possible hierarchy, no second, no third...The same and the similar no longer have any essence except simulated, that is as expressing the functioning

53. *Sophist*, 236 a-d.

54. *Republic*, X, 601 c. “The Latin term ‘simulacrum has its crucial beginnings in Plato’s Greek dialogues, where it appears as the term we would translate as phantasm’ or ‘semblance.’ Plato sought to distinguish essence from appearance, intelligible from sensible, and idea from image. His famous banishment of painters from his republic was founded upon the embodiment of truth in the *Eidos* or Idea and his deep mistrust of ‘the imitator,’ who, ‘being the creator of the phantom, knows nothing of reality.’” Michael Camille, “Simulacrum,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, edited by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1996, p. 31.

55. *Ibid.*, Camille, p. 32-33.

56. Carvarnos notes, “In the Republic Plato envisions a painter who contemplates divine archetypes and seeks to express through the human figures he paints the ideal wisdom, courage, temperance and justice. Such an artist looks at the archetypes of these virtues and tries to express them as far as possible in line and color, until he succeeds in representing ‘a type of human character that is pleasing and dear to God.’...This rejection of naturalism in painting and demand for idealism constitute not only a vindication of Egyptian art, but also a remarkable anticipation of some of the basic principles underlying Byzantine iconography.” Constantine Cavarnos, *Plato’s Theory of Fine Arts*, Astir Publishing Company, Athens, Greece, 1973, p. 35-36.

57. “Subject positions” is an expression made by M. Camille. *Op. cit.*, Camille, p. 33.

of the simulacrum.⁵⁸

Yet, the simulacrum has not prevailed, the hegemony of appearances has not completely destroyed “the presence of that which *is*.” The Archetype cannot be destroyed. Blurring and distortion might occur, forgetfulness might set in, but our grounding on the Real will never cease. It is as if we are forgetting our countenances when we cease to look at the mirror. It is a common traditional understanding that we become what we habitually contemplate. This is clearly expressed by St. Paul who says of Christian initiates, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”⁵⁹ We contemplate the Lord’s glory as in a mirror, “Behold, the Lord is our mirror. Open your eyes and see them in Him, and learn the manner of your face.”⁶⁰

So what are we contemplating in the spectacle, and what are we becoming? Ironically, although swamped by images, what we are dealing with is a form of iconoclasm, a defacing of the divine image in us, a smashing of our dignity, by the constant hammering of the mesmerizing idols of the spectacle. Since the referent to the image, the Archetype is forgotten, or thought of as non-existent, there is no sense of how to arrive at our true image and likeness- of how we can become living icons. Without an alpha and omega, there is no in-between, no ontological context, no existential meaning- no destination. Man becomes just another contingency, a phenomena shadow, without any sense of his call to become god. In this kind of world of postmodern skepticism most have abandoned the possibility of a true symbol of the Real. But the holy image, the icon, asserts that which truly *is*. It is a mirror of the Mirror of the self, in which we can discern whether or not we have acquired the divine likeness and can say, “It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me.”⁶¹ If in the spectacle the constant flux of fantasies prevails and the imagination is deceived, with the icon it is healed, stabilized and delivered from phantasms and mirages. Nicholas Conŝtas explains this “transfixing” of the imaginative faculty in contemplating the icon of Christ as follows:

The imaginative gaze is transfixed by the theophany of God’s human face, an epiphany in a mirror reflecting the true, engoddened self. Instead of a docetic⁶² fantasy, one encounters the factual visibility of our flesh: a person with a name and a face (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). And whereas contemplation of mental *figmenta* may be nothing more than idolatrous, narcissistic self-delusion, contemplation of the icon is a concrete, dialogical encounter with the sacred presence of a transfigured Other. Like the mirror image that is the effect of the subject placed before it, the icon expresses artistically the principle that the truth of being is an event of communion between persons.⁶³

This communion entails a moment of stillness. The icon calls us to step back from the distraction and scattering of soul produced by the sensory overload of the insidious profane image, to recollect ourselves, go within, and encounter the *logos* of our being- our grounding in divinity. It reminds us of our intended destiny, calls us to the stillness of contemplation where we encounter the Real, our divine Archetype, in the depths of the heart. This happens through the icons palpable materiality, as

58. Gilles Deleuze, *Plato and the Simulacrum*, 1990. As quoted by M. Camille. *op. cit.*, Camille, p. 33.

59. II Corinthians 3:18.

60. *The Odes of Solomon* (c. A.D. 180), 13.1-3, trans. J.H. Charlesworth, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 106.

61. Gal. 2:20.

62. *Docetism* pertains to the heretical doctrine that the bodily incarnation of Christ was just only a semblance and had no concrete reality.

In other words, that the full humanity of the Logos and historical existence was only an illusion.

63. Nicholas Conŝtas, “Icons and the Imagination,” in */Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture/* Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 1997, pp. 117.

it reveals the countenances of the saints- gods by grace- those who have attained to the true dignity of their humanity. We are not led into a virtual reality, a dreamscape to get lost in. This is not an illusionist environment disconnected from immediate experience, emphasizing distance, a lie and absence, rather than presence. No, the icon is “the location of a personal presence.”⁶⁴ The saint does not sink into a fictitious space, rather, he stands in front of the gold, inhabits your time and space, and confronts you, face to face. It is an invitation to commune, person to person, to engage honestly. What appears to be “distortion” in the icon, its flatness, stylization and seeming lack of reality, its “abstraction,” is in fact the lifting of appearances, an unveiling of a true and concrete higher reality. We see a *noetic* vision- Nature according to its *logos*. And so we are challenged to stop and converse, to commune with the Real, or to continue going about our business, taking for reality that which doesn’t exist.

But the monk communes with and seeks a return to Reality. He looks at the mirror to see if he bears the lineaments of divinity. He remembers that we proceed and we return. That there is no way of avoiding this metaphysical first principle. We cease to be ourselves if we ignore it. The question is whether or not we are actualizing our return to the Beloved. Monasticism is a spiritual marriage, an intense longing for the nuptial chamber, where the soul embraces the Archetype. It is an *eros* of repentance, a joyful mourning, a shedding of tears that cleanses the divine image, and colors in the divine likeness. Monasticism is the icon of the angelic life, a cultivation of *noetic* vision in a life of virginal purity, foreshadowing the incorruption of the age to come. It is a constant reminder to the monk of the necessity of cooperation with divine energy, for without the Logos incarnate we can do nothing. A thing not of this world. An anomaly to most. Nevertheless, a witness to immutable Tradition, a call to deification, an unceasing process of conformity to uncreated Beauty.

Behold you are beautiful my beloved, and indeed lovely...

Song of Songs 1:16

64. “Every icon portrays a person. As the location of a personal presence, an icon can only be the image of someone, and not of something, like an abstract nature or quality. Thus, the bestowal or inscription of the “name” is an irreducible aspect of personhood and an essential component of the icon. The name expresses the person no less than the actual representation, and without the identifying inscription there can be no icon, just as there can be no icon without representation.” /Ibid.,/ p. 121.