The Councils on the Icon and the Iconpainter's Canonic Life

In this understanding we approach the conceptual term continuously used in the eighth-century iconoclastic struggle: *remembering.*

Over and over, the proponents of icons refer to the icon's power to *remind:* the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council say, "the icons remind those who pray of the icons' prototypes and, through gazing upon the icons, the believers 'lift up their minds from the images to the prototypes'." These are terms well established in theology. But many nowadays wrongly interpret these terms to mean something subjective and 'psychological,' thereby radically twisting and falsifying the thought of the Holy Fathers; moreover, under the guise of defending the icons, they recreate an iconoclasm more thoroughly violent than that eighth-century form the Church long ago defeated: for the ancient iconoclasts were more thoughtful, intricate, and courteous than our contemporary "defenders of icons" who parrot and thereby reduce ancient truth when they argue against Protestant rationalists. The older iconoclasts never in the slightest denied the genuine spiritual usefulness of religious art, that art to which we now assign the icon; contemporary iconoclasts, however, in their insistence upon the merely subjective psychological value of icons as their sole value, thereby completely deny the ontological connection between icon and prototype. And in this denial all the veneration of icons—praying to them, kissing them, lighting candles to them, setting lamps before them, the priest censing them—all the centuries-old practices of Christianity become, in this denial which sees in the icon only an 'artistic depiction' that refers to itself and the viewer but never to its prototype—all these practices become criminal idolatry. For if icons are 'artistic depictions,' then it is sinfully absurd to honor what is merely educational supplies, for only God Himself deserves such honor; thus the honor given to icons—given because of the ancient teaching

that, in doing such honor, the believer ascends from image to proto-image—this ascending, this ancient Church belief, becomes something absolutely incomprehensible. In the century of the iconoclastic controversy, people knew precisely what they were struggling for, and they knew clearly who was friend and who was enemy; plainly, there were icon-smashers and icon-worshippers. The entire matter has fallen into oblivion; today, it is not clear whether the iconoclastic controversy took place in the ninth century—and not in the twentieth; in Byzantium—and not in England; whether it was founded on the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle—and not on the views of Bacon, Hume, and Mill. For into the patristic terminology of the Holy Fathers there has slipped the whole content of English sensationalistic-empirical psychology, thereby entirely ousting the ontological meaning of Being as found in ancient idealist philosophy, with the result that the contemporary defenders of the icon have won a victory long ago lost by the eighth-century iconoclasts.

Thus, let us ask what the Seventh Ecumenical Council means in its decisions by the terms *prototype, image, consciousness, remembering,* and so on.

An icon remembers its prototype. Thus, in one beholder, it will awaken in the bright clarities of his conscious mind a spiritual vision that matches directly the bright clarities of the icon; and the beholder's vision will be comparably clear and conscious. But in another person, the icon will stir the dreams that lie deeper in the subconscious, awakening a perception of the spiritual that not only affirms that such seeing is possible but also brings the thing seen into immediately felt experience. Thus, at the highest flourishing of their prayer, the ancient ascetics found that their icons were not simply windows through which they could behold the holy countenances depicted on them but were also doorways through which these countenances actually entered the empirical

world. The saints came down from the icons to appear before those praying to them.

Similar experiences have occurred less frequently (but still connectedly) to persons who were not following any ascetic practice of prayer at all: that is, a sharp penetration of a spiritual reality into the soul, a penetration almost like a physical blow or sudden burn that instantly shocks the viewer who is seeing, for the first time, one of the great works of sacred iconpainting. There is not the slightest question in such experiences that what is coming through the icon is merely the viewer's subjective invention, so indisputably objective is its impact upon the viewer, an impact *equally* physical and spiritual. Like light pouring forth light, the icon stands revealed. And no matter where the icon is physically located in the space we encounter it, we can only describe our experience of seeing it as *a beholding that ascends.* Our seeing rises above everything around us, for we recognize that we are, in this act of seeing, existing in the icon's space in eternity. In such acts of seeing, the fires of our lusts and the emptiness of our earthly hungers simply and wholly cease; and we recognize the vision as something that, in essence, exceeds the empirical world, as something acting upon us *from its own dominion.* "Yes," we say, "this icon plainly exists—here are the brush strokes right before me—but it's inconceivable it exists, my eyes cannot believe what they're seeing": such we testify to the icon's triumphant beauty overwhelming everything.

Such is the effect, then, of St. Andrei Rublev's great icon of the Holy Trinity; such, too, is the incomparable expression of the icon known as the Holy Mother of Vladimir. But these great icons—that in a single stroke overwhelm even the crudest, least sensitive eyes—even these icons do not stand apart from all other icons. Using such icons as the measure of the highest in iconpainting, let us now say preliminarily: all icons possess in themselves the power of spiritual revelation, though some veil it almost

impenetrably. But the hour is coming when the spiritual state of every icon's beholder will bestow upon him the power to experience every icon's spiritual essence even through the most impenetrable of form-distorting veils, and then every icon on earth will live and effect its operation as witness of the supreme world. As Lermontov says in his poem:

> Mother of God, I stand now praying
> Before this icon of your radiant brightness—
> Not praying to be saved from some battlefield,
> Not giving thanks, not seeking forgiveness
> For my soul's sins, not for all the souls,
> Numb, joyless, and desolate in earth
> But I pray for her whom wholly I give you now:
> Shield her from this vast world of violence....

So Lermontov—in restlessness and anxiety—saw revealed in the icon the Mother of God. And it is not merely a poet's one stanza that testifies to this most essential teaching of the Church: all icons are miracle-working, i.e., all can be windows into eternity, though not every icon is apriori so—the very happening of an icon so testifies. That is, when an icon happens, its happening (as the very word indicates) means that something has already happened, something has already *entered into appearance,* so that we may say that the icon happens and appears in making happen and appear in us those very appearings of hap-pened hap-iness (i.e., those blessed visions) through which the icon itself happened and appeared. The beholder's soul is necessarily healed in touching, through the icon, the spiritual realm: but that such healing happens means, first of all, that the icon's happening is the having happened of miracle-working help.

Thus, every icon can be seen as the factual certainty of divine reality. An icon may be skillfully or poorly executed, but, at root, it *necessarily authenticates* perception of the world beyond the senses through an always *authentic* spiritual experience. Such an icon could be the first transfixing of authentic experience in such

a way that it becomes the manifest revelation of that experience. Such an icon then becomes (as is said) a prototypical or 'first-appeared' icon and is thus considered a source; it thereby corresponds to the original manuscript written by the one who experienced a revelation.

Subsequently, there are copies made of this prototypical icon, ones more or less exactly reproducing its shapes. But the spiritual content of these copies is not something new (when compared to the prototype) nor is it even something similar; rather, the spiritual content is *exactly the same* (though it may be in a veiled, dimmed, or dulled medium). Moreover, exactly because their spiritual content is not merely similar to but actually identical with the prototype, the copies can modify and vary the basic interpretation.

If someone copying a prototypical icon is unable to experience in himself that which he depicts, if while following the original he fails to make contact with the reality of it, then (being honest) he will try as precisely as possible to reproduce in his copy the prototype's outward features; but it almost always happens that, in such a case, he will not comprehend the icon as an opening and so, lost in copying the fine lines and brush strokes, he will interpret unclearly the icon's essence. But if, on the other hand, through the prototype he is opened up into the spiritual reality depicted on it and thereby comes to see it clearly (if secondarily), he will—because he possesses the living reality of his own aliveness—manifest his own viewpoint and thus swerve from a strict calligraphic adherence to the original. In a manuscript you write describing a country someone else has previously described in an earlier manuscript, you will see your own words and phrases in your very own handwriting; but the living basis of your manuscript is assurdedly identical with that of the earlier one: the description of the country. Thus, the variations arising between successive copies of a prototypical icon indicate neither the illusory subjectivity of what is being depicted nor the arbitrariness of the iconpainting process but exactly the opposite: the living reality which, remaining itself, nevertheless will appear with those variations that correspond to the spiritual life of the iconpainter who seeks to comprehend that living reality. Thus (ignoring mere servile mechanical reproduction), the difference between a prototypical icon and its iconic copy can approximate quite precisely that between an explorer's account of a newly discovered country and a later journeyer's narrative who visits that country because of the first explorer's account; no matter the historical importance of the first account, the later narrative may well be more exact and complete. Just so in iconopainting: sometimes an iconic copy can become particularly precious, one whose extraordinary indications confirm both its own spiritual truth and its supreme correspondence to the spiritual reality it depicts.

But, in any case, the basis of every icon is spiritual experience. As a result, we could organize icons into four categories, depending upon their point of origin:

1. Biblical icons, those whose reality is grounded in the revealed Word of God;

2. Portrait icons, those arising from the iconpainter's direct experience and memory of persons and events he not only outwardly saw as empirical reality but inwardly comprehended as spiritual fact;

3. Icons from the Holy Tradition, i.e., ones created from the oral or written record of other persons' spiritual experience in the past; and

4. Revealed icons, ones wherein the iconpainter records his own spiritual experience arising from either direct vision or from mystical dream.

These four categories, however, by their abstract clarity also show us that—practically speaking—only the fourth category really applies. For if certain icons are unquestionably revealed, then all

the icons in the other three categories (even the Biblical ones) compel the same conclusion: the historical authenticity of certain events and persons does not exclude their existence in eternity; thus, the possibility emerges that we may contemplate such events and persons by raising our consciousness *above time*. All icons are therefore revealed icons. And even when the icon is a portrait icon, it is clear that in order for it to be an icon, it must in the iconpainter be based in a vision (for example, a vision of spiritual light in the person—even though that person is still living on earth): thus, the portrait icon cannot be directly opposite to a revealed icon. Equally, the icons of the Holy Tradition demand that the iconpainter go beyond the merely abstract accounts of past experience and see something with his own spiritual eyes.

Not only in the Eastern church was this understanding of the visionary basis of iconpainting essential but also in the West, in times and places far from mystical contemplation, there were those secretly living the belief that spiritual revelation was the only true ground of iconpainting and therefore that the only truly reverential things were those created not from earthly but from heavenly sources. A striking example is that of the Italian Renaissance artist Raphael. In a letter to his friend Count Baldazar Castalione, Raphael wrote an enigmatic sentence: "In the world there are so few images of feminine grace that I have stuck to the one mysterious image that sometimes visits my soul." What does he mean, "visits my soul"? The unraveling of the enigma can be found in the account by another friend of Raphael's, Donato D'Angelo Bramante:

> I write here for my own delight the miracle entrusted to me by my dear friend Raphael and commanded to conceal under the seal of silence. Once when I had expressed to him with an open and full heart my wonder at the ravishing images in his work of the Madonna and the Holy Family, I besought him to unravel the mystery of where in the world he had seen such beauty, such touching gazes and inimitable expressions as were in his Holy Virgin. With his youthful shyness, his unique humility, Raphael fell silent for sometime, and then with a flood of tears he embraced me and told me his secret. He said that from his earliest youth he had had always a burning in his soul, a unique sacred feeling for the Mother of God—and sometimes he would say Her name aloud, feeling a sadness sweep over his soul. From the first stirrings of his desire to paint, he had nourished within an overwhelming hunger to paint vividly a picture of the Virgin in Her heavenly perfection—but he never dared trust his ability. Unceasingly, night and day, his spirit tirelessly attempted to picture in his mind the true image of the Virgin. But he could never satisfy himself, for it always seemed to him that this inward image was somehow dimmed into the gloom of his own mental fantasies. Yet sometimes it seemed that a divine spark of brightness would flame in his soul and then this inward image of the Virgin would be outlined in light exactly as he would want to paint it—but always it was a fleeting instant, and he could not hold this true image in his soul. Anxiety ceaselessly tormented his mind, continually growing, for he could see this true image of Her features only in briefest passing, and in his soul there arose a darkness that did not even desire to transfigure the dim image into the illumined one. At last, he could not stay his hand, and tremblingly he began to paint the Madonna. And as he worked, his spirit grew always more fiery.
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> Then one night he dreamt he was praying to Her illumined image as he had so often fleetingly beheld: and, all at once, a sudden surge of anxiety awakened him. In the night darkness, he looked at the wall across from his bed and saw that it was bathed in light, and the light was hanging on the wall, and it was the unfinished image of the Virgin shining in soft radiance, perfect, an image and yet living! and divinity was shining everywhere from it! Tears filled his eyes as he looked into Her indescribably tender face, and it was as if every least mistake he had made as an artist was being erased by this living vision of Her face; it even seemed to him that She was quite literally moving. And most wonderful of all, Raphael found in this bright vision precisely that for which he had searched all his life and that which he had for so long experienced only in a dark haziness. He could not now remember how he had fallen back asleep, but upon arising in the morning, he felt as though he had been reborn. This vision was forever etched into his soul, his emotions, and thus carried in his soul, it vividly guided his depictions of the Mother of God, and whenever he looked at any of his paintings that depicted this image of Her, he felt a sacred awe and

> trembling. This is what my friend, my dearest Raphael, told me and I have thought this miracle so important and remarkable, that for my own delight I have written it on this paper.

Thus we understand what Raphael meant in his sentence about the mysterious image that sometimes visited his soul.

An icon is a transfixing, an annunciation that proclaims in color the spiritual world; therefore, iconpainting is the occupation of a person who sees that world as sacred; and so iconpainting "art" (to use the term in the sense it has in the secular world) belongs to no one else but the Holy Fathers. In fact, the consciousness of the Church, especially as expressed in the resolutions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, does not even deem it necessary to distinguish between true iconpainters and the Holy Fathers, instead opposing them both to the lowest form of iconpainter, the hack-copyist, the mere traders in icons, or (as they were known in ancient Russia) the "iconers" who, because of their careless disregard for genuine iconpainting, were also called the "icon-daubers". But such Russian terms, though they illustrate something of the Council's meaning, do not reveal its essence. What the Council plainly said was that icons are created not through the artist's own intention (ἐφεύρεσις) but through the immutable law and Holy Tradition (θεσμοθεσία καὶ παράδοσις) of the Ecumenical Church; that to compose and 'pre-execute' icons is the occupation not of artists but of the Holy Fathers; and that to the Fathers belong the integral right of composition (διάταξις) while to the artist belongs only its fulfillment in the technique (τεχνή).

In the depths of Christian antiquity there is rooted the understanding that the icon is something not subject to arbitrary change; and as this understanding strengthens, deepens, and manifests itself in the succeeding centuries, it becomes more firmly expressed, particularly in the Russian ecclesiastical rulings in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here, the many iconpainting authentifications, both verbal and visual, testify to the stability of the traditional practice; and their essential terms and

concepts flow down into the very depths of Christian antiquity—although some of their elements are rooted in the darkness of pre-Christian history. Thus we can understand the deliberate warning to the iconpainter repeated many times in the authentifications: anyone who ignores the Holy Tradition and begins to fashion icons according to his own thinking will be condemned to eternal torment.

In these norms of Church consciousness, secular historians and positivist theologians see this unique conservatism of the Church as the variety they know: a senile sustaining of habitual forms in the circumstances of Church art having ended, seeing the norms as obstacles that are preventing the emergence of new religious art. This fundamental misunderstanding of the Church's conservatism is, simultaneously, a misunderstanding of artistic creativity itself. To the truly creative, the presence of a canonical tradition is never a hindrance, for in every sphere of art the complexities of canonical forms act as a touchstone that, while it may break lesser talent, will serve to sharpen true creativity. Lifting creativity to the very heights of human achievement, canonical tradition frees the artist's energy for new attainments, releasing it from the necessity of sterile repetition; the demands of canonical tradition—more precisely, the gift from mankind to artist of canonical tradition—is therefore for the artist not an enslavement but a liberation. An artist who in ignorance imagines that, without canonical tradition, he could create a great work is exactly like a person walking on the earth who comes to imagine that the firm ground under his feet is hindering him, and that if he were only suspended in the air, how much farther he could go! In reality, such an artist is throwing away the perfection of forms and is, instead, taking hold subconsciously of the wrecked fragments of forms whose perfection—now accidental and imperfect—can only be wholly subconscious memory; and such work is called "creative". The true artist, on the other hand, wants not his *own* (at any cost) truth but rather the objectively beautiful and artisti-

cally incarnate *truth of things*—and he cares nothing at all about pride's mean-spirited question whether he is the first or the hundredth to speak this truth. If the work is true, then it establishes its own value. In the same way wherein every person alive busies himself with the living realities of his own life rather than with the question whether his life resembles his neighbor's—that is, he lives by and in himself for the truth, in the absolute certainty, first that the truth of his life is necessarily and essentially unique and individual and, second, that his life can be truthful only within the universal currents of human history and thus cannot be self-willfully invented:—just so, the work of art lives, and the artist who bases his work on the canonical tradition (if it can be found where he is) discovers in and through the canons the energy to create works wherein reality is the true object of their meditation, wholly certain in the knowledge that his work (if free) will never duplicate another's—though his actual concern is not with that issue but with the truthfulness shown in the work. Thus, to accept the traditional canon is to enter into a relationship with all humanity and to realize that humanity has not lived in vain, that it has not been without truth, and that, instead, it has comprehended truths that have been tested and purified by the councils and the generations; thus, humanity is confirmed in the canon.

The immediate task, then, is to understand the canon, to enter into it as into the essential rationality of humankind, spiritually straining so as to attain the highest level whereupon we may determine ourselves; and to see, too, how from this level the truth of things then reveals itself to me, the individual artist; for it is universally acknowledged that such spiritual straining, wherein our individual reason enters into the universal forms, opens the source of all creation. Contrarily, when an artist in the weakness of proud self-will abandons the universal forms, he finds himself on a level far beneath the spiritually attained one, a level beneath even the personal, one that is instead merely random and unconscious. To use a figure: were I to dip my finger and not my pen in

this inkwell, I would not in this way be exhibiting originality and inspiration even if I managed to compose some lines of poetry. The more complex and remote from ordinary life the subject in hand is, the more the artist must concentrate on the related or corresponding canonic forms, both because only so can he be responsible to the art itself and because only so can he make accessible that which is remote.

In relation to the spiritual world, the Church—always living, always creative—seeks neither to defend the old forms as such nor to oppose them to new ones as such. The Church's understanding of art was, is, and will be realism. This means that the Church, "the pillar and foundation of truth," requires only one thing: the truth. Thus, the Church will never ask whether the form is old or new; rather, She will demand that the thing in question be authentic truth, and if She is satisfied it is so, then She will bless it and take it into Her treasury of Truth, while if not so satisfied, She will reject it.

In the case of iconpainting, if assemblies of the devout find in an icon the accomplishment of the universal canons, then there is formal acknowledgement that the icon in question reproduces what is recognizably the truth or opens into something else also truthful; but when no such discovery occurs (i.e., when the canons cannot be perceived in the work), then it is an impermissible work, or else its revelatory truth still has to be demonstrated; and if the latter, then the iconpainter has to comprehend what he has in fact done and be able to show this to others. Thus, the catholicity of the Church cannot refuse to ask Vrubel, Vasnetsov, Nesterov and other recent iconpainters whether they are depicting something they invented in their own imaginations or some truly existing reality—and, furthermore, whether they have *told truth* about this reality and have produced 'first-appeared' icons, or whether they produced yet another of those whose number exceeds in Church history all the holy visions of true iconpaint-

ing—whether, that is, they have *told falsehood.* The question is not whether an image of a woman is "skillfully" or "poorly" executed (such measures lie merely in the artist's intention); the question is, is She in reality the Mother of God? If an artist is inwardly unable to reveal the spiritual self-identity of the person he depicts—if it is, in fact, someone else altogether—then is not what is happening immense spiritual disorder and has not the artist spoken about the Mother of God with a brush filled with falseness? When contemporary artists look about for human models in order to paint sacred images, then they are already proving that they do not clearly see the sacred person their imagery depicts; for if they did, then every alien image from the earthly world would be for them a hindrance and not a help to spiritual contemplation. It seems as though most religious artists see nothing whatever, either clearly or hazily, but, instead, are superficially restating an external image along the lines of half-conscious memories of Theotokos icons, confusing canonic Truth with their own arbitrariness and daring, when they finish it, to entitle their work the "Mother of God." But if they cannot show the Truthfulness of their work—if they themselves remain unsure of it—then are they not testifying to this very doubtfulness? Are they not wrongly taking upon themselves the immense responsibility that belongs solely to the Holy Fathers? Are they not therefore imposters? Are they not liars?

If a theologian were to describe the life of the Virgin Mary in terms outside the Tradition, would not a reader rightly demand to know the theologian's sources? And having gotten an unsatisfactory answer, would not the reader rightly accuse the theologian of writing lies? But a theologian-iconpainter depicting the Holy Mother somehow considers such lying his privilege. Thus, while Renan's *Vie de Jesus* was never meant to be read in liturgical services in place of the Gospels, false icons are not only placed in churches but are made the object of liturgical actions. For icons manifest the Truth to all persons, even the wholly illiterate; theology, however, is accessible only to the highly educated few and

therefore bears less responsibility; nevertheless, some contemporary icons publicly cry out lies in the midst of churches. Even the artists of the Renaissance West, not bound in the slightest by the canon, used a tiny handful of basic iconpainting themes, doing so without any ecclesiastical demand whatever and even, now and again, observing the Church Tradition: so greatly does the artist need the canonic norms. For the Church norms, even when very strictly observed, exercise almost no restraint upon the iconpainter—a fact demonstrated when we compare ancient icons of the same theme, even of the same exact drawing; never are any two of them identical, and even the resemblance we see at first glance only heightens the originality of approach each icon uniquely takes. Further, the way wherein a new iconic creation, arising from a new experience of the heavenly mysteries, *perfectly fits into* the already opened canonical forms, entering into them as into a fully prepared nest: this is what we see in St. Andrei Rublev's icon of the Holy Trinity. The iconic subject of three angels seated at a table existed within the canonically determined ecclesiastical art long before St. Andrei. In this sense, he invented nothing new, and (archaeologically speaking) his Trinity icon is one of a long series of depictions of Abraham's hospitality that begins somewhere in the 4th to the 6th centuries. Archaeologically, these depictions were iconic illustrations of a person's life (namely, Abraham's) and, in being so, they also foreshadowed the revelation of the Holy Trinity. But the Trinitarian *meaning* of these early icons is a foreshadowing in the same way that baptismal meaning is a foreshadowing in the passage of the Israelites over the Red sea, or that the Burning Bush is a foreshadowing of the Holy Mother: for when we intently examine even the perfect renderings of the Burning Bush, we can see no hint in them of the Virgin. Just so, the image of the three strangers at Abraham's table at Mamre could, abstractly considered, have produced the dogma of Trinity; but it could not, in itself, paint the icon.

In the fourteenth century, for a variety of reasons, the dogma of the Trinity became the special object of Ecumenical attention, and the Church gave it then a precise verbal formulation. The man who completed this work, crowning the whole of the medieval epoch, was "the worshipper of the most Holy Trinity," St. Sergius of Radonezh. He was the one who understood the heavenly azure—that unassailable, transworldly peace which is ceaselessly flowing into the immortal depths of perfect love—as both the goal our meditation must seek and the commandment our lives must incarnate; as, that is, the basis of both ecclesiastical reality and personal life as well as the ground of all political and social forms. He saw the iconic image of this love in the canonic patterns of Abraham's Epiphany at Mamre. But St. Sergius' experience of this new vision of the spiritual world was seen in the saint by St. Andrei Rublev, who (guided by St. Nikon, the disciple of St. Sergius) made then his great icon of the Holy Trinity "in praise of Father Sergei." At that moment, the Trinity icon-series ceased being illustrations of Abraham's personal life, its relationship to the Mamre experience becoming merely rudimentary. For the Rublev icon shows in the most astonishing way this new vision of the Holy Trinity, a new revelation shining through the veils of what are now the old and clearly less significant forms. But these old forms do not obstruct the new revelation because they themselves were expressions of authentic reality and therefore not mere inventions—and also because the new revelation is comparably an expression of the very same reality and also thus not subjective conjecture. What was strange or unclear in the vision's first outline was filled densely in with historical details, so that when, centuries later, the vision returned, the vision was at last understood, a process taking humankind millenia of spiritual labor to develop the necessary organs of perception within sacred consciousness. And at that moment, the historical details all by themselves fell away from the composition, and St. Andrei's icon (rather, St. Sergius'), both the 'first-appeared' and the repetitions

of it, both old and new, together became a new canon, a new instance or exemplar, one confirmed by Church consciousness and firmly established as a canonic norm by many Russian councils, including the 100-Chapters Council.

The more that spiritual comprehension becomes ontological, the more unshakably it is accepted as something long familiar; and for a long time, human consciousness had awaited that comprehension. Thus, such comprehension truly is a joyous message from the depths of existence, from the almost completely forgotten but always inwardly cherished memory of our spiritual homeland. For we genuinely receive a revelation from that which has entered our homeland, comprehending not outwardly but inwardly in remembering that an icon is a remembering of a high prototype. That is why we ourselves need not penetrate deeply into the spiritual world, for it, by extraordinary means, will always enfold itself into unusual, even mysterious forms that, like so-called rebuses, reinstate, in terms we can see, the spiritual world. At one extreme stands purely figurative art at the very boundary of verbal narration, but without verbal clarity; at the other is that degenerative symbolism called allegory, which possesses nothing but verbal clarity. But this does not mean, however, that an allegorized symbol is necessarily an abstraction in the inventor's mind. But its purely contemplative visuality, along with the difficult indirectness with which one may pass through it to its prototype, makes the allegorized symbol accessible only to a very few. Moreover, in the same way that apostasy is a separation from all humanity, so an allegorized symbol is opposed to all true symbols and, in being exalted above the catholicity of true symbols, the allegory easily becomes the source of heresy, i.e., the source of all isolation or sectarianism.

At the close of the sixteenth century, as ecclesiastical life fell into decadence, the spirit of allegory everywhere took hold as part of an ontological collapse, resulting in a heaviness that made

greatly difficult any rising up out from the merely sensory world. And in his inability any longer to see clearly the supernatural world, the iconpainter attempted to compensate by increasing the complexity of his theological compositions, thereby uniting theological rationalism with purely conventional images drawn from the merely empirical world of the senses. The result was that the theological rationalism degenerated into purely abstract schemata expressed primarily in the terms of the conventionally sensory imagery: a frivolousness both secular and sensual. Such was the sad end of things at the close of the eighteenth century, a conclusion made infinitely more dismal by the fact that, in Russia, the figurative arts had attained heights unequalled anywhere in the world.

Earlier, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Russian iconpainting had reached a height of perfection without parallel in the whole history of world art—a pinnacle shared, perhaps, only by classical Greek sculpture (which also incarnated spiritual vision), and (again like Greek sculpture) whose brilliance was corrupted by rationalism and empiricism.

Thus, at the heights of perfection, iconpainting is wholly alien to even the slightest shadow of allegory, opening the spirit into a bright vision of primordial unity by means of forms so organically created that one can easily see in them the canons common to all humankind; and because they are first of all revelations of the life in Christ, and because they are also manifestations of the purest ecclesiastical creativity, these forms become the most beloved primordial forms in all humankind. For in these iconic forms we can recognize the separate appearances of ancient cultures: e.g., the features of Zeus in the face of Christ Pantocrator or the features of Athena and Isis in the Mother of God. "Wisdom is justified of her children" (Mt.11:19), for in these hints and guesses in the faces of Zeus and Athena, the children of ancient

wisdom, we see how Holy Wisdom was using the whole of world art-history to prepare for the revelation of truth.

Thus we say again, that the more ontological the vision is, the more universal will be the human form this vision expresses—in the same way that the most sacred words of the highest mysteries are always the humanly simplest words: father and son; birth; seed rotting and sprouting; bridegroom and bride; bread and wine; breath of wind; the light of the sun; and so on. A canonical form is a form of supreme essence, a form which is impossible to simplify further; and while deviations from canonic forms limit and artificialize, canonic forms liberate: thus, imagine how an artist who is genuinely free would cry out were deviant forms to be established as the norms of figurative art!

In canonic forms, on the contrary, we can breathe freely, for they wean us from the streams of inessentialities that seem always to disturb the movements of the divine creation. The most developed, the most established, the strictest canons express most deeply and purely the universal spiritual needs of all humanity; for the canons, in becoming the Church's wisdom, become the catholic canons of all humanity. Thus, a soul will purify itself through the canons of ascetic discipline, stripping away everything within itself that is merely subjective and inessential and allowing the spiritual discipline to open the soul to that eternal, primordial truth of human nature created in the image of Christ (i.e., to the absolute foundation of creation)—thereby finding in one's own deepest soul the very thing long ago implied in the canons and which inevitably had to be expressed in the whole course of history. The ascetic will then see—even in the fierce glare of the fallen day's vanities—the beauty of the divine starry sky.

For some reason I remember here the great elder Ambrose of the Optina Hermitage. He had an icon that had been composed with shallowness of feeling by an iconpainter badly infected with the disease of naturalism, an icon portraying the Multiplication of

the Loaves. Nevertheless, from this monk's tiny cell in a very remote monastery in a still more remote province, from an old, poor, and simple man, arose an extraordinarily powerful idea, one contradicting the whole pattern of contemporary ecclesiastical sophistication and refined synodal culture: that this poor icon depicted the Good Goddess; for who else is the Multiplicatrix of Loaves, who else except a vision of the Mother of God in the canonic form of the Mother of Loaves: Demeter. The bad iconpainting of the 1880's disobeyed true spiritual discipline; yet, solely by inner feeling, Ambrose could see (as can we) exactly how the Church affirmed that ancient image of mellow Demeter, that image wherein the ancient Greeks registered their prescient guesses about the Mother of God.

In the most precise sense of the word, only the saints can be iconpainters; and it may well be that the vast majority of the saints have "painted" icons in the sense of directing, through their spiritual experience, the very hands of those iconpainters who possessed both enough technical skill to depict sacred vision and enough spiritual intelligence to respond sensitively to saintly instruction. Such artistic cooperation need not amaze us. In earlier periods, in times of greater cultural cohesion than ours, artistic work was generally done collaboratively—something we can see, for example, in the workshops and studios of the great masters, even in the periods when artistic individuality was sharply emphasized. In the Medieval period, when artistic consciousness was more unified, and when the guidance of a spiritual director was culturally recognized, collaborative iconography perhaps reached special perfection. It may even be that the Gospels and other sacred Christian texts were still earlier so created: the Gospel of Mark, for example, under the guidance of St. Peter, and the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles under the guidance of the Apostle. It is no wonder, then, that certain masters of iconpainting, obedient to the saints who proclaimed visions of

immortal beauty, would depict that beauty under the direct supervision and verification of the very saints themselves.

But the techniques of the brush are not always inherently opposed to the contemplation of spiritual vision; and through the whole history of the Christian Church there runs (like a golden thread) a tradition of *sacred* iconpainting. Beginning with the first witnesses of the incarnate Word and carrying through all the centuries, there march those saints who are themselves iconpainters along with those iconpainters who themselves are saints. We know the names (though we cannot pretend to know all) of these saintly iconpainters, led by the evangelist St. Luke.

To these iconpainters, and to those like them, also belong those who create the new or 'first-appeared' icons. Furthermore, we must also add the names of iconpainters who multiply the 'first-appeared' evidence of the spiritual realm. Just as the spiritual word needs copyist-writers, so the spiritual vision needs copyist-iconpainters. These copyists may not need be the eagles in the heavens, but they cannot be so far removed from spiritual intensity as not to feel the significance and responsibility of what they are doing as witnesses—or, more precisely, as assistants in the witnessing. For they are not iconpainters in the sense that they are craftsmen who happen to be making icons as opposed to another kind of fine art; they are not skilled technicians who may or may not belong to the Church. Rather, they are holders of an unique Church office. For in the consciousness of the Church, they hold this special office in the sacred hierarchy, in the true theocracy, of the Church, and, as members of the Church, they are recognized in their function as iconpainters. They occupy a place midway between those who serve at the altar and the ordinary layperson. They live a prescribed life, almost semi-monastic, under the direct supervision of the Metropolitan, the local bishop, and the specially designated wardens of iconpainters. The Church honors Her iconpainters by giving them this unique status—and, in some

rare instances, She has even granted financial rewards, as in the extraordinary eighteenth-century case of one Simon Ushakov, who was given noble rank. On the other hand, the Church recognizes the necessity to scrutinize attentively not only the work of Her iconpainters but their very lives.

An iconpainter's life is therefore not simple. Because they are raised in the ecclesiastical hierarchy above ordinary laypeople, they must therefore practice a greater humility, purity and piety, a profounder practice of fasting and prayer, and a more constant and deeper contact with their spiritual father. Thus, the bishops consider their iconpainters as people "higher than the ordinary." Conversely, then, were an iconpainter to violate the prescribed Rule of his life, he would be immediately dismissed from the work under a condemnation to suffer in eternal torment—such would be the requirements in that case. But, in actual reality, iconpainters always put themselves under disciplines stricter than any given to them, becoming genuine ascetics in the exact sense of the word.

Thus, it is not for reasons of "law and order" (as the phrase has it) that the Church tells Her iconpainters that they should see their work as acts in a high and sacred service; rather, She is attempting to link them to the very same "golden thread" of logic that runs from the first Witness—i.e., Christ Himself—to the very center of the Incarnation that is the Holy Church Herself. This artery of iconpainting sustains the whole ecclesiastical body and therefore it can nowhere be allowed to run dry, and the ecclesiastical canons of iconpainting intend precisely that: to provide the free flow of grace from the head of the Church (i.e., Christ) to Her very least organ. And, truth to tell, the more intricately ramifying the spread of this arterial system of iconpainting, the less dangerous for the whole ecclesiastical body is the clogging of a single capillary. But nevertheless even the least icon-copy—one of those reproduced by the millions—must bear

witness to the truths of the other world; for a spiritual blurriness or inconsistency or (worse) falsehood could inflict irreparable damage upon one or more Christian souls, just as (on the other hand) its spiritual truth could help strengthen someone's soul.

An icon must conform—"in imagery, likeness, and essence"—to the authentic images of spiritual existence. Otherwise, the Holy Church cannot be certain that one or another of Her vital organs will not go dead. In this light, the ecclesiastical function of those specially appointed wardens of iconpainting is very clear: to accept truth-telling icons and to reject the false-speaking ones. In fact, an icon becomes truly an icon only after the Church recognizes that the image in it corresponds to its living spiritual Prototype; in other words, it is an icon only after She truly names it. And the act of true naming—i.e., of establishing the self-identity of the person in the icon—belongs *only to the Church;* and were an iconpainter to write on an icon a name not so given in the Church's teaching (without which an icon cannot truly be an icon), then it would be essentially the same as signing a legal document with not your own but with someone else's name. If I understand the practice correctly, an examination by an icon-warden always concluded (if affirmative) with the warden himself, with the bishop's blessing, writing the name of the saint on the icon itself; and evidence of this practice can be seen on the many old icons which have attached to them metal plates with the saints' names quickly, even carelessly written in charcoal and oil—writing surely not done by the iconpainters themselves. It has something of the air of an executive's signature on correspondence composed by an intelligent secretary.

We might naturally conclude, then, that such a signature functions as the censor's seal of approval. But it is far more than that, for it is not enough merely to verify (or reject) icons after they have been made; the deeper question is: if eternity must be witnessed in and through the icon, can this occur through the

work of someone who is himself alienated from true spirituality? This is precisely the point at which the Church, in considering not merely the work but the whole life of an iconpainter, will come to view disregard of spiritual rule as devastating to the very integrity of the iconpainting cult. Hence, the ascetic demands placed upon iconpainters in the matter of their personal lives; hence, too, the precise formulation given these demands in the 43rd chapter of the document known as the 100-Chapters Council, a formulation articulated when Russian iconpainting had already reached its supreme heights:

> Let this be read in the royal city of Moscow and in all the cities, as the Czar so advises, to all metropolitans, archbishops, and bishops: for the protection of all the orders of the Church, but pre-eminently for the holy icons and the iconpainters and other orders, that all and every may be protected as befits the sacred precepts; and that also it may be made known what the iconpainter shall be, what diligence he shall possess, so as to depict in earthly images Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and His Most Pure Mother, and all the heavenly Powers, and all the saints who have been in all ages well pleasing to God.
>
> Let it be known, then, that the iconpainter shall be meek, humble, and reverent, neither filled with vain talk, nor empty laughter, not quarrelsome, not envious,not a drinker of spirits, not a thief nor a murderer; and above all things, that he shall sustain in great mindfulness a pure chastity of soul and body, and that if he cannot sustain a pure chastity of body, he shall marry a wife by the lawful sacrament of matrimony; and that always and everywhere the iconpainters shall attend constantly to their spiritual fathers, telling them everything always and living always according to their teachings about fasting and prayer and all the ascetic disciplines, doing so with neither embarrassment nor willfulness, and with always the true wisdom of humility; and that they shall with great diligence make the image of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of His Most Pure Mother, of all the holy apostles and prophets, of all the holy hierarchs and martyrs, and of all the righteous women and holy fathers, each and every according to the "image and likeness" of the most divine essence, looking always to the images of the ancient iconpainters and always drawing from that good treasure-house of their most excellent example.

> Let it be also known that if it shall be that a master-artist who has given solemn oath to live in this very way, observing truly all these commandments of God and working diligently in all these labors of God, shall accomplish the will of God in all of these things, then shall the Czar express gratitude to this master-artist, and the all–hierarchs of the Church shall grant great protection to him and in every way shall regard him as elevated above all ordinary persons; and, further, that this master-artist shall accept disciples, examining them in all things and teaching them every devotion and chastity, and shall lead them in unto his own spiritual father; whereupon the spiritual father, in turn, according to the canons given him by the hierarchs, shall instruct the disciples in how the Christian shall, by abandoning every self-willfulness, live in every humility; so that from their masters the disciples may truly learn. And if it please God that He shall reveal the art of true iconpainting to one disciple or more, then shall the master lead this disciple in unto the hierarch who, after examining carefully the work of the disciple and discerning its accordance with the holy "image and likeness" of God, and after determining that the disciple lives in every obedience and chastity of life and in full and humble accordance with every commandment of God, shall then bless the disciple and instruct him to continue in this life of devotion and to sustain in all diligence this great labor of God, therein granting to the disciple the like honor his teacher bears in being exalted above all ordinary persons.
>
> Further, let it be that, after the hierarch shall instruct the master not to defend any disciple whomsoever it be—whether the master's own son or his brother or anyone thus close to him—to whom God did not grant the true work of the holy art, if it shall be that the master take the work of such disciples who have begun to fashion wrong icons and to live in wrong fashion and, telling falsehoods by proclaiming the bad disciples' great worth, he shall then display the work of another as the fruit of the bad disciples' labors, then shall the hierarch, having learned of all this, put this lying master under fair prohibition, so that every other iconpainter will go in great fear and not dare do the same thing, and so that even those bad disciples will not dare even to touch the fruit of another's labor.
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> Also, let it be that, if God reveal to one disciple or more the true teaching of iconpainting such that these disciples begin to live in full accordance with the commandments of God, and if it so be that the master in

jealousy's fierce grip begin then to blame such reverent disciples, then shall the hierarch, having learned of all this, put this jealous master under fair prohibition and give to these good disciples every great honor.

Again, let it be that, if some master in the art hide away his knowledge and not give the art's very essence unto his disciples, such a master shall—like the man Our Lord speaks of as burying away his talent—be condemned by God Himself into eternal torment; and if either some master or some disciple begin to live in unholy ways, in drinking of spirits or in licentiousness or in self-willful pride, then shall the hierarch put them all under fair prohibition, and he shall separate them from every holy work in the icons, commanding them all not even to touch the tiniest part of it, under the terror of the revealed word that cursed be they who do the good work of God in the evil of carelessness.

And, again, let prohibition fall upon any who attempt to make icons without sacred study, fashioning them not by sacred image but by the self-willed imagination of their own unlettered hearts, and who then attempt to sell or exchange them to and with the unknowing and the simple; and let it be commanded that such ones begin to study with the good masters of the art; and if it shall be that some, by God's grace, begin then to make icons by image, these ones shall continue in the art; but if it should be that God not grant them the art, such ones shall cease all their work so that the sacred Name of God may not be disgraced by such work; and if it so be that they refuse to cease all their work, let the Czar in his anger punish all such ones; and if they lament that it be their one livelihood, let them not be heard in this sinful complaint, for they see not their sin in their ignoring God's grace in giving only a few the gift of true icon-working; and say also to them that God, in His wisdom, has granted to men many arts and crafts wherein they may find their livelihood but that the image of God may not be disgraced by their hands.

Also, let it be known that the archbishops and bishops in every city and village, and in every monastery under their care, shall personally examine every master of the art, both his life and his art; and when he finds, in his jurisdiction, the supremely good master, then he shall command such a master to supervise all the other iconpainters so that, among them, there not be any bad ones; and, further, that the archbishops and bishops shall equally inquire into and equally well care for

the wardens of the icons; for in this fashion shall the iconpainters be rightly protected and honored above all ordinary persons, that every man, of either mean or high estate, shall reverence such artists and render them honor for their sacred iconpainting.

And, lastly, let it be known that the hierarchs in each their own jurisdiction shall exercise great diligence in assuring that the every master and disciple, out of their own mind and ideas, shall not ever fashion an icon that attempts to depict the invisible Godhead Himself, for Christ Our Lord shall be shown in the flesh, not in the Godhead....

These teachings on the iconpainter's high calling were, of course, not confined to one city cathedral at one period of time. Throughout the whole history of Christendom we find the handbooks of iconpainting suggesting, for example, even in such apparently routine matters as cleaning and inspecting old icons that:

Do not conduct these tasks carelessly and inattentively but with reverence and the fear of God, because these are tasks pleasing to God.

A work entitled *Hermeneia,* or *Instructions in the Art,* by the iconpainter and hieromonk Dionysius of Fourna, codifies and expounds the teachings of Panselinos' school. Dionysius begins with clearly stating his sense of spiritual responsibility that has led him to compose the present manual. The *Hermeneia* gives exact and full instructions, step by step, on the entire process of iconpainting: drawing the pattern; making charcoal, glue and gesso; gessoing the icon board; building up the haloes in the icon; gessoing the entire iconostasis; preparing the poliments and gilding the icons and iconostasis; preparing the sankir (flesh color); applying the highlights and painting the garments; and so on—including how to mix pigments for different colors, what are the true proportions of the human body, how to do frescos, and how to renovate older icons. But that is not by any means all. Dionysius also gives a complete pattern-book in which he explains in full detail how to compose the figures from the Old Testament texts as well as the figures of the Greek philosophers. He also tells how to compose the figures not only from the

Gospels, Acts and Epistles but also those from Jesus' parables; and he tells how to distinguish iconographically the Apocalypse from the Second Coming. He also discusses the iconpainting details of the feasts of the Theotokos, the imagery of the Akathists, the historical feasts of the Church, didactic and miraculous images, and, last of all, he gives detailed instruction in fresco composition: where and what should be depicted in a church of this or that style. This rich *Hermeneia* concludes with the dogmatic foundations of iconpainting wherein Dionysius discusses the ancient Church traditions about the features of both Our Saviour's Face and the Holy Mother's, about the position of the blessing hand in an icon, and about what words should be written in which icon. At the very end, Dionysius concludes with his own brief prayer:

> To the Creator of all goodness, to our God, thanksgiving! Having finished this book I say, Glory to You, O God! Again I say, Glory to You, O God! And again I say, Glory to You, O our God of all creation!

Such is the richly harmonious content of this high and magisterial *Hermeneia.* But, reader, I ask you: do you not feel that something here is missing? Do not all these exact and full instructions feel suspended in air, self-enclosed and detached from the true order of iconpainting? For what is missing in all these technical details is their absolutely necessary condition: prayer. The *Hermeneia* would indeed be empty if it had not been the fact that, in this account, I silently passed over the actual beginning of the book. For here, in full, are Dionysius' preliminary instructions to anyone who "wishes to learn the art":

> If anyone wishes to learn the art of iconpainting, let them begin by practicing drawing for a time, without concern for proportions, until the skill of drawing becomes an acquired habit. Then let the novice approach the priest, to have prayers said before the icon Hodegetria (the Directress of the Way) on his behalf. The priest must say the prayers "Blessed is our God," "O Heavenly King" and the rest of the Trisagion, and then, after the megalynarion of the Holy Mother and the troparion of the Transfiguration, the priest should make the sign of the cross upon the head of the novice and loudly chant "Let us pray to the Lord," and then continue with the following prayer: "O Lord Jesus Christ our God, infinite in Thy divinity who, inexpressibly incarnate through Mary the Virgin Mother, became finite for our salvation; who imprinted the sacred shape of Thine immaculate face on the holy veil and, by means of this, healed the illness of Abgar and enlightened his soul with the full knowledge of God; who through Thy Holy Spirit brought such wisdom to the Holy Apostle and Evangelist Luke that he could depict Thy wholly sinless Mother who held Thee in Her arms saying, 'May the grace of Him who is born of me be given to this image through me'—the same way, O God and Master of all things, enlighten and bring wisdom to the soul and heart and mind of this Thy servant [name] and so direct these hands that they may depict—most perfectly beyond all reproach—the forms of Thy person, of Thine All-Holy Mother, and of all the saints; to do so to the glory, splendor and beauty of Thy holy church, and for the remission of the sins of all who truly revere and devoutly kiss and so bring honor to Her; and protect, O Lord, this Thy servant from all demonic wiles as he diligently follows in his work the sacred commands of Thy ministers, of Thy Holy Mother, of the holy apostle and evangelist Luke, and of all the saints. Amen." Then closing prayer and dismissal. After this order of prayer, let the student now begin to draw the holy faces in their exact shape and appearance, practicing for a long period of time with full attentiveness. Then, with the help of God, the student will come to fully understand the true work of iconpainting. For I have seen this happen in my students.

Dionysius says that he writes all this solely for the benefit of his "fellow artists in Christ," from whom he asks their prayers for him. And he speaks with grateful love a word "to a student":

> Know, my diligent student, that when the moment arrives when you shall plunge into this great art, you must search tirelessly to find an experienced teacher, one you will come to appreciate deeply if he teaches you in the very way I have outlined to you here.

Thus, Dionysius sees what the whole community of iconpainters everywhere and always affirms: the successful accomplishment of iconpainting technique depends entirely upon the iconpainter's devotion to prayer. Such is the clear air of a master iconographer and iconpainter in the first half of the eighteenth century, a period when all life—including ecclesiastical life—had fallen into

a secularization of terrible harshness. Nevertheless, this devout spirit and unique consciousness has persisted uninterrupted among iconpainters into our own time, a spirit and consciousness sometimes informing whole villages wherein, from one generation to the next, there has passed this spiritual self-awareness of being workers in a high and sacred task, a self-awareness accompanied by the transmission of semi-secret techniques of iconpainting, of divine processes of working. It is a unique and enclosed world of witnesses. And if it has remained so into our time, then we have great difficulty even imagining rightly that spirit-bearing atmosphere whence, in antiquity (when the whole of earthly life was set in order), there flowed into the whole ecclesiastical body that manifestation of divine beauty whose spiritual principles were and are the unshakable axis that was and is the Holy Mysteries of Christ.

A Dialogue with Sophia Ivanova

The History of Artistic Technique, Western and Iconic

There is nothing accidental in the organization of sacred custom: neither in the iconic forms nor in the lives of the iconpainters. It is quite incorrect to assert that the cultic order employs either iconic forms or iconpainters from beyond itself, unaware that they represent its own powers. Rather, the cult in itself serves to reveal the sacred faces and, again in itself, to guide the lives of the iconpainters. Plainly, then, the holy images of iconpainting are incarnated by these servants of the Church through the use of artistic strategies that are in no way alien to the cultic metaphysics or that employ media which do not flow from the sacred purpose. Concerning the cult, neither the techniques nor the materials themselves are accidental; none of them may be understood as having simply arrived—in the accidents of history—inside the Church, as if any of them could be painlessly and easily replaced by other techniques and other materials. We would not so think

in relation to any other art form, that any artistic concept could be executed with any artistic technique or material, as if materials and techniques were somehow arbitrarily connected with artistic ideas and concepts, somehow extrinsic to esthetic essences. How much more so, then, should we see nothing whatever accidental, subjective or capricious about the techniques and materials of that art wherein is revealed the spiritual nature of all humanity. The field of this art is therefore bounded in itself in ways beyond any comparison to any other human art, for nothing alien—no "alien fire"—could ever be placed on its sacred altar. It is impossible, then, to conceive even as a purely esthetic experiment an icon composed in an alien technique with alien materials: it could not possibly be an icon. But this impossibility becomes vividly clear when we consider the spiritual essence of the icon. The artistic strategies and tactics of iconpainting, i.e., the materials used and the ways of technically using them, are the metaphysical modalities by which the icon possesses incarnate life. The materials and techniques of an art—any art—are symbolic: for each single one of them possesses its own concretely determined metaphysical aliveness through which it corresponds to a unique spiritual fact.

But even granting all this, consider the matter on some purely empirical issue of artistic surfaces (affirming, of course, that there can be nothing superficial that does not also possess inward manifestation). The issue we shall consider is the consistency of the paint. If we think about the surfaces of iconpainting—about the exact biology and physics of the artistic surfaces (i.e., their chemical and physical natures), about what precisely coheres the color-pigments as well as their chemical constituents; if we think about what various dissolvents and varnishes exactly do in the icon; if, in short, we think about all the myriad *material causes* operating in any art, then we are already directly engaged in reflecting upon that profoundly metaphysical disposition which the creative will expresses in and as its wholeness. It may well be that the artist will deploy these so-called material causes instinc-