

Introduction to the Orthodox Church

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1. What is the Orthodox Church ?

We are here in a dialogue because, I suppose, we deeply understand that the Orthodox Church, such as any other religious institution, does represent something different for those standing outside of it and not caring at all, standing outside of it but sympathising, as for those being official members without any kind of personal involvement in the spiritual life and finally, for those who made from the teaching of the Church a proper and everyday life.

For those regarding the Church from outside or from religious indifference, the Orthodox Church is nothing more than an institution both ancient and unchanged, even unable to change and stuck somewhere in between the Byzantine glory of another times, the Turkish conquest of Constantinople and of the Balkan countries, the communist regimes of the Soviet space and finally the “invasion” of the West by Eastern Europeans in modern times once some Orthodox countries joined EU or signed an agreement of free-pass with EU. There is definitely more than this when speaking about the Orthodox identity. For most of those who assumed a profound Orthodox identity, the Church’s way is the life Jesus Christ and the Apostles taught to the world. For many of our believers this does not apply only to general faith aspects, but even to the tiniest liturgical details, such as vestments, way of singing, prayers, incense etc. This is one of the first aspects an outsider must keep in mind about the Orthodox self-understanding: whatever is Orthodox must somehow be by apostolic origin, and therefore, not something easy to put in discussion.

One cannot easily answer to *What the Orthodox Church is?*¹ in half an hour, not even in one or two but we can start from scratch, from what sets the Orthodox identity in its most profound substance: *the Eastern Christian Mind*. Once you get to this, you shall understand that Orthodoxy is a bit like driving in London², the same rules applied (as in every religious identity) but having the arrow inversed. So being Orthodox is not about becoming more healthy, wealthy and wise, because the Orthodox Church actually did not have the opportunity to produce the wealthiest societies or renowned Universities but, the Orthodox identity means, first of all, being faithful to a certain ethos (a profound nature) which is not irrational, but also not rational; this is the *Eastern ethos* or nature, call it if you want “way of understanding and doing things”. The main characteristics of this ethos are:

¹ Book recommendations on the main theme of this lecture: TIMOTHY WARE, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity* (Penguin Group, 2015); Bishop KALLISTOS WARE, *The Orthodox Way*, (Mowbray: London & Oxford, 1979); FEDERICA MATHEWES-GREEN, *Welcome to the Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity* (Paraclete Press, 2015).

² The “driving in London analogy” is taken from: Fr. Theophan Whitfield’s presentation sheets about the *Eastern Christian Mind*. The same applies to the idea of beginning with *Lex orandi – Lex credendi* the fostering of what the *Eastern Mind* could be. See: <https://sncbulletins.files.wordpress.com/2019/10/02-outline-intro-orthodoxy-02-of-08.pdf>.

2. ***Lex orandi – Lex credendi*** (- *lex vivendi*) (traditionally belonging to Saint Vincent of Lerins)³

The rule of prayer is the rule of believe, the rule of worship gives the rule of faith or even the rule of life. (*lex vivendi*) What does this mean? Normally, departing from the creed, hymns and texts for worship would be created. In the Eastern thought this setting is reversed. Liturgy precedes and guides theology.

We could take into consideration two general questions that would apply for every faith:

What do we believe? (Question of Theology)

How do we worship? (Question of the Liturgy)⁴

A Western tendency following a logical-rational regard in the matter, would give priority to theology (*what do we believe*). It is the theology that would necessarily condition the content of the liturgy (the liturgical texts written in accordance to the faith).

For us is the opposite. If *how do we worship* guides *what do we believe*, it means that in the development of the Creed, Bible Canon or later Canon Law, the liturgical Tradition had the main role. There was a liturgical Tradition before a universal Creed or a Bible Canon. We can go even deeper, to mention that some New Testament biblical texts contain liturgical hymns⁵ dating before the writing of the New Testament. So, the Liturgy precedes the Bible according to the Orthodox theology, which means Liturgical texts are believed to be part of a Tradition, written with capital T, or, in another words: the Bible is just another part of this Tradition. This is how we explain the historical fact that, during the Synodal debates of the first centuries' Ecumenical Councils which actually created the content of the faith, liturgical hymns were quoted and brought into discussions as arguments. From this point of view, the Orthodox ethos is totally opposed to the Lutheran one, to *Sola Scriptura*,⁶ where the intellect has a primary role. This is fundamental in understanding the very substance of the Eastern mind: you cannot arrive to any conclusion about God outside worship and Liturgy. Some Orthodox theologians argue this using some texts of the New Testament: for example, *the Road to Emmaus*, from Luke 24, where the disciples were not able to recognise Christ after the “sermon” (even if delivered by Jesus Himself) but only after receiving the communion – we would say after *Eucharistic worshipping*.

Let me put it on another way, that, a first glance might sound a bit strange: we Orthodox, we do not think first and pray second.⁷ It is rather the liturgical worship that most of the believers are profoundly linked to and, not the least, it is the liturgy that managed to convert and to conquer the heart of many non-Orthodox. This also explains why the Byzantine rite

³ For more information on *Lex orandi – Lex credendi* see: MARY-ANNE PLAATJIES-VAN-HUFFEL, “Rethinking the Reciprocity between Lex Credendi, Lex Orandi and Lex Vivendi: As We Believe, so We Worship. As We Believe, so We Live”, in *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, vol. 76, no. 1 (2020), available online at: <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/hts/v76n1/38.pdf>; for a Protestant regard on the matter, please see: GLEN CLARY, “Lex orandi, Lex Credendi – a Reformed Perspective”, available online at: <https://reformedforum.org/lex-orandi-lex-credendi-a-reformed-perspective/>.

⁴ Fr. T. WHITFIELD, *The Eastern Christian Mind*.

⁵ See, for example, the Christological hymns of the New Testament: John 1, 1-18; Phil. 2, 1-11; Eph. 1, 3-14; Eph. 2, 14-18.

⁶ Read more on the ratio between *Lex orandi* and *Sola Scriptura*: DAVID A. WILLIAMS, “Sola Scriptura Statuat Lex Orandi: Toward a Transcultural Theology of Liturgy” (2017). *Faculty Publications*. 857. Available online at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/857>

⁷ Fr. T. WHITFIELD, *The Eastern Christian Mind*.

developed so much during the centuries and why so much theological energy was placed for developing the rite into a **liturgical experience** (please keep in mind this expression).

But it also has another *facet* less positive: it explains why the catechism, sermons or everything else linked to the teaching of the faith does not occupy a place of special interest, or didn't use to occupy until the Orthodox identity met the West and got inspired from it in developing activities linked with catechism or religious education. The great importance given to liturgy also explains the limited level of knowing the doctrine of the faith in the Orthodox world or the low interest for reading the Bible. Instead, there is a strong faithfulness towards the Liturgy and the Church. I assume most of the Orthodox believers going each Sunday to Church (at least in the Orthodox-majority countries) would not manage to explain at a minimum-satisfying level the main dogmas of Christianity: the Trinity and the Incarnation, but they would still go, because it is the **experiential sensation** offered by the Divine Worship that has precedence to whatever intellectual aspect. This aspect was very well understood in the XVI and XVII centuries by the Catholic Polish and Austrian Authorities when, after many failed attempts to convert to Roman-Catholicism the Orthodox Ukrainians or Romanians found in some territories that temporary came into their administration, they realised those Byzantine-rite worshipers would never give up their faith, even if back-then, Ukrainians and Romanians had almost no religious education; the general term used back-then by the simple Orthodox believers to refer to what we theologically call today the *Byzantine Rite* was *the forefathers' ancestral law*. So, the Catholic Authorities realised that keeping the Liturgy in its *interim* but changing some small details in the faith might actually work, and it did, and so were born two of the biggest Greek-Catholic Churches: the Ukrainian one and the Transylvanian (Romanian) one. This is the Greek-Catholic Church: Roman Doctrine and Byzantine Liturgy, and this has to do a lot with the Orthodox Church and its history.⁸ But let us go back to the Byzantine liturgy.

3. The Byzantine Rite – a full sensible experience of prayer

3.1. **Personal prayer** – there is no universal-decided rule regarding the simple believers such as the reading of the Breviary in the Catholic Church. Usually, morning and evening prayers for laymen (laity) are made out of psalms, patristic texts, Bible fragments etc.⁹ Usually personal prayer at home is made in front of *corner-of-prayer*, some corner of the room with icons and candles. Laymen's personal prayer still needs something else: to have the blessing of a spiritual father because prayer must also to be keepable (*Pray as you can, not as you cannot*,¹⁰ so choosing a program that one can observe for a long period), and in order to find the right routine for everyone, a professional advice is needed, and this is the figure of the spiritual father. We shall see suddenly why a prayer-routine is so emphasized in the Orthodox spirituality.

⁸ For an updated discussion on the Greek-Catholic identity and the nowadays relations between the Orthodox and the Greek-Catholic Churches see: Vladimir Latinovic and Anastacia K. Wooden, *Stolen Churches or Bridges to Orthodoxy?, Volume 1: Historical and Theological Perspectives on the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Dialogue, Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue*, Palgrave Macmillan 2021; or our review of this volume: ALEXANDRU-MARIUS CRIȘAN, „Review of Vladimir Latinovic and Anastacia K. Wooden, *Stolen Churches ...*”, *RES - Review of Ecumenical Studies Sibiu* 13 2(2021), p. 340-345. Available online at: <https://sciendo.com/es/article/10.2478/ress-2021-0030>.

⁹ An example of an Orthodox Book of Prayers for believers can be found here: <https://www.transchurch.org/ourfaith/prayers>.

¹⁰ The expression is actually taken from the book of the Anglican Archbishop of York: STEPHEN COTTRELL, *How to Pray* (Church House Publishing, 2010).

3.2. In **monasteries**, the communities follow an official liturgical routine called the *Liturgy of the hours*. Each important moment of the day is consecrated through prayer: the liturgical day begins actually in the evening with the *Vespers*, there is a *Midnight Office* whose psalm¹¹ and hymnological content is very close to the Service of the Funeral being dominated by a nuance of an imminent eschatology, inspired by the *parable of the ten virgins* (Matthew 25).¹² *Christ is coming back in the middle of the night of your life, be prepared!* This is very interesting and beautiful, but also predictable from the part of a symbolistic rite such as the Byzantine one. There is no better moment to contemplate and pre-taste the death as the darkness of the night during a prayer held at the light of the candles. Look at it from the another side: each funeral is a personal *eschata* and each night you pray prepares you for that moment, or, the monks are pre-celebrating their funerals each night. In the morning there is the celebration of the *Lauds*, a service dedicated to the Christ as *Light from above. Glory to you who have sent us the Light!* In most of the monastery there is also a daily eucharistic celebration. Important to mention is that, normally you won't find in the Orthodox world so-called active monastic orders (so orders specialised in philanthropic or pedagogical work) but only/mostly contemplative monasteries whose only duty is to preserve and observe the day-light – darkness-night and Sunday-to-Sunday rhythms of prayer. So, there is a certain separation between the *world* and the monastic life.

Now let us go back to the absolute need of a *praying-routine* in the Orthodox spirituality. Praying by meditating significant spiritual concepts and observing a certain rhythm of the day gives you the impression that the prayer is truly universal and cosmic – *Cosmos* means *world* in Greek, and a *praying-routine* truly makes you feel as being part of the *Cosmos*. So in the Orthodox Church, for those seeking a more elevated spiritual life, it does not matter only how, but also and mostly when you pray for sanctifying certain moments of the day. It is not so important how much you pray during a day, but mostly how long one is able to observe a certain routine of prayer; only a long repeated routine of prayer will offer the taste of a cosmic spiritual experience, and with this, a taste of what does it mean to be fully human because we are connected to the *Cosmos* around us.

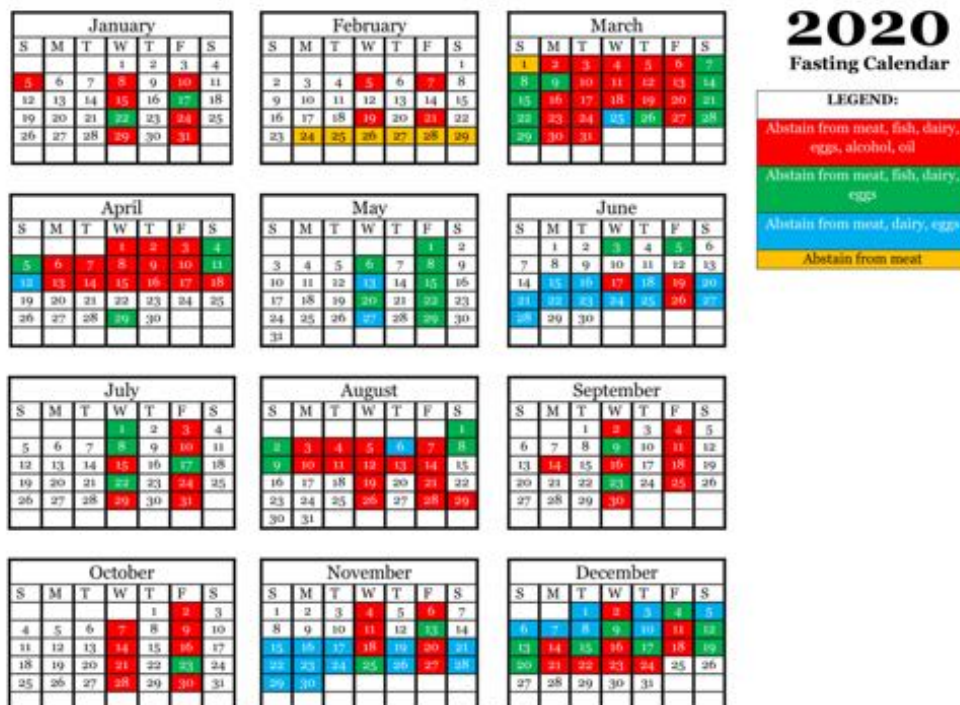
3.3. All around us are cycles and rhythms that shape our lives, and the same aspects apply to fasting. When it comes to **fasting** it is clear that the nutritional program of the Orthodox Church is linked with the agrarian seasons of planting, harvest and growing animals of the past societies. But this has also another facet: it is close to what a natural biological feeding rhythm and natural order would look like without human-hand artificial intervention. One could not be full-vegetarian or having the possibility of eating every-day meat without the help of artificial light and heating, modern transportation means or processed food.

The base of the fasting programme in the Orthodox Church has no ideological or ecological rationality but the faithfulness to Tradition. Since not very long time ago, most of

¹¹ I refer particularly to the Psalm 118 (according to Byzantine psalm-counting-system)/119 (according to the Western psalms-counting-system), the longest psalm. This psalm, which contains many contemplative verses, is found both in the *Midnight Office* as in the *Orthodox Funeral Office*.

¹² The main hymns, found in the center of the *Office* refer to parable the ten virgins, using the narrative of an imminent eschatology: “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh at midnight, and blessed is that servant whom He shall find watching; but unworthy is he whom He shall find heedless. Beware, therefore, O my soul, lest thou be weighed down with sleep; lest thou be given up to death, and be shut out from the kingdom. But rouse thyself and cry: Holy, Holy, Holy art Thou, O God, through the Theotokos have mercy on us./ Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit./ Meditating on that terrible day, O my soul, watch, keeping thy lamp alight and filled with oil; for thou know not when unto thee shall come the voice saying: Behold the Bridegroom! Beware, therefore, my soul, lest thou fall into slumber and be left outside, knocking, as were the five virgins; but wakefully watch, that thou mayest come to meet Christ with good oil, and He shall bestow upon thee the divine chamber of His glory.” (See the entire liturgical service of the *Midnight Office* here: <http://www.saintjonah.org/services/midnight.htm>).

the families were following the Orthodox fasting programme, which still has a social aspect because during fasting periods one can find in Romania, for example, in shops special shelves with fasting food¹³. This has also led to the fact that *vegan* or *vegetarians* programmes or gurus did not have lot of success in Orthodox societies. Orthodox fast-rule, if completely followed, implies a number of days equal to almost half of the year: 40 days before Christmas, 47 days before Easter, 2 weeks before 15th of August (St. Mary's feast), approx. 1 week in June before the feast of St. Apostles Peter and Paul and all the Wednesdays and Fridays during the year. Observing Orthodox fast means abstaining from meat, fish, milk- and egg-products. (Considering the remarkable number of the fasting days, see the internet meme "I was vegan before it was cool. The Eastern Church is not impressed") An example of a fasting calendar:



3.4. Normally Orthodox worship implies only *acapella singing*, no instruments and all believers are encouraged to sing. This does not always happen, people do not always know the hymns but we repeat dozens of time: *Κύριε, ἐλέησον* (*Lord, have mercy*), *Σοί, Κύριε* (*To You, oh Lord*) or *Παράσχου, Κύριε* (*Grant us, oh, Lord*) so these short expressions are sang not only by the choir but also by the entire congregation. If we sing, we must also dance. We do not have a proper dance but we have a physical movement that we perform quite often during the liturgical services: **the sign of cross**. The sign of the Cross is performed each time the name of the Trinity or of Jesus is mentioned but also in each moment the believer feels that during worship or sermons something touches her or his heart. An Orthodox former Baptist theologian

¹³ The inscription on the shelves is not *Vegetarian Food* but *Fasting Food*.

¹⁴ The fasting calendar example is taken from the website of an Orthodox American Parish. See: <https://www.allsaintstoronto.ca/bible-study-blog/2020-one-page-fasting-calendar>.

said that the sign of the cross in the Byzantine rite is like the modern *Amen* of Baptist and Pentecostal sermons; the congregation feels instantly when there is an intense spiritual *momentus* and makes the sign of the cross. The sign of the cross'-instant movement is the ancient *Amen* of the Church.¹⁵ There is a beautiful choreography when doing so: three and two fingers representing the Trinity and the two natures of Christ, moving the hand up, down, right and left (not left-right as in the Catholic or traditional Protestant Churches). Somebody wrote that Orthodox hold their theology literary "in their hands".



3.5. One cannot close the description of the Byzantine rite's private and common worship without some mentions on the **prayer of the heart**. The Orthodox Tradition contains the Jesus Prayer, which is sometimes called the prayer of the heart.

Its first mention goes back to the *Desert Fathers* of Egypt, who didn't always have the occasion to participate to impressive Church services and used simple repetitive prayers. Though there are both longer and shorter versions, the most frequently used form of the Jesus Prayer is: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Not everyone or every time must find themselves comfortable with these exact words. The Fathers of the Ancient Church t didn't use themselves the prayer always in this exact form, different forms in different times and in different places were in use. What means saying this prayer? In the words of Paul Evdochimov "just add Jesus among your thoughts"¹⁶. There are three mainly techniques:

- a) **Breath techniques** – inhale and exhale – quite close to some Buddhist practices
- b) **Following the attention given to words** – Repeating a phrase, a short prayer, helps us concentrate and can also help question ourselves. We must pay attention to which words speak to us more in different periods of our life.
- c) **Using a prayer rope** – something material to link our thoughts to. From this point of view, the practice is quite close to the practice of the rosary in the Catholic Church, with two significant differences.

There are some studies showing the benefit of meditating with short repetitive phrases (and/or repetitive songs, such as those used by the Taizé community)¹⁷. I assume it has something to do with the language of the passion, lovers are always repetitive in love declarations or the opposite, persons who hate one another or who argue always repeat the same arguments, ill persons adore to repeatedly mention their illness or fears etc. Something happens in our brain when entering in a rhythm of a repetitive prayer or songs, but also at a spiritual level, we experience most of the time a spiritual fragmentation - Living only as minds and bodies and losing the contact with the heart (in the Patristic Language our ability to keep us in contact with God, to be still). The mind cannot keep with immense cascade of thoughts, regrets, memories, images, impressions, anticipations, reactions. The mind is helpless to chase

¹⁵ Idea taken from the already quoted Father Theophan Whitfield, himself an Orthodox convert and former Baptist.

¹⁶ An absolute *must* for those wanting to deepen the question of the prayer of the heart is the book (without having a known author) *The Way of a Pilgrim* appeared in different translations in different languages originally known as *The Russian Pilgrim*.

¹⁷ See for example: JOHN J. PILCH, "Music and Trance", in *Music and Altered States. Consciousness, Transcendence, Therapy and Addictions*, ed. DAVID ALDRIDGE & JÖRG FACHNER (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), p. 47 (mentioning especially the short and repetitive Taizé songs) and the following. There is though a significant difference between the use of the prayer of the heart in the Orthodox Church and the Taizé repetitive songs observed by the great French Orthodox theologian of the XX century, Olivier Clement. See: OLIVIER CLEMENT, *Taizé – Un sens à la vie* (Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1997), p. 64.

them all. The mind is not designed to be the highest faculty within the human person, the heart is this. Silence is a form of prayer. Such a short-repeated prayer practiced in silence is a means of concentration, a focal point for our inner life.

4. Icons

We must deepen a bit the question of the art that one sees when she or he entered in an Orthodox Church: the iconography. Iconography is something taken naturally by Christians from Jewish and pre-Christian Pagan sources. I think we do agree that the Jewish cult and culture were not totally an-iconic (I remind you of the “Paradebeispiel” well-known example of the Synagogue from Dura Europos¹⁸). The icons became so important for the Orthodox identity because there was a period in the Byzantine Empire between the VIIth and VIIIth centuries when *iconodoulia* (the veneration of icons) was forbidden by the political power. The cult of the icons was finally re-established and the rejection of the icons was itself rejected because the Church considered that the icons are the ultimately expression of the doctrine of faith regarding the incarnation. The way of thinking back-then was this: if you reject the icons, you do take something from doctrine of the Incarnation, so from the fullness of the Christian Gospel. So, icons are something enduring, that resisted in the Orthodox Church and became part of the confession of faith. This explains why until today we still have a Sunday during liturgical year dedicated to the icons which bears the name: *Sunday of Orthodoxy*¹⁹. (John 1, 43-51) (year 843)

On the other hand, the symbolism was something very present in the Eastern Christian mind. Everything must have a sense, as you have already observed, I suppose; everything is linked to a more profound reality in the Byzantine Rite. So, it is very easy to regard the icons as *symbols* in the authentic Greek sense of the word: two realities profoundly united in an invisible way and linked together by visible signs.

Now let's discuss about some features of iconography. There are some very concrete and touchable standards, artistic norms of an icon to be an icon, not every painting is an icon, because as we shall see, the icons have an active role and function during the worship.

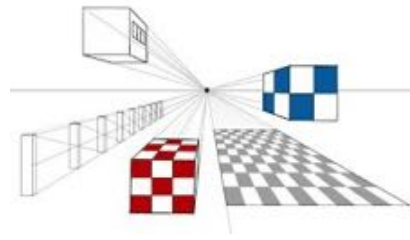
4.1. Disregard of normal perspective

Too often we are used to consider icons just as a decorative art. This is not the case for the icons who are a kind of anti-art, because the iconography does not respect the art standards. One of these standards is the normal perspective of every 3-dimensional painting, according to which objects in the front would always be bigger than objects found in the backwards or there is a perspective-line going deeper in the painting towards a central horizon point. In a Byzantine icon all these facts are reversed.

Normal 3D images, having a central horizon point and objects found in backwards are smaller than objects in front:

¹⁸ Read more info and see some pictures of this iconic synagogue here: <https://www.thetorah.com/article/retelling-the-story-of-moses-at-dura-europos-synagogue>.

¹⁹ Each first Sunday of the Lent.



Byzantine icons with a reversed perspective²⁰, no central horizon point or line, nor objects in backwards being smaller than those in front, the lines of convergence are reversed.



Inversed lines of convergence



Buildings in backwards are not smaller
We should not be able to see the out sides of the buildings in right and left parts of the icon. If you trace the point of convergence, you will observe they are heading to you actually.

²⁰ There is a significant debate among the specialists on the “inverted” or “reversed” perspective of icons. From those sustaining it and presenting it as necessary feature of a Byzantine true icon (among these the most notable would be the renowned theologian Fr. Pavel Florensky, see: <https://catalog.obitel-minsk.com/blog/2020/03/the-reverse-perspective-in-iconography>; Fr. Theophan Whitfield, see: <https://snbulletins.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/07-outline-intro-orthodoxy-07-of-08.pdf>) to those sustaining that the “inverted/reversed perspective” would be only a myth (see: <https://mmekourdukova.livejournal.com/468333.html> or <https://russianicons.wordpress.com/2011/09/01/reverse-perspective-another-icon-myth/>).

The horizon point in a Byzantine icon is actually the observer the icon, “this world”. So, icons are not something to help our mind escape from an earthly here and take us in a heavenly there, there is no central horizon point. They do not have the function to make us meditate, to have a passive reflection, as when we see a picture representing a beautiful landscape, but to give us the sense of a presence that opens towards us. There is nothing escapist when speaking about icons, I even dare to say that naming icons “widows to heaven” is wrong. Because it gives the impression there are two distinct realities, ontological separated. Using the reversed perspective, the icons inspire the idea we are watched by the reality represented in painting not the other way. The “heavenly reality” is opening and uniting with us during the liturgy. This is the main function of icons, to create the impression of the unification of the two realities and to inspire the sense of real presence. No outside perspective, no mind-escape, meditation or reflection, on the contrary, we can say, in a very non-politically correct way, icons invade our space.

4.2. Disregard of reality through symbolism

Icons are not pictures, nor photographs, do not contain realist emotions, rather stylist, simplistic or even cartoonish. The face of a Jesus or a Saint represented in an icon is not meant to show us HOW He/She was but rather WHO He/She was. Having always the eyes wide-open, the face showing no emotions is meant to look at you. One must feel challenged by the gaze of Jesus or the saint represented in the icon. The details of each person represented in an icon are symbolic, doctrinal and theological.



Some dogmatic and theological symbols one can find in the icons: the Greek letters “O Ω N” (actually “ὁ ὢν” meaning “He Who Is”, Exodus 3,14), or the eyes having different shapes and measure representing that Christ was true God and true Human, or the three stars in the vestments of Saint Mary (representing the absolute pureness/virginity of Mary: before, during and after giving birth to Jesus) and so on.

Another disregard of the reality is the golden horizon, characteristic to almost every icon. Even in icons representing events where also some buildings appear, the background or the horizon is always golden, not blue (the sky is missing). This golden yellow background

represents that Something that cannot be actually represented, the absolute pure, unchanged, immanent nature of God, which is eternal, never changes, but which sustains everything, being the very background of everything. The golden background for an icon is what the resonant *ison* (a constant background sound that doesn't change, having the role to create a simple harmony) is for the Byzantine Church music.

5. Conclusions

Remember the “driving in London” analogy?

The context of the *Eastern Mind/Ethos* is really different from a Western Protestant approach to faith, especially when it comes to liturgy. But this should in no way discourage us from wanting to know more about each other or to consider ourselves a single family of faith. The different approach to faith could also be understood in the light of the complexity and richness of the life inaugurated by Jesus, the complexity of Christian theology. Another important aspect I would like to mention would be the need to have a dialogue, not just based on what is common, but on a lived experience of encounter. There is no need at all to "make up" our identities in order to appear more similar (mentioning only what is common). Our identities will be fascinating to each other if we present them as they really are.