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ORIGEN AND THE ICONOCLASTIC CONTROVERSY

The veneration of icons in the Byzantine Church came to be challenged by the State in the age of Emperor Leo III the Isaurian (717-741). Scholars have divided the history of the Iconoclastic controversy into three parts, the so-called «first Iconoclasm» lasting from AD 726 till 780, followed by an Iconodulic interlude which culminated in the Seventh Ecumenical Council or the Second Council of Nicaea in AD 787, and the «second Iconoclasm» from AD 813 to 843 which ended with the Restoration of Orthodoxy by Empress Theodora and Patriarch Methodius. The state of present day scholarship on Iconoclasm is inevitably restricted by the very limited number of sources discovered to date. The silent consensus is that unless new sources are uncovered or old sources re-edited, it seems that it will be difficult to add anything radically new to the subject. Yet in spite of the many hypotheses proposed and the exhaustive bibliography on the subject, the origins of Iconoclasm still remain controversial and its ideology obscure.

The title of my paper alludes to a groundbreaking article on the theology of Byzantine Iconoclasm by Father George Florovsky, published more than forty years ago and entitled *Origen, Eusebius and the Iconoclastic Controversy*. Florovsky hypothetically proposed that the spiritualistic attitude of the Iconoclastic Emperors of the First Iconoclasm and their antipathy towards matter may point to the influence of Origenist doctrines¹.

Before diving into the depths of texts, a short explanation is required. Ironically, the corpus of sources testifying to the theology of the Iconoclastic side (primarily the side I will deal with in my paper) cannot be compared either in terms of its volume or in the quality of the published editions to the corpus of Origen's much earlier writings. While studying Byzantine Iconoclasm, we are forced to treat fragmentary texts with unclear and sometimes contradictory positions expressed in them. In this situation, turning to Origen as a source, whether immediate or remote, may help in making sense of the Iconoclastic arguments, ones that have previously remained unclear or inconsistent.

I would like to start the investigation of the role which Origen or, rather, the texts of Origen played in the Iconoclastic controversy with Theodore the Studite. In the first *Antirrheticus*, he puts the following quote in the mouth of his Iconoclast²:

1. G. FLOROVSKY, *Origen, Eusebius and the Iconoclastic Controversy*, in *ChH* 19 (1950) 77-96, reprinted in *Id.*, *The Collected Works*, vol. 2, Belmont 1972, 101-119. See also N. OZOLIN, *K voprosu ob istochnikakh vizantijskogo ikonoborhestva (To the question of the sources of Byzantine Iconoclasm)*, in *MEPR* 56 (1966) 239-252. The Origenist traits in the Horos of Saint Sophia are mentioned in P. ALEXANDER, *The Iconoclastic Council of Saint Sophia (815) and Its Definition*, in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953) 50-51; more recently in C. VON SCHÖNBORN, *L'icône du Christ: Fondements théologiques*, Paris 1986, 164-170, and in A. GIAKALIS, *Images of the Divine: Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*, New York 1994, 70-74.

2. We should keep in mind that among the objections of the Iconoclasts, St. Theodore must have selected the most typical or dangerous ones for his *Antirrhetica* (written in the genre of questions and answers, the former put forth by an Iconoclast, the latter by Theodore the Studite himself).

«What, then, is it that is shown?» the heretics ask. «Either the image of Christ or Christ Himself, but not both, for the shadow and the truth are not the same thing» (Τί τοίνυν τὸ δεδειγμένον; εἰκὼν Χριστοῦ, ἢ Χριστὸς, καὶ οὐ τὰ δύο; οὐ γὰρ ταῦτόν σκιὰ καὶ ἀλήθεια). And how could one say that each is in the other, or that either one is in the other? The absurdity is obvious³.

Under the «shadow», the Iconoclast here most certainly refers to icons, contrasting them to what the Iconodules would call a «prototype»⁴. What is then the difference between «truth» and «shadow» for them? The principal source of the passage – the simile of «shadows» and «truth» – goes back to Plato's *Republic*, VII, where Plato presents his famous metaphor of the Cave⁵. The Iconoclastic use of the simile, however, does not seem to make direct use of the Cave metaphor, as Plato's illustration of the general epistemological inadequacy of the notions and principles of this world for the true noetic reality of the worlds of ideas⁶. In Plato's paradigm, even though the shadow which a puppet casts and the puppet itself are not the same thing, they are ultimately connected and not opposed, Plato does not place sharp emphasis on the falseness of the shadows, as the Iconoclastic question implies, but rather on their inefficiency. According to Plato, shadows may even be useful: escape from the Cave itself happens gradually. The shadows are the first step of epistemological awakening⁷, followed by the puppets and fire, the sources of the shadows, and only as an ultimate goal, stepping outside of the Cave to the Sun, in order to finally return to the prisoners back in the Cave⁸.

Rather, we need to look for a more immediate source of the Iconoclast's question. Indeed, we can find such text: this is the beginning of Origen's *De Principiis*. In a typical Origenian train of thought, the spiritual, and, consequently, the true perception of the Godhead is opposed to an incorrect bodily understanding of God or representing of God within a certain image⁹. In this text, commenting upon the verse from St. John's Gospel, «God is spirit and those who venerate Him, must venerate Him in spirit and truth» (*John* 4, 24), Origen offers us two pairs of opposites: the spirit as opposed to the body, and truth as opposed to image or «shadow»:

... And observe how logically He has joined together the spirit and the truth: He called God a Spirit, that He might distinguish Him from bodies; and He named Him the truth, to distinguish Him from a shadow or an image. For they who worshipped in Jerusalem worshipped God neither in truth nor in spirit, being in subjection to the «shadow or image of heavenly things»; and such also was the case with those

3. *Antirrheticus* I, 11 (PG 99, 341b). Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

4. Cf. Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus* II, 3: «The heretic: "You shall venerate the Lord your God, and Him only shall you worship (*Deut* 6, 13)". This is what is written. We are commanded to venerate the Lord, not any kind of "prototype", much less an image, as you say» (PG 99, 353C, trans. C.P. ROTH, St. Theodore the Studite, *On the Holy Icons*, Crestwood 1981, 45ff).

5. *Republic* VII, 514a-519d.

6. Cf. *Republic* VII, 517Bc.

7. Cf. *Republic* VII, 516ab.

8. *Republic* VII, 519d.

9. H. CROUZEL, *Origène et la «connaissance mystique»*, Bruges 1961, 31-35 for ἀλήθεια, 216-220 for εἰκὼν and σκιά.

who worshipped on Mount Gerizim (...*Et vide quam consequenter veritatem spiritui sociavit, ut ad distinctionem quidem corporum «spiritum» nominaret, ad distinctionem vero umbrae vel imaginis «veritatem». Qui enim adorabant in Hierosolymis, «umbrae et imagini caelestium deservientes», non veritati neque spiritui, adorabant deum; similiter autem et hi, qui adorabant in monte Garizin*)¹⁰.

Commenting upon the same quote from St. John's Gospel in another passage, Origen confirms the opposition of rational and sensible realms and now proposes the way to worship the spiritual divinity correctly – by «rational worship» without images:

if it is said that «God is spirit», we do not say that He is a «body». For the Scripture names rational beings «spirits» and «spiritual things» in contradistinction to the sensible ones... For He should be understood to be spirit analogously to the worship [rendered to Him] in spirit and in an intellegible manner. But it is not with images that we are to worship the Father, but «in truth», which «came by Jesus Christ...» (ἐὰν λέγηται «πνεῦμα» ὁ θεός, οὐ σῶμα αὐτὸν λέγομεν εἶναι. Πρὸς γὰρ ἀντιδιαστολήν τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἔθος τῆ γραφῆ τὰ νοητὰ ὀνομάζειν πνεύματα καὶ πνευματικά... Καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἀνάλογον τῷ «ἐν πνεύματι» καὶ νοητῶς λατρεύειν τινὰ αὐτῷ «πνεῦμα» νοηθεῖν ἄν. Ἄλλὰ καὶ οὐκ ἐν τύποις «προσκυνεῖν δεῖ» τῷ πατρὶ ἀλλ' «ἐν ἀληθεία», ἥτις «διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο»)¹¹.

The most interesting thing, however, is that the Iconoclasts, following the Origenian train of thought in their objection to «false images» as opposed to the truth (and shortly we will consider what «truth» means for them), also adopted the opposition of material and spiritual, present in the passage from the *De Principiis*. Another text, representing the Iconoclasts' attitude towards material representations, may be taken from the *Three Apologetic Treatises against Those Who Calumniate Divine Images (Apologies)* by John of Damascus. This text testifies to the doctrine behind the rejection of images by his Iconoclastic adversaries: the teaching of a purely mental approach to the divinity, already familiar to us. John thus sarcastically addresses his «high and immaterial» adversary:

If you say that one should unite with God in a purely intellectual manner, remove all corporeal things: lights, fragrant incense, the very prayer which [comes] from voice, all the divine mysteries which are fulfilled from matter, the bread, the wine, the anointing with oil, the imprint of the Cross. These are all matter... Perhaps, you being high and immaterial and above body, spit on all visible things, but since I am a man and wear a body, I desire to have intercourse with, and to see the holy things in a corporeal manner. Condescend to the humbleness of my thought, oh high one, so that you [may] maintain your height! (Εἰ δὲ χρῆναι λέγοις νοερῶς μόνον θεῷ συνάπτεισθαι, ἄνελε πάντα τὰ σωματικά, τὰ φῶτα, τὸ εὐῶδες θυμίαμα, αὐτὴν τὴν διὰ φωνῆς προσευχὴν, αὐτὰ τὰ ἐξ ὕλης τελούμενα θεῖα μυστήρια, τὸν ἄρτον, τὸν οἶνον, τὸ τῆς χρίσεως ἔλαιον, τοῦ σταυροῦ τὸ ἐκτύπωμα. Ταῦτα γὰρ πάντα ὕλη... Σὺ τυχὸν ὑψηλός τε καὶ ἄυλος καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸ σῶμα γενόμενος καὶ οἶον ἄσαρκος καταπτύεις πᾶν τὸ δρώμενον, ἀλλ' ἐγώ, ἐπεὶ ἀνθρωπός εἰμι καὶ σῶμα

10. *Prin I*, 1, 4 (eds. H. GÖRGEMANNS – H. KARPP, *Origenes. Vier Bücher von den Prinzipien*, Darmstadt 1976, 106.29-34, hereafter ed. GÖRGEMANNS).

11. *CC VI*, 70 (ed. M. BORRET, *Origène. Contre Celse*, vol. 3, SC 147, Paris 1969, 354.20-22; 356.36-39).

περίκειμαι, ποθῶ καὶ σωματικῶς ὀμιλεῖν καὶ δρᾶν τὰ ἅγια. Συγκατάβηθι τῷ ταπεινῷ μου φρονήματι, ὡ ὑψηλός, ἵνα σου τηρήσης τὸ ὑψηλόν)¹².

This was the perception of the Iconoclastic doctrine by an Iconodule. How much can we trust it, knowing that for polemical purposes the doctrine of the opposite side could well be misrepresented? Fortunately, we possess texts from the Iconoclasts, and these texts testify to the same doctrine. It is thus expressed in a single statement in the *Horos* of Hierēia among the acclamations with which councils were usually closed. The Iconoclasts propose a «correct» kind of worship in an imageless, or «intellectual» manner, as if fulfilling the program of true intelligible worship (νοητῶς λατρεύειν), outlined by Origen as follows:

We all believe rightly! *We venerate in an intellectual manner bringing worship to the intellectual divinity!* This is the faith of the Apostles, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the faith of the Orthodox people. This is the way all of them have venerated and worshipped God! (Πάντες ὀρθοδόξως πιστευόμεν. Πάντως νοερώς τῇ νοερᾷ θεότητι λατρεύοντες προσκυνοῦμεν. Αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν ἀποστόλων, αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν πατέρων, αὕτη ἡ πίστις τῶν ὀρθοδόξων. Οὕτω πάντες λατρεύοντες τῷ θεῷ προσεκύνουν)¹³.

12. *Apology* I, 36, II, 32 (ed. B. KOTTER, 147-148).

13. Ed. J.D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. 13, Florence-Venice, 1759-98, 353A; hereafter MANSI XIII. Further: «If anyone attempts to perceive the divine character of God the Word according to his Incarnation by means of material pigments and not to worship wholeheartedly with the eyes of the intellect Him who, above the brightness of the sun, has sat on the right hand of God on the throne of glory, let him be anathema! (Εἴ τις τὸν θεῖον τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου χαρακτῆρα κατὰ τὴν σάρκωσιν δι' ὕλικῶν χρωμάτων ἐπιτηδεύει κατανοῆσαι καὶ μὴ ἐξ ὅλης καρδίας προσκυνῆ αὐτὸν ὀμμοῖσι νοεροῖς ὑπὲρ τὴν λαμπρότητα τοῦ ἡλίου ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ὑψίστοις ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης καθήμενον, ἀνάθεμα)» (MANSI XIII, 336E). In other places in the *Horos* of Hierēia, a similar attitude towards matter is expressed. Cf.: «It is not lawful for Christians, who have their hope in the resurrection, to use the customs of nations that worship demons, and to treat so spitefully, by means of worthless and dead matter, the saints who will be resplendent with such glory (Οὐ θεμιτὸν γὰρ τοῖς ἐλπίδα ἀναστάσεως κεκτημένοις Χριστιανοῖς δαιμονολατρῶν ἔθνων ἔθρσι χρῆσθαι καὶ τοὺς τοιαύτη μέλλοντας δόξη φαιδρύνεσθαι ἁγίους ἐν ἀδόξῳ καὶ νεκρᾷ ὕλῃ καθυβρίζειν)» (MANSI XIII, 277CD, trans. D. SAHAS, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-century Iconoclasm: An Annotated Translation of the Sixth Session of the Seventh Ecumenical Council [Nicea, 787]*, Toronto 1986, 105, hereafter SAHAS); «they called together the entire sacerdotal congregation of the bishops who love God, in order that, after they gathered together into a council, and after they searched the Scriptures together about the deceptive work of likenesses with colours which lowers the human mind from the high worship proper to God down to the base and material worship of creatures (πᾶσαν τὴν ἱερατικὴν συνεκαλέσαντο τῶν θεοφίλων ἐπισκόπων ὀμήγυριν, ὅπως συνοδικῶς ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ γενομένη γραφικὴν τε συζητήσιν ποιησαμένη περὶ τῆς ἀπατηλῆς τῶν ὀμοιωμάτων χρωματουργίας τῆς κατασπώσης ἐκ τῆς ὑψηλῆς καὶ θεῶν πρεπούσης λατρείας εἰς τὴν χαμαιζήλον καὶ ὕλικὴν κτισματολατρείαν...)» (MANSI XIII, 229E, trans. SAHAS, 68). The source of this passage again seems to be Origen's, *CC* IV, 31: «For neither artist nor statue-maker existed in their state, the law expelling all such from it; that there might be no pretext for the construction of statues, that attracts the attention of unintelligent men, and drags down the eyes of the soul from God to earth (Οὕτε γὰρ ζωγράφος οὐτ' ἀγαματοποιὸς ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ αὐτῶν ἦν, ἐκβάλλοντος πάντας τοὺς τοιοῦτους ἀπὸ αὐτῆς τοῦ νόμου, ἵνα μηδεμία πρόφασις ἢ τῆς τῶν ἀγαμάτων κατασκευῆς, τοὺς ἀνοήτους τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπισπωμένης καὶ καθελκούσης ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς γῆν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς ψυχῆς)» (ed. M. BORRET, vol. 2, *SC* 136, Paris, 1968, 260. 15-20).

Probably this character of «intellectual» worship was suggested to the Iconoclasts by the quote from *John* 4, 24 («God is spirit and those who venerate Him, must venerate Him in spirit and truth»), commented upon by Origen in the above passages, when they included it into the beginning of the *Horos* of St. Sophia (815)¹⁴ and started the Scriptural *florilegium* of the Council of Hieria with it¹⁵. Veneration «in an intellectual manner» (νοερῶς) from the *Horos* is explicitly connected with «intellect» (νοῦς) and it is to this imageless worship in the intellect that the Iconoclasts appeal, in perfect accordance with the doctrine of Origen, whom I will again quote here:

If we hold that the God of all things is a simple, invisible, and incorporeal Mind – or even above mind and substance¹⁶ – then we should not say that He is apprehended by anything else than by that, which has come into existence upon the image of that Mind. Now, to use the word of Paul, [He is apprehended] «through a mirror and in a riddle, but then, face to face». If I say «face», let no one denigrate because of this expression, by the word that it denotes, but let him learn from [the parallel passage]: «we are mirroring with the unveiled face the glory of God, and are transformed according to the same image, from glory to glory», that all these texts do not speak of sensible face, but should be taken figuratively (Νοῦν τοίνυν ἢ ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας λέγοντες εἶναι ἀπλοῦν καὶ ἀόρατον καὶ ἀσώματον τὸν τῶν ὄλων θεόν, οὐκ ἂν ἄλλω τινὶ ἢ τῷ κατὰ τὴν ἐκείνου τοῦ νοῦ εἰκόνα γενομένῳ φήσομεν καταλαμβάνεσθαι τὸν θεόν· νῦν μὲν, ἵνα τῇ λέξει χρήσωμαι τοῦ Παύλου, «δι' ἐσόπτρου καὶ «ἐν» αἰνίγματι τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον». «Πρόσωπον» δὲ ἐὰν λέγω, μὴ συκοφαντεῖτω τις διὰ τὴν λέξιν τὸν δηλούμενον νοῦν ὑπ' αὐτῆς, ἀλλὰ μανθανέτω «ἐν τῷ» «ἀνακακαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμενοι ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν» οὐ πρόσωπον αἰσθητὸν ἐν τοῖς τοιοῦτοις παραλαμβανόμενον ἀλλὰ κατὰ τροπολογίαν νοούμενον)¹⁷.

According to this passage from Origen, the opposition between our true being and purpose, and this life according to flesh and senses, will finally be resolved only in the world to come («we see in a glass obscurely, but then face to face»)¹⁸, when we, minds, will see the Mind, in the image of whom we are made. Yet the full knowledge and «vision» of God is impossible in the transitory present condition in bodies, and for this purpose, material sensible images are even of less use¹⁹.

14. Ed. J.M. FEATHERSTONE, *Nicophori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Refutatio et eversio definitionis synodalis anni 815* (CCSG 33), Turnhout – Leuven 1997, 7, 4-5 [p. 13]; cf. the words of an Iconoclast in Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus* I, 13 (PG 99, 344c).

15. MANSI XIII, 280E.

16. Cf. Plato, *Republic* VII, 509b.

17. CC VII, 38 (SC 150, 100.1-12).

18. On the importance of *1Cor* 13, 12 for Origen as a transforming vision, see H. CROUZEL, *Théologie de l'Image de Dieu chez Origène*, Paris 1956, 232-236.

19. Cf. «For it is worthy to believe: the Lord [is called] according to Moses faithful and true: true as opposed to shadow, token, and image, since this is indeed characteristic of the Word in the Open Heaven. For he is not the same on Earth as he is in heaven, inasmuch as He became flesh and spoke through shade, tokens, and images (πιστεύεσθαι ἄξιος· κύριος γὰρ κατὰ τὸν Μωσῆα πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, καὶ ἀληθινός γὰρ πρὸς ἀντιδιαστολὴν σκιάς καὶ τύπου καὶ εἰκόνας, ἐπεὶ τοιοῦτος ὁ ἐν τῷ ἀνεωρότι οὐρανῷ λόγος· ὁ γὰρ ἐπὶ γῆς οὐ τοιοῦτος ὅποιος ὁ ἐν οὐρανῷ, ἄτε γενόμενος σὰρξ καὶ διὰ σκιάς καὶ τύπων καὶ εἰκόνων λαλούμενος)» (Origen, *Clo* II, 6, 49, ed. E. PREUSCHEN, *Origenes Werke* IV, GCS 60).

In a chapter which is dedicated to John of Damascus' concept of honoring matter, he alludes to the same quote from *2Cor* 3, 18²⁰. However, John interprets the quote in a sense opposite to that intended by Origen, giving it a literal meaning. Thus, John of Damascus, quoting a long passage from *Exodus* describing God's commandment to create the Ark of the Covenant and the materials used for it, goes on, arguing that the very Law to which the Iconoclasts appealed accusing the Iconodules of idolatry, ordered the creation of material representations. Moreover, if Israel has not seen God, «we all are reflecting with unveiled faces the glory of the Lord» (*2Cor* 3, 18)²¹. John of Damascus uses Patristic parallelism between Moses' vision of God on Mount Sinai (*Exod* 19, 16ff), and the Apostles' vision of Transfigured Christ, on Mount Tabor (*Matt* 17, 1ff). Moses could not see the face of God, only His «back parts», and after this, Moses' face shone so brightly that the Israelites could not bear this light, so that Moses had to veil his face. This semi-hidden, «veiled» manifestation of the Divine marks the whole Old Testament.

The Truth could not be seen with open eyes. It had to be «veiled» in symbols and foreshadowings. In the New Testament, however, God, the «true Light» was made flesh and dwelt among us (*John* 1, 14). After the full manifestation of the Divinity of Christ on Tabor, to the measure of human abilities, there can no longer be any question of idolatry, since the Christians *saw* their God face to face. Indeed, besides insisting upon the vision of the face of God here and in the corporeal condition, which John takes as a warranty of our freedom from idolatry and knowledge of the Incarnated Christ, he turns to an apology of the sense of vision. And thus, he continues, we «everywhere set in a sensible manner the image of Him, I mean, of the Incarnated God the Word, and we sanctify the first of the senses (for the first of the senses is sight)»²².

Both, the *florilegium* of the Council of Hiereia and the surviving Iconoclastic fragments testify to the importance which the Iconoclasts placed on hearing as opposed to vision. This importance, in addition to a surviving fragment from the writing of the last Iconoclastic Patriarch John Grammaticus (AD 837-843)²³, is further manifested in the quote from the *Rom* 10, 17: «Faith is from hearing, and hearing is through the word of God», which the Iconoclasts included within the Scriptural *florilegium* of the Council of Hiereia²⁴.

20. *Apology* I, 16.90-91 (KOTTER, 92)

21. I am quoting here the Greek used by Origen and St. John of Damascus. All the modern translations of the Bible, and not only the English, follow the medieval interpretations based on the Latin translation. Κατοπτρίζομενοι, does not mean «beholding», as it is translated in the King James Version, for example. I thank Prof. István Perczel for this information.

22. *Apology* I, 17.1-4 (KOTTER, 93).

23. Three fragments of the lost treatise by Patriarch John Grammaticus are edited by J. Gouillard from the anonymous refutation contained in the manuscript *Scorialensis* Y-II-7 (fols. 200-206v) in J. GOUILLARD, *Fragments inédits d'un antirrhétique de Jean le Grammairein*, in *REByz* 24 (1966) 171-181. A brief biography of John Grammaticus is contained in S. GERO, *John the Grammarian, the Last Iconoclastic Patriarch of Constantinople. The Man and the Legend*, in *Byzantina* 3-4 (1974-75) 25-35.

24. MANSI XIII, 285bc. Cf. another «anti-vision» quotes in the Scriptural florilegium of Hiereia: *John* 1, 18; *John* 5, 37; *John* 20, 29 (MANSI XIII, 280de); *Deut* 4, 12 (MANSI XIII, 284c); *2Cor* 5, 7; *Rom* 10, 17 (MANSI XIII, 285bc).

It is in the writings of Evagrius of Pontos that we may find a clue to the Iconoclastic preference of hearing over sight. Evagrius distinguishes between representations, which come into the mind through different faculties. According to Evagrius, vision is useless in rendering the contemplative (and, consequently, in his theological system, ultimately the more genuine) reality, since vision provides the mind with representations possessing forms, only suitable for sensible reality. Hearing, however, may be preferred over vision: it may render contemplative reality along with the sensible one, since by hearing the intellect can receive formless representations²⁵.

This notion, in turn, is based on Origen's epistemology, in which vision relates to the corporeal and necessarily provisional state and cannot convey true knowledge, which pertains to the timeless and incorporeal divinity²⁶. The notion of the impossibility of conveying a true definition by material representations (perceived by vision) but solely by discourse (perceived through hearing) might well have been only an application of the Origenian doctrine concerning knowledge of the divine as opposed to vision of the corporeals to which John of Damascus replies in his *Apology*, pinpointing the essence of the debate: in venerating an icon, there is no contradiction between the sensible and the intelligible, «as the word is for hearing, the icon is for sight: we become unified with it in an intellectual manner (νοητῶς δὲ αὐτῷ ἐνοούμεθα)»²⁷.

Finally, we should return for a moment to the beginning of this paper, namely, to the Iconoclastic (and Origenian) use of the opposition of «truth» and «spirit» against «shadow» and «bodies» (implying by bodies, the matter and variety signified by them)²⁸. In order to do justice to both sides of the debate, we should ask

25. Edd. P. GÉHIN – C. GUILLAUMONT – A. GUILLAUMONT, *Évagre le Pontique. Sur les pensées* 41 (SC 438), Paris 1998, 290-296; J. MUYLDERMANS, *Evagriana*, in *Muséon* 44 (1931) 52, N9 (Cent. Suppl. 18, Fragment 435).

26. *Aliud est videre, aliud cognoscere: videri et videre corporum res est, cognosci et cognoscere intellectualis naturae est. Quicquid ergo proprium corporum est, hoc nec de patre nec de filio sentiendum est; quod vero ad naturam pertinet deitatis, hoc inter patrem et filium constat. Denique etiam ipse in evangelio non dixit quia «nemo vidit patrem nisi filius neque filium nisi pater», sed ait: «Nemo novit filium nisi pater, neque patrem quis novit nisi filius». Ex quo manifeste indicatur quod quicquid inter corporeas naturas videre et videri dicitur, hoc inter patrem et filium cognoscere dicitur et cognosci, per virtutem scientiae, non per visibilitatis fragilitatem (Prin I, 1, 8, ed. GÖRGEMANN, 118.16-120.11). Cf. Origen's fragment 13 on *Jn* 1, 18 (ed. E. PREUSCHEN, *Origenes Werke* IV, GCS 494-495).*

27. «And everywhere we set in a sensible manner the image of Him, I mean, of the Incarnated God the Word, and we sanctify the first of the senses (for the first of the senses is sight) in the same way as hearing is sanctified by words: for the icon is a reminder. And what the book is for those who are initiated into letters, the icon for the illiterate, and what is word for hearing, the icon is for sight: we become unified with it in an intelligible manner (Καὶ αἰσθητῶς τὸν αὐτοῦ χαρακτήρα τοῦ σαρκωθέντος φημί θεοῦ λόγου προτίθεμεν ἀπανταχῆ καὶ τὴν πρώτην ἀγιαζόμεθα τῶν αἰσθήσεων – πρώτη γὰρ αἰσθήσεων δρασις – ὡσπερ καὶ τοῖς λόγοις τὴν ἀκοήν· ὑπόμνημα γὰρ ἔστιν ἡ εἰκὼν. Καὶ ὅπερ τοῖς γράμματα μεμνημένοις ἡ βιβλος, τοῦτο τοῖς ἀγραμμάτοις ἡ εἰκὼν· καὶ ὅπερ τῇ ἀκοῇ ὁ λόγος, τοῦτο τῇ δράσει ἡ εἰκὼν νοητῶς δὲ αὐτῷ ἐνοούμεθα)» (*Apology* I, 17. 1-8, [ΚΟΤΤΕΡ, 93]). Cf. *Apology* III, 12 (ΚΟΤΤΕΡ, 123), MANSI XIII, 249de.

28. Coarse matter is not an original state of creation (*Prin* III, 5, 4); variety is connected with matter (*Prin* II, 1, 4; *Prin* II, 9, 6).

whether there was any response from the Iconodules to Origen's powerful argument (used by the Iconoclasts) concerning such a grouping? Indeed, reading the *Apologies* of St. John of Damascus, we may now see how the Iconodulic author writing at the beginning of Iconoclasm attacks one-by-one all aspects of Origen's argument: first, that «shadow» and «image» are in opposition to truth, second, that «shadow» itself is a negative notion, and, finally, attacking the ambiguous attitude to the material realm embedded in the argument.

On the first level of defense, St. John of Damascus appeals to the authority of the Old Testament's hand-made images such as the Tabernacle of Moses, in his attempt to justify the notion of «shadow». The Tabernacle was the shadow and image, he says. It was material, but what is wrong about it since it was God Himself who commanded Moses to make it, thus, in a certain way, providing the foundation for all the hand-made icons to come²⁹. Thus:

He commands that the image of the Cherubim be made, as being circumscribable and standing, as befits servants, beside the divine throne so that the image, as befits servants, overshadows the propitiatory altar. For it was only right that the image of the heavenly servants overshadows the image of the divine mysteries. What would you say of the ark, of the pot [with manna], of the propitiatory altar: are they not hand-made? Are they not the works of human hands? Are they not made, as you say, of ignominious matter? What then, about the whole Tabernacle – was it not an image? Was it not a shadow and a sign? (Τῶν δὲ χερουβὶμ ὡς περιγραπτῶν καὶ τῷ θεῷ θρόνῳ δουλοπρεπῶς παρεστῶτων τὴν εἰκόνα προστάττει ποιεῖν δουλοπρεπῶς σκιάζουσιν τὸ ἱλαστήριον· ἔπρεπε γὰρ τῇ εἰκόνι τῶν οὐρανίων λειτουργῶν τὴν εἰκόνα τῶν θείων μυστηρίων σκιάζεσθαι. Τί δὲ φῆς τὴν κιβωτόν, τὴν στάμνον, τὸ ἱλαστήριον; Οὐ χειρότευκτα; Οὐκ ἔργα χειρῶν ἀνθρώπων; Οὐκ ἐξ ἀτίμου, ὡς σὺ φῆς, ὕλης κατεσκευασμένα; Τί δὲ ἡ σκηνὴ ἅπασα; Οὐχὶ εἰκὼν ἦν; Οὐ σκιά καὶ ὑπόδειγμα;)³⁰.

John of Damascus also breaks up Origen's twofold and sharp opposition between «shadow», «image», «matter» and «falsehood», on the one hand, and «truth» and «spirit» on the other³¹, by alluding to the irrefutable authority of the Apostle Paul. He constructs, on the basis of a verse from the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, a threefold system of increasing epistemological value³². Indeed, John says, the shadow of the Law with its material sacrifices has passed away, but we

29. Cf. The Iconoclasts' accusation that «the evil name of the falsely called images does not have a foundation in the tradition of Christ, nor of the Apostles nor of the Fathers (Ἡ δὲ τῶν ψευδονύμων εἰκόνων κακωνυμία οὔτε ἐκ παραδόσεως Χριστοῦ ἢ ἀποστόλων ἢ πατέρων τὸ εἶναι ἔχει)» (MANSI XIII, 168b).

30. *Apology* I, 15.9-18 (KOTTER, 88).

31. H. de Lubac argued for the trychotomic (shadow, image, truth) epistemological scheme in Origen (H. DE LUBAC, *Histoire et Esprit. L'intelligence de l'Écriture d'après Origène*, Paris 1950, 219-222), adducing but one text, inspired by *Heb* 10, 1. On the other hand, he cites many Origenian passages which reveal the dychotomic (shadow/truth) scheme (*ibid.*, 223-225). See also M. HARL, *Origène et la fonction révélatrice du Verbe incarné*, Paris 1958, 144-145 for the insistence on the dychotomic scheme in Origen.

32. «For the law having a shadow of good things to come, [and] not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect» (*Heb* 10, 1).

have not yet attained the truth in its complete form – the immaterial heavenly Jerusalem. This is precisely why in our intermediary position – having received the true revelation, yet being in a material and sensible state – we still need material images that correspond to our state until we reach the ultimate goal – the immaterial Jerusalem, «whose artist and craftsman is God Himself» (*Heb 11, 10*)³³:

You see that the Law and all these things that are according to [the Law], and all our worship are holy things made-by-hands, leading us by means of matter to the immaterial God. But the Law and all these things according to the Law were a certain outline of the future image, which is our worship. But our worship is the image of the coming good things, while the reality itself is Jerusalem above, immaterial and not made-by-hands. (Ὅρα, ὅτι καὶ ὁ νόμος καὶ πάντα τὰ κατ' αὐτὸν πᾶσά τε ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς λατρεία χειροποίητά εἰσιν ἅγια δι' ὕλης προσάγοντα ἡμᾶς τῷ ἄλλῳ θεῷ, καὶ ὁ μὲν νόμος καὶ πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὸν νόμον σκιαγραφία τις ἦν τῆς μελλούσης εἰκόνας, τουτέστι τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς λατρείας, ἢ δὲ καθ' ἡμᾶς λατρεία εἰκῶν τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν, αὐτὰ δὲ τὰ πράγματα ἢ ἄνω Ἰερουσαλήμ ἢ ἄλλος καὶ ἀχειροποίητος)³⁴.

Moreover, is shadow itself such a bad thing? – asks John and, again, in a somewhat rhetorical manner, alludes to the authority of the *Acts of the Apostles*: certainly not if the shadows of the Apostles could cast out demons and heal the sick³⁵!

Finally we should also say that it was not only the Iconoclasts who used his theological arguments for their purposes – Origen also seems to have supplied the Iconodules with one of their most powerful defensive arguments. In many places, the Iconoclasts applied the Old Testament prohibition of the worship of idols to the Iconodulic practice of veneration of images, considering icons to be the same as the idols of the Heathens (and even establishing a common etymology of the words «icon» and «idol»)³⁶. The Iconodules invented different ways to counter this argument, and the case of Patriarch Nicephorus is especially interesting, since the Patriarch seems to have employed an Origenian argument. In the *Homiliae in Exodum*, Origen argues that, as opposed to the representations of alive beings and bodies, the Pagan gods represented by the idols, have no existence in reality, and when they pretend to represent the divinity, they do not in fact accomplish their goal.

The likenesses of the existing things are images of living beings and of bodies, but idols are the reproductions of non-existing things. For the idol is not existent. In fact, Paul says that «there is no idol in the world» (*1Cor 8, 4*). [It is] as if somebody would reproduce Pans or hyppocentaurs or other monstrous natures. Therefore any concept that in a comprehensive representation apprehends the divine nature produces an idol of God, but does not announce God (τὰ μὲν οὖν ὁμοιώματα τῶν ὄντων εἰκόνας

33. *Apology II*, 23.11-12 (KOTTER, 122).

34. *Apology II*, 23.1-8 (KOTTER, 122).

35. «The shadows of the Apostles, their scarves and towels repelled sicknesses and cast out demons (*Acts 5, 15*); how then should we not honor the shadow and the icon of saints?! (Ἡ τῶν ἀποστόλων σκιά τὰ σουδάρια τε καὶ σιμικίνθια νόσους ἀπήλυνε, δαίμονας ἐφυγάδευε· καὶ πῶς ἢ σκιά καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν τῶν ἁγίων οὐ δοξασθήσεται)» (*Apology I*, 22.9-12 [KOTTER, 111]); cf. *Apology I*, 36.4-6 (KOTTER, 147).

36. Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus I*, 16, PG 99, 345c.

ζῶων τε καὶ σωμάτων, τὰ δὲ εἰδῶλα ἀνυπάρκτων ἐστὶν ἀναπλάσματα. Οὐ γὰρ ὑπαρξίς τὸ εἰδῶλον· οὐδὲν γὰρ εἰδῶλον ἐν κόσμῳ Παῦλός φησιν· οἷον εἶ τις ἵπποκενταύρους ἢ Πᾶνας ἢ τερατώδεις τινὰς ἀναπλάσαιτο φύσεις. Πᾶν ἄρα νόημα κατὰ περιληπτικὴν φαντασίαν ἐν περινοίᾳ τῆς θείας γινόμενον φύσεως εἰδῶλον πλάττει Θεοῦ, ἀλλ' οὐ Θεὸν καταγγέλλει³⁷.

Patriarch Nicephorus uses this position of Origen and argues that, since the prototype is the beginning and cause of every image – «the original of a copy», the image, copy, and depiction are possible only in relation to something existing in reality. And here Patriarch Nicephorus seems to follow very closely the thought of Origen; he even uses the same example of a centaur as an animal without a prototype: image is always the image *of something*; on the contrary, the idol is utterly imaginative, it is the depiction of that which has no real existence. Patriarch Nicephorus emphatically differentiates icon and idol: the former is the image of an existing prototype, and the latter is the image of a non-existing prototype³⁸ and consequently, a false and vain image.

To conclude: the influence and theological heritage of Origen seems to have spread as far as 8th-9th cc. Byzantium, where his ideas were intensively used and refuted in the heat of the struggle over images. Moreover, in the Iconoclasts' «intellectual» imageless approach to the divinity, we may see distinctive Origenian elements. However, to determine the channels of the transmission of the Origenian influence still remains a task for further research.

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37. HEx VIII, 3. The Greek text is ed. in W.A. BAEHRENS, *Origenes Werke* VI, GCS 29, 221-222. Cf. Rufinus' much lengthier Latin translation (CPG 1414, ed. M. BORRET, *Origène, Homélie sur l'Exode*. Texte latin, introduction, traduction et notes [SC 321], Paris 1985, 250.9-252.35). The same argument is in Theodoret of Cyrillus, *Quaestiones in Exodum*, 38 (ed. N. FERNANDEZ-MARCOS – A. SAENZ-BADILLOS, *Theodoretii Cyrensis Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, Madrid 1979, 127).

38. Cf. Patriarch Nicephorus, *Antirrheticus* I, 29: Τὸ δὲ εἰδῶλον ἀνυπάρκτων τινῶν καὶ ἀνυποστάτων ἀνάπλασμα, ὅποιός δὴ τινὰς Ἕλληνας ὑπ' ἀσυνεσίας καὶ ἀθείας, Τριτόνων τινῶν καὶ Κενταύρων καὶ ἄλλων φασμάτων οὐχ ὑφεστώτων, μορφᾶς ἀναπλάττουσι (PG 100, 277b). It is interesting that St. Theodore Studite in his argument on the difference of icon and idol does not seem to be aware of the argument of Patriarch Nicephorus. Cf. Theodore the Studite, *Antirrheticus* I, 16 (PG 99, 345d-348d).