

DECONSTRUCTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY.  
THE PERMANENCE OF ICONOCLASM

ILIE BĂDESCU

THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY OF THE ROMANIAN ACADEMY

*Seen as the clash between the culture of faith and the counter-culture of nihilism, iconoclasm is the attempt to deconstruct and rebuild the human identity on a faithless base. There is a difference between real iconoclasm, as a nihilist deconstructivism that engenders a faithless identity, and deconstructions that have emerged even within the Christian Church. Iconoclasm cannot be explained by economic, ethnic or political causes, for it has been always related to the spiritual organization of the world.*

**Key words:** *iconoclasm, Christianity, identity, Europe, noology.*

FROM THE BYZANTINE ICONOCLASM TO THE BOLSHEVIK ICONOCLASM

Beginning with the 8th century Byzantium was shattered by the iconoclast movement for a period of almost 300 years. Such a phenomenon appears to be much more than an historical event as long as it has been repeating many times throughout history. Historically it emerged as a front wave during the Byzantine Isaurian dynasty but such a phenomenon repeated almost cyclical reaching a new climax with Nazism and Bolshevik movements. Its root is the clash between the culture of faith and the “counter-culture” of nihilism, the spiritual sacral identity of the human being and the opposite nihilist forces aiming to deconstruct and rebuild human identity on a faithless basis. The clash between the culture of faith and the “counter-culture” of nihilism is the most representative example for the power of *states of spirit*, the affective fields, in history, within societies, nations, civilizations, formations like the empire, the Byzantine one in this case. We have to make a specification in order to avoid any possible confusion. Iconoclasm as a phenomenon and as notion only refers to nihilist deconstructivism and in no way to any deconstructions which emerged even within the Christian Church, which could not have pushed the reactions with respect to icons to the extent of making them the start of a culture of anti-Christ nihilism as happens with the real iconoclasm.

We will first of all notice that this phenomenon is propagated in the form of two front waves which clash against each other. Irrespective of the reason for the emergence of these huge *affective fronts*, it remains obvious that once they rise above the line of the horizon, they will influence everything, they will shatter the structure of the empire, they will cross cultures, nations and therefore individual and collective conscience, thus deconstructing and reconstructing, sinking or revealing from forgotten depths, forms and landscapes, in a word, covering history, time and space, for a relatively long period of time (in the Byzantine case for more than 300 years).

Nothing from what is “historical” could explain the phenomenon, neither the interests, nor the ideologies, the state of institutions, because we do not have other examples in which materialist passions and interests, or ideologies led to such a deflagration. The phenomenon can be compared with the one in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when, from the two great invasions of paganism, Nazism and Bolshevism, the latter unleashed over the Church of Christ the same demolishing fury that reminds us of the iconoclastic one. However, Marxist Bolshevism cannot be explained by economic or political or ethnic causes either. In this case too, what happened was related to the noological (spiritual) organization of the world, to the spiritual systems thereof and in no case only to the economy or political systems.

The characteristics of this conflict with the icons emerge precisely from Leon III's attempts who, for several years tried to convince the two great bishops of the world, Pope Grigory II and Patriarch Germanos without accomplishing anything, but instead increasing the opposition of the fiercest defender of icons, St. John of Damascus. “In neo-Platonic sense, [he] sees the icon as a symbol and as a means, the icon of Christ is founded on the dogma of the Embodiment” (Bănescu, 2003, p. 125).

When Leon III failed in his attempts and negotiations with the two religious leaders, he resorted *to force*. “He issued a decree for the destruction of all the icons of saints” (Ibidem). Seven years had passed since the moment when Yazid II had commanded (in 723 A.D.) that “in his empire all icons be removed from Christian churches” (Ibidem, p. 124).

The iconoclast war has a fierceness which is only matched by the acts of Bolshevik commissioners. Going through the actions of Leon III, who kept alive the war against icons for 20 years and referring here to the acts of his son, Constantine V, we can retain the terribleness of iconoclasm. “Monks were persecuted, exiled, imprisoned and sometimes killed. It was then that Andrew Calybrit of Blachernae and Saint Stephen the Young, killed on the streets of Constantinople, perished. *Monasteries were closed or laicized; the churches were distracted from their function.* Writings supporting the icons were burnt. Icons were destroyed without mercy. ‘Those that were in mosaic were torn out, those that were painted were erased. Any form of beauty disappeared from the Church’. This is how the frescoes of the churches in Blachernae, which represented the scenes of

the life of Jesus, were destroyed; this is how the frescoes and the mosaics that decorated the Patriarchic Palace and the numerous works of art of Christian art disappeared. The illuminated manuscripts were not spared either.” (Cf. Diehl, apud Bănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 149)

“Instead of religious scene, the churches were filled with ‘trees or birds or animals and especially with satanic horse races, hunting scenes, shows and hippodrome games’ ” (Cf. “Viața Sf. Ștefan cel Tânăr”).

“In Blachernae, Constantine V ordered that instead of religious scenes and of scenes representing the Ecumenical Synod, the portrait of his favorite coachman be placed” (Bănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 149).

All these can only be compared with the neopagan Bolshevik iconoclasm, when the sacrilege and aggression against Christian imagology and Churches reached frightful proportions. The books of Christian philosophers throughout the East were burnt or archived and put under strict interdiction being forbidden for public. Libraries changed half of their book collections into large locked deposits. The forbidden collections appeared. Christian intellectuals were imprisoned, manuscripts were “cleaned” of any Christian and national theme, countless churches were destroyed or changed into communist museums, into stables.

In 1947, the era of martyrs had begun in the countries of the former concentration camp and in Russia even as early as 1917, just like in the Byzantium of iconoclasm the era of martyrs “opened in 761 with the killing of the monk of Blachernae, Andrew Calybit. Then, on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 764 on the streets of Constantinople, Saint Stephen the Young was killed, after he had suffered all sorts of tortures. Brought from St. Auxentius and imprisoned he was dragged, from the order of the emperor, from the prison by a gang of men armed with clubs and killed by blows. In 765, Constantine V wanted to force all his subjects to swear against icons. A solemn gathering took place in Saint Sofia: Patriarch Constantine was the first to swear on the cross that he has condemned icons forever and such oath were asked throughout the empire.” (Ibidem, pp. 149-150)

In a complete parallel with the martyrdom of Saint Stephen the Young we have, in the Romanian space, the martyrdom of Mircea Vulcănescu and Anton Golopenția. The latter was taken out in the cold, water was poured on him and he was left to freeze until dead. Communist reeducation has a terrifying correspondent in the attempt at reeducation which was initiated by Constantine V against monks. “As the greatest resistance was that of the monks, Constantine V proceeded to his last violence against monasteries. Monks were subjected to the most trivial public insults; they were brought to the Hippodrome and forced to parade, each of them with a nun by the hand, in the booing of the crowd. In the same place, a few days earlier, eleven high statesmen had been executed, accused of plotting. Patriarch Constantine, having been denounced, was exiled in Princes’ Islands and then executed. The fury of the emperor also extended over the art monuments.

Numerous works of Christian arts were lost then. The Euphemia Church was turned into an arsenal and a stable.” (Ibidem, p. 150)

In the provinces, the persecution was equally fierce. Everything seems to be a carbon copy in relation to the Bolshevik iconoclasm. We could say that the shadow of Byzantium was always this hypostatic iconoclasm which is stirred as a super-structure phenomenon and always has an anti-Christian and anti-church vector. *The churchly organization of the world is the target of all iconoclasms and the hate of iconoclasts is always aimed at Jesus and Virgin Mary and the Saints and this fight aims at the axis of evangelic teaching, which is fulfilled through Jesus and in collaboration with the Saints.* In fact, the punishment that fell on Constantine V and on his entire family was more than shattering in its mysterious meaning: “When Constantine V became ill with the terrible illness that killed him in a few days (September 14<sup>th</sup>, 775) and which did not spare his family, he seems to have been seized by remorse and, on his deathbed, Theophanes tells us, he was shouting and saying that he had been sent to the unextinguished fire while alive and asked the clericals to sing hymns to the Virgin whom he had so much offended.” (Ibidem) *Iconoclasm and the dynasty of the Isaurians make up a sort of “Byzantine curse” which follows all those who, one way or another, repeat the heretic act of the Isaurians. Stalinists, Trotskyites, Leninists and Bolsheviks in general are all direct descendants of the Isaurians and through them, the nations of Orthodox East are hit by the same “Byzantine curse” i.e. the disorder of images, the aggression against the Christian noosphere, the clash of teachings, the noologic anarchy, the famous lack of spiritual unity, the great disunion.* However great the victories of the Isaurians were against the Arabs, they cannot cover the long term effects of the iconoclast fury that actually led to the first severance of Christian Europe and to the loss of the Byzantine control over the West. Practically, from then on, the East lost its “European supremacy” (over the West), the Byzantine ascent was annulled and, no matter how severe the “restoration of icons” was to be, Byzantium was never to recover its ascent over the West. *This was the great punishment of the saints in the icons and therefore of God over the Eastern nations, and when the second imperial Byzantium, the Russian-Bolshevik one, repeats the iconoclast heresy, the Byzantine curse will not delay in falling with even greater wrath on the nations of the East. They will not reach the threshold of peace and of minimum welfare unless they will restore the complete power of saints and icons in the home of the soul, plundered by passions.*

A curious thing is the matrimonial alliance of Leon III with the Chazars (he had made an alliance with the Chazars and consolidated with this alliance through the marriage of his son Constantine V with daughter of their leader - 733). Leon IV, the son of Constantine, also called the Chazar (775-780) followed in the

footsteps of Constantine even if he did it in somewhat gentler terms. He also died of his father's disease. His measures against the partisans of the cult of icons "did not have the violence of those ruled by his father", but did not stop. "Theophanes tells us that the adorers of icons, several of the court officers were flogged in public and imprisoned, but there were no more executions" (Ibidem, p.153).

*This "sweetening" was due to empress Irene, the second wife of Constantine V, Athenian woman raised in the religious ideas and in the cult of icons. It was the orthodox reconquista against the oriental usurpation.* What is turned into a new teaching through iconoclasm is precisely the fact that Byzantium does not leave the stage of history before restoring what the iconoclast emperors had ruined, these "noetics" through which the luciferic attempt of overturning the churchly organization of the world is continuously resuscitated. When historical Byzantium left the stage of the world, spiritual Byzantium had been remade, otherwise said, the spiritual order is restored, in which icons and saints reestablished in their "place," wherefrom the heretic emperors, iconoclasts, these luciferian "noetics" had tried to ban through a 400 year war which they will continually reopen then on, being always defeated by the Church and by the army of the saints of the icons. We understand that the science of the empire in the world is not complete as long as it does not recuperate the teaching of the celestial empire. This was explained to Nebuchadnezzar by Daniel and the same truth will be explained by Dimitrie Cantemir to Peter the Great, at the beginning of modernity, when the Russian empire was entering the great stage of the world claiming to be a soteriologic, Christian empire. D. Cantemir was therefore restoring the biblical science of the empire, thus setting the bases of a possible geopolitical Christian approach to these mysterious formations that empires are. In order to be able to advance towards a conclusion of our attempt at a possible Christian science on the great space and on the civilizational identity, which we called by a specifically chosen term, noopolitics, it would be necessary to insist on D. Cantemir's theory on the rotation of the empire, since it is the first European view on these formations, that is founded on the Holy Scripture. We have to conclude here but by stressing that the identity phenomenon is exposed repeatedly to deconstructions and reconstructions so that we may speak about a true fight to defend identity, our own identity and the identity phenomenon itself in order to keep the order on throughout history and through cyclical crisis of human societies. The different civilizations are drawn themselves into such an holotropic process being forced to fight against each other or to cooperate with each other by replacing the clash with the dialogue of cultures and civilizations. The nations look for the dialogue instead of the clash of civilizations. Secondary we may conclude that the martyrdom is the price which man agrees to play in order to keep his unity with God refusing to offend God or to

take part to such an offence. The martyr refuses to depart from God, to be estranged from God, even if such a fact had to be paid with the price of his life. He receives death as a price of not losing his unity with God. That is the supreme price for the Christian identity and it was paid whenever the situation asked it.

#### ICONOCLASM AND THE “CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS”

Iconoclasm was the “frame” in which the two religious civilizations of Byzantium, the “Greek-Roman” and the “Syrian-Egyptian” one, *clashed*.

“The iconography which was so praised by the Greek who were great lovers of beauty, even after they were Christianized, was seen in Syria and in Egypt as a true idolatry. It *represented* the high idea that the Syrians and the Egyptians had about the almightiness and endlessness of God. In these lands, art is ornamental, with geometrical lines, symbols taken from the vegetal and animal kingdom and if the Coptic art of Egypt is also acquainted with Christian art, it prefers certain subjects; St. George, for example, and the human body is depicted without any beauty, in almost geometrical forms. In year 722/723 caliph Yâzid II decreed the prohibition of the cult of Christian icons in his state. It is sure that this tendency is due to the influence of Islam. The Qur’an, even if not prohibiting the figurative representations, forbids the idols. When, as a consequence, Syria and Egypt become the center of Arab power, the art of these provinces complies with the regulations thereof and then the famous arabesques are created, that polygonal decoration, those complicated ins and outs characterizing Arab art. Caliph *Omar II persecuted even icons, issued a decree against them.*” (Ibidem, p. 120)

The conflict between the two religious civilizations, the Islamic and Orthodox one is, therefore, radical. Who was *Islamic Asia* fighting against? Not only with the *Byzantium of the world* but especially with the *saints in the icons*. This battle was not of the world, a worldly one, but one which draws in the war trans-worldly, supernatural forces. These Arabs knew the “*power of icons*” and of the “*saints of the icons*”, as *power that modeled* both the soul and the body, *which led to a human pattern which the Qur’an and the Arab art could no longer control*. This *man* was free both from the Qur’an and from the universe of Arab-Islamic sensitivity. This is why they did not delay in making iconoclasm the occasion of a war of their own. However, the enemies of “*icons*” and of the “*saints in the icons*” are no longer in the Islamic Orient or among the Jews (who also “*could not suffer the icons of the Christian cult*” (Ibidem, p. 121) but also in the Catholic West and even in the Greek East. The iconoclastic bishop make up a *series* from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (therefore for about 300 years). “In 488, Xenaias, monophysite bishop of Hierapolis, had forbidden the icons of Jesus and of the Virgin in his diocese. In Marseille, in 599 there is a true iconoclastic attempt when bishop Serenus destroys all the icons in the city he was bishop of. Pope

Gregory the Great reprimands this action, understanding very well that the adoration of icons must be stopped but not permitting the deprivation of believers of the teachings such icons depicted, by the destruction thereof." (Ibidem)

Beyond the "intellectualist" interpretation of the "cult" and therefore of the "art" of icons, the Pope understood their deep meaning of "places" or of "noologic frames" of the "revealed teachings" in and through which that noosic faculty of knowledge which we called "proto-sight" and "proto-vision" is manifest.

*Iconists and people who worship icons* do not see with the "eyes of the world" and therefore with the "worldly sight", but they see with the eyes of the Holy Scripture, "godly eyes" seeded in man together with the image of God. *It is obvious that Michelangelo's visions are not the fruit of his worldly eyes, but of a "proto-sight", i.e. of a capacity of seeing with the "first eyes" of Adam from before the fall, the Adam of celestial Heaven.* By this proto-sight human being has a special ability of seeing the world not only with the body-eyes but also with the "eyes of heart" which are even more than the "eyes of mind" (of intellect). This proto-sight was not withdrawn from man after the fall, but was left to him in a virtual way, actualizable only as a reward for repentance, for the cleaning of the senses from the sins which cover the world with the thick fog of "noosic blindness". The sinner does not *see* what the *saint* sees. This is why, as Brancusi tells us, the "cross-makers" of old times used to fast for two weeks before starting to carve the crosses of the world, unlike the modern artist who mixes the glass of wine with the beefsteak and the ease and paints among the vapors of drunkenness and of the "beefsteak".

Another aspect of maximum relevance, because it shows us the secularist essence of any iconoclasm, is the fact that the "iconoclastic party" was supported by the army; "most of the heads [of the armies] appear to be the violent iconoclasts and those who become emperors following a revolution – Leon the Isaurian, Leon the Armenian, Michael the Stammerer – use their power in order to suppress the icons" (Ibidem, pp. 121-122). Is this not the case with the "armies of soldiers and peasants" of the neopagan Bolshevik iconoclasm?

The explanation of the iconoclasm in the army is found in the belonging thereof to the "iconoclast religious civilization", the enemy of icons. "Soldiers are iconoclasts out of conviction, their recruitment from among the Orientals, especially Armenians, explains this belief. Constantine V settles a large number of immigrants coming from these regions in Thracia. Most of them were affiliated to heretical sects, Manicheans, Paulicians, montanists. Minor Asia was full of. They were iconoclasts by traditions and unleashed the greatest violence against the Orthodox cult which they found idolatrous. *Orientals and soldiers are the essence of the iconoclastic party.* Civilian statesmen, the high aristocracy, even bishops had often changed their attitude according to the fluctuations of the Court" (Ibidem, p. 122).

The essential issue was found by Bănescu: “*Orientalists and soldiers are the essence of the iconoclastic party.*” This statement includes two faces of the truth on iconoclasm. The first: *iconoclasm was the first secular classification of a conflict between two religious civilizations: one orthodox and one inclined towards heresy when it was not entirely alien from Christianity (the Arab-Islamic one).*

The second: *iconoclasm was a conflict on the vertical axis: between monks, agents of the “celestial empire” on the one hand, and soldiers and ideocrats (or theologocrats), agents of the worldly, terrestrial empire, on the other hand.*

“Emperors, like all their predecessors, are theologians, not only statesmen [...]. They have their religious opinions and are keen on them *even if they are heretics*. The persecutions they extend over the monks and monasteries are not explained except by the vigorous resistance they encountered on the part of the latter against the measures they promulgated” (Ibidem).

“They were not rationalists in the modern sense of the world, some believe they were, nor influenced by Islam or Judaism as others think. As for Leon III thinking of making of his reform a means of attracting Mohammedans to Christianity, this is very little truth-like” (ibid). It has to be remembered that iconoclasm is a residual phenomenon of the Paulician sect, of heretics like monophysites, of “ideological wars”, etc. “Theological Byzantine literature of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, witnesses the emergence of a number of polemical writings with the Jews who attacked Christianity. The Arabs *also* brought with them in Minor Asia the hatred against icons. Thus, the *quarrel for icons was born in the Eastern regions of the empire from crossbreeding a Christianity that was seeking clean spirituality with the doctrine... and with the view of the old Christological heresies, as well as of unchristian religions*” (Cf. Ostrogorsky, *apud* Bănescu, *op. cit.*, p.124).

#### ICONOCLASM: PAGAN DECONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIAN EUROPE

Therefore, what happens with and in the world in such periods of iconoclasm? And why do these things happen? Let us retain for now that this phenomenon cannot be explained politically, economically or socially, in general. Its explanation is a spiritual, noologic one, otherwise said, it is related to the noologic (spiritual) organization of the world. The explanation must be looked for at this level and within it. Our hypothesis is that such phenomena appear each time a *terrible pressure* is unleashed *against the creational order, against the churchly organization of existence, irrespective of its character, be it a catholic, an orthodox or a protestant one, meaning against its supernatural structure*<sup>1</sup>. In these periods

---

<sup>1</sup> You may ignore, for instance, the cult of icons for yourself and that reaction is due to your choice on your own account as an expression of your freedom of conscience. But whenever you rise yourself against the other people who chose to worship the saints in their own account, asking them to destroy or destroying yourself the icons in their living environments and in their own churches, then your attitude appears to be biased by an iconoclast temptation.



there are comparable reactions that occur, terrible *combustions* prepare the great explosions through which both “resistance” and restoring attempts manifest. It is as if spiritual order, the spiritual “organization” of the world mobilized its own powers, which are not *from the world*, in order to defend the world from such a terrible threat. Historical iconoclasm, meaning iconoclasm inside the Byzantine Empire is the frame through which we can verify the reaction of the *saints of the icons* to the attempt of great forces to deconstruct the churchly image of the Eastern Christian world of that time. Let us first of all remember the *story* and then *explain* it. The issue is fixed in a “narrative” manner by Nicolae Bănescu, in his “History of the Byzantine Empire” (Bănescu, *op. cit.*). The author provides a synthesis of the hypotheses with which the analysis of the issue was operated. We will not mention all of them here because our aim is not a documentary one but it is subordinated to a line of interpretation which had already selected from the various approaches the ones which already selects from among the various approaches the ones which bring explanations from a certain direction of interpretation. As it was retained, we called this interpretation a noological one. Among those whom Bănescu calls to explain the issue is Louis Bréhier<sup>2</sup>, who takes the discussion in the angle of interest of *Christian interest*. In essence, the “issue of the cult of icons” was reduced in the investigated epoch as it is today to two questions: “Must we worship icons and if so, to what extent?” The second question is of the same type: “Do we have the right to kneel before them, kiss them, incense them?” (Bănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 118). Secondly, there are other also other auxiliary questions which Bănescu summarizes: “Can we use art in order to represent the divine world? Can an artist portray the Savior, the Holy Virgin, the Saints?” (Ibidem, p. 119) We will retain here the conclusion drawn by: “at the start of the iconoclast movement, *Christian art was definitely formed*” (Ibidem). Born in a humble manner, in the catacombs, it expressed first of all the hopes of the believers in the afterlife, it was transformed, after the triumph of the Church, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., and sought to tell the story, in epopee-like manner, of the religious history of the world, from Creation until the Last Judgment. The inspiration is found in the reading of the Holy Scripture” (Ibidem). Let us insist. We infer that Christian art is a *noologic frame* in and through which the *spiritual latencies of the states of faith of the first Christians were actualized*. The legitimacy of Christian art is rooted in this indubitable *noologic fact*. It is a *Christian spiritual phenomenon*, a frame and form of *actualization (expression) of the Christian soul, of the life in and for Jesus Christ*. Therefore, the first thing we can present in this point of the analysis is that the iconoclastic movement had touched precisely that *soul*, that *spiritual experience in*

---

<sup>2</sup> *La Querelle des images*, Paris, 1904.

*the primary Church*, in and through which the first crystallization of the *Christian way of existence* and of manifestation was achieved. This is the same as the expressive system of the primary Church and is an *act of unpremeditated experience*, absolutely free, because it was expressed in the catacombs, i.e. against the official expressive *system*, the manifest one which was pagan, otherwise said it was related to the expressive systems of the “traditional world” (pre Christian). From this point of view, we can notice that Christian art was a side of a renewed, recreated world. It was, therefore, an “innovation” which of course was to inaugurate *a new tradition*, which the *force of the anti-Christian future* was to attack reproaching it the traditionalist *closure*, “traditionalism”. Secondly, we will retain that “after the triumph of the Church,” in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when, otherwise said, the Christian soul was free to come out of the catacombs and walk the streets in the light of the cosmic sun, Christian art acquires a *systematic* character, i.e. it builds an exercise and a *new frame* from “*telling the story*” with even more refined expressive means, *the religious history of the world*, meaning from revealing to the believer the spiritual organization of the entire existence, *the creational order* on which everything was built. “The walls of the churches of the Christian world are covered with these pictures which portray the most significant religious scenes” (Ibidem). Further on, such compositions “are reproduced in the illuminated manuscripts of the holy books, in the sculptures of the ivory thrones and of the panels at the church doors, on the gold and silver chest (...) (even) in the texture of the bright clothes of the aristocracy of this epoch. Religious art had reached deep inside Christian life and had acquired a universal character” (Ibidem).

#### THE WORSHIP OF THE SAINTS: ASYNCHRONOUS MANIFESTATION

The “legitimacy of Christian art” is again in discussion (Ibidem). From my point of view, iconoclasm brings to the foreground the real function and *power of art* of causing the spiritual “actualization” of some of the noologic frames through which the very spiritual organization of the world is preserved and propagated in history. The issue descends to a deeper plan and reaches even the issue of the competition of *legitimacies* in relation with the access to the *management of spiritual power* in the world here and at the same time in relation with the *imperative of the permanent actualization* of the spiritual organization of the world (spiritual order). In a way, iconoclasm is the frame in which we are revealed the double crisis which will mark universal history, the one that pertains to the pre-Christian, ancient traditional world, which related the sacred power to the traditional orders and castes and to the great esoteric systems and, secondly, the crisis of a world that was announcing itself in and with the strange claims of questioning the order consecrated through the *order of the church*. Who were those

who were at the same time *coming from the past and from the future*, from a time that was keen on bringing down all empires, inaugurating the era of imperialisms, shattering at the same time the order instituted by the Church?!

This is the crucial issue. We will retain for now that iconoclasm is the expression of the *front wave* caused by the pressure of the two *pure temporal forces*, that of the *pre-Christian past* and that of a *pre-announced, deconstructivist and anti-church time, which was to show its true face in the epoch of bolshevist nihilism*.

Before further examining the nature and specificity of these two *destructive forces*, let us examine the other sides of the phenomenon emerging in the spiritual frames of that world, in which the artistic one is axial for the issue we examine.

*Christian art* is, as it has already been underlined, the visible, factual face, *interpreted* with the help of artistic means, of the spiritual organization of existence, of the creational order of the world, of everything that exists. Iconoclasm contains in it an obscure temptation of contesting this claim to explain by *plastic signs* (the language of arts) the spiritual organization of existence, the order of God. To the legitimacy of the written world, of the *text* set on parchments and then on the pages of manuscripts, another “narrative” (strategic narrative) had been added, using not the manuscript page and the written word, in order to explain the *divine order of the world here and beyond*, but the *picto-graphic sign* (and, more recently, the photo- and filmographic sign) for the same purpose. The legitimacy of the textualist *hermeneutist* a new legitimacy had been added, that of the *hermeneutist vizualist*. The one who “sees” is added to the one who “understands”. However, the church never lost their *unity*, because it “gave these artistic representations the value of teachings. They were the means whereby the scenes of the Scripture were exposed to the eyes of the laymen” (ibid.). This issue is, of course, a secondary one. What has to be retained is that, in the view of the Church, both the *reading of the text* and the *sight of what was explained* by the written word come from the same source: the Word of God, communicated to man in Its two forms: a) by natural revelation in *written* form (what is heard is at the same time recorded on tables, sheets and parchments, and, later on, on the paper of manuscripts); b) by supernatural revelation, meaning through the Embodied Word, shown to man in Its completeness, and therefore made accessible to us through all our faculties of knowledge: mind, eyes, ears, mouth and hand (touch). Therefore, icons and all the other means of expressing the faithful soul (blessing on the forehead with the holly Myrrh and with the hand of the priest, the baptism in the water, the taste of God through the Holy Eucharist, the holy water, etc.) are all of them means of perpetuity for this extraordinary phenomenon of our synergic participation in God, made possible by the Embodiment of the Word through the God made man. Iconoclasm is the expression of *collision*, of the predisposition to push into conflict the two means of revelation. This is what the iconoclast does.

### ICONOCLASM: THE SUPPRESSION OF THE PROTO-SIGHT

Iconoclast forces take the faithful man out of the harmony and *synergy* of revelations, delivering him (throwing him) to collision, to the conflict of the revelations. This was the first disobedience of what the Savior had explained: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill". On this side, we understand that anybody who contests *visualism as a means of situating oneself in the horizon of the mysteries* (therefore as a means of access to the area of explaining the mysteries) throws man and the world in the conflict of the revelations, disconsiders the teaching of Jesus with respect to the harmony of revelations and, implicitly, contests the synergeticism, the *noological integrism* of the New Testament, of the mystery of the Embodiment. The problem is troubling in relation to the prolongations of Iconoclasm beyond the Byzantine time, which shows us that that state of spirit which bred *historical iconoclasm* did not disappear. *Therefore, iconoclasm is a technique of the deconstruction of the evangelic organization of the world, of the highest and most complete accessibility of mankind to the creational order of existence.*

Through this, iconoclasm is also a form of anthropological nihilism, because it contests one of the noosic (pure-spiritual, pre-experiential) faculties of man, that of the *protosight*. To the faculty of *proto-understanding*, which had been confirmed by the prophets and therefore by the *texts* of the Old Testament, the Christian experience of godliness actualizes another noosic faculty, that of protosight, which suggests that man is a participating being, it is a full-fledged participant in the noosic (creational) order of existence, with all his faculties and not only with the *intellect* (also with the sight and hearing, with the taste and touch). *This attests the proto-being character of man, the fact that he is a "spiritual man", he is "inner body" before being "exterior body", "corporeal, material being". Therefore, iconoclasm is an expression of a deeper nihilism than the one appearing from the circumstantial reading of its historical expression in the Byzantium of the 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.*

It is not simply a historical phenomenon but a technique of deconstruction of the revealed spiritual order of existence; it is the luciferic attempt to intervene in the plan of creational order. The issue is troubling and deserves all the attention. It moves from the strictly historical horizon and appears as what he is: a trans-historical state which emerges with each new strength of those forces which are capable of reopening the conflict of revelations, of the two revelations: natural and supernatural. With modern iconoclasm, triggered in Europe in the century of the enlightenment, the luciferic temptation of deconstructing the spiritual (Christian) order of the world is even more severe, because it is exercised against both these two revelations. This iconoclasm denies both the faculty of pre-understanding and that of protosight, both the initiatic scenario (understanding), mediated by the

noosic frames of the teachings of the Old Testaments, of myths and of the ethnographic collection of stories and the evangelic scenario of the *direct access* to the Godliness of Jesus (an access that is possible due to mysterious or noosic sensualism, i.e. to the range of protosenses). This issue reappears in the debate in full modern age, with a book by Paulescu dedicated to “proto-functions” (“the notions of soul and of God in physiology”). But let us return to historical iconoclasm for further explanations.

We have established that the iconoclast phenomenon is a composition of *contrary forces*, of vectors that come on *currents of neo-pagan insurrection* from a pre-Christian past and of *post-historic nihilism*. The two trends belong one to prehistory (the archaic world), and the other one to post-history, to a time situated beyond this time, beyond the present time without being thereby in any way related to the time without time (*aeternum*), because it is one with the age while however having its origin outside it, in a malefic inspiration.

*The pre-time and extra-time* are conjugated in order to compose a front wave which can throw entire nations and even the world into the collision of the revelations (natural and supernatural) i.e. in the conflict of the noosic frames of existence.

The pulsation of such a conflict is noticed as such by Theophanes who “claims that Leon [the iconoclast emperor, our note. I.B.] wanted to please the Muslims and the Jews. But he defeated the Arabs and persecuted the Jews” (Ibidem, p. 116). Without further explanations, Bănescu noticed the essence. It was not the nations that were at war, but the “*noetics*,” those in whose soul the conflict of revelations had become acute. Leon was the carrier of this *collision*, his soul was the problem and not the Jews or the Arabs. They could not have seeded in the depths of emperor Leon’s such a terrible anguish that keeps the latter in a tense iconoclastic predisposition which passes into all its acts. In fact, *tradition*, as part of the natural revelation, is a form of manifestation of *pre-understanding*, both in its capacity of *noosic faculty* of man and as relation to the supernatural (myths, mysterious, noologic powers, heroes, symbols, etc.). Iconoclasm seems to entitle this “anthropological manner” of relating to the supernatural, but this is only apparent. In fact, as shown by Theophanes, Leon does not entitle the Arabs or the Jews, but makes himself the agent of a terrible tension in which the conflict of revelations is pulsating. Iorga intuits this issue in a plan which is not at all surprising. He emphasizes the “parallel of *persecution* at around the same date of the Buddhist monks in China”<sup>3</sup>.

It is true that Iorga is sensitive to the “worldly” motive of the “persecution,” i.e. the gold, silver and precious stones that were gathered in the Church treasury, in a quantity a lot larger than the one in the “treasury of emperors” (Ibidem). Moreover, churches were tax exempt and they had become the refuge for those who wanted to “avoid military service” (Ibidem). “The religious reform carried out

---

<sup>3</sup> Scientific communication at the First Congress of Byzantine Studies, The Romanian Academy, “Bulletin de la sect. hist.,” XI, 1924, apud Bănescu, *op. cit.*, p.116.

by Leon gave the state possession of the territorial assets of monasteries and churches. 'It gave the financial problem the same solution as in the case of the French revolution, by seizing the goods of the clergy [...]. By depriving the Church from everything it had accumulated by then, through the exploitation of its fields, the iconoclast emperors were forever preventing an ecclesiastical domination in the Orient, like the one that had been just imposed at the time in the West, through the act of infeudation, which was the subordinated creation of a franc emperor' ” (Apud Ibidem, p. 117).

#### THE STATE IN THE WORLD AGAINST THE 'EMPIRE' IN HEAVEN

The thing that escapes the analysis focused on the *motive* of the economic and political power is the persistence of iconoclastic movements beyond the threshold of the secular crisis, and at the same time, of the violence shown by iconoclasts in an undifferentiated manner against “icon-devotees”. Byzantine iconoclasm lasted around 300 years and its driving manifestations are reactivated throughout the modern history of Europe. The iconoclasm of the French of revolution will be prolonged until the triumph of global “bolshevism” and beyond its threshold of apparent political crisis, because this neoiconoclasm acquires a terrible striking force within the fourth Hollywood which unleashes the iconoclast anarchy, stirring anarchic visualism against the Christian protovision (a terrible invasion of visual idolatry against the Christian protosight. Hollywood film is a malefic chef d'oeuvre of the *theme of impersonation* which aggresses at terrible thresholds precisely the mystery of kenosis and therefore the evangelic theme of the embodiment of God. The view of Hollywood filmography rose, in a large antichrist rebellion, against the Christian proto-sight which had been made possible by the Gospels and by the entire visual and visionary meta-narrative of the New Testament).

Thirdly, it is hard to explain, from the perspective of the economist theory and of secularist politology the guillotine of the French revolution used against a Catholic priest and against a poor peasant who was stubborn in believing in the Holy Mysteries. The fight for the riches of the Church does not explain the 600,000 victims of the French revolution and the 20-40 million victims of the red Holocaust. It is obvious that Leon as well as the Directorate and Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, did not aim solely at the economic wealth of the church in their epoch but primarily at the spiritual order of God. They wanted to empty not the visible Church of its treasury, but the temple of the soul, the invisible Church of Godliness. They were fighting against the “inner man” and not against the “exterior man”, against the victory achieved by the “inner man” and by the inner Christ on the exterior man with the complete set of the *senses* thereof. At the cry of St. Augustine: “You were inside me, Lord and I was outside myself and I did not

know You”, iconoclasm would want an answer based on the triumph of the “outside man,” who has not returned with his senses and with his mind inside him, to the inner Christ, to the “kingdom of endless daylight” in the soul which can be darkened by sins. The cult of icons is, at the same time, a pure contemplation, an exercise of free function of inner sight, “having turned” from the “exterior” to the “interior”, from the world towards God. The cult of icons was one of the two sides of the triumph of the protosight on the view of the world, of the inner man over the “exterior” one, of pure contemplation over the appetitive ego, of the nous against the body located in the tomb of sin (darkened by sins). It is very possible for all secularist motives (wealth, increasing influence on the clergy, etc.) to be true things and reasons of alarms for the kingdom and therefore for the secular order, with its administration, with its taxes, its wars and markets. However, it is no less obvious that that *secular order* appears incapable of solving in a different manner this ascension *of the power* of monks than by suppressing and destroying the order based on the “cult of icons” in general, on a noologic gravity rather than on a secularist one. This is the real issue and the solutions proposed by iconoclasm prove to be disastrous, no matter how justified they might appear in the horizon of the worldly (of world order).

Russian scholar Uspensky pushes this - let us call it secularist - reasoning at the scale of prototype when he envisages the following: “monks transported the battle from the theological field, in order to classify the position of the emperors as atheist and heretical, in order to discredit the movement and ruin the trust of the popular masses in the iconoclast emperors”<sup>4</sup>.

The same could be said by the ideologist of the French revolutionary Directorate and by the commissioners of the Bolshevik iconoclasm and this book written by Uspensky in 1917 is in a way the preface of the new iconoclasm which was to sweep the Eastern church for around 100 years.

The first iconoclasm (of Byzantium) was also clearly marked by the same conflict of “teachings” (in the substratum of which the two revolutions always persist).

Secondly, in this conflict we can see the “care” for what is “great” in the world: the state, wealth, ranks, in a word, everything that is related to apparent “greatness”, to worldly “greatness”. “Leon III, an Asian of origin, and his son were not free thinkers, rationalists, precursors ... of the Revolution. They were men of their time, pious, faithful, and wanting to clean religion from what for them seemed to be idolatry. But at the same time, they were also statesmen, preoccupied by the *greatness* and peace of the empire. And the large number of monasteries and the continuous growth of the wealth thereof were dangerous for the state. The immunity enjoyed by the goods of the Church was diminishing the treasury resources [...]. But moreover, the influence exercised by monks on the souls made them a dangerous element of agitation” (Bănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 118).

---

<sup>4</sup> *Schemă asupra istoriei Bizanțului*, Moscova, 1917, p. 213, apud Bănescu, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

Therefore, Bănescu emphasized an axial element of iconoclasm: the reaction of the worldly state against the “empire” in heaven (celestial), because these were the monasteries, the place on earth of the “celestial empire”, the place in which apophatism reaches its maximum threshold, maintaining itself as an extraordinary spiritual power in the world. Monasteries are the expression of the liberation from the world, of the complete exit from the world and at the same time of the permanence in the world with an extraordinary force. The lay state makes people captive in this world, the monastery makes of man a “citizen of heaven”, free from this world and therefore *empowered* to fulfill the work of God through the way of His Son in the here world, for eternal life.

This was never tolerated by the “lay state”. Iconoclasm reveals in its complete terrorist nakedness the *secular fundamentalism*, the fanaticism of “noetics” who are passionate with this world, against the “disciples of Jesus”.

“By banning the icons [the Isaurians] were striking the monks, who had in these icons a powerful means of action. We must not forget that in their battle, [Isaurians were not acting] without a powerful support from the *high clergy*, which was jealous of the influence of monks, *from the army*, mostly formed of Asians and even *from a great part of the population*” (Ibidem) Was it not the same with the Bolshevik iconoclasm? Let us remember only that *Christ* crucified on His Cross at the entrance in a church in Basarabia pierced by the bullets of the soviet soldiers upon the invasion of this province by the army – also Asian – of the “neo-pagan Bolshevik iconoclasm”. Like then, in the Isaurian epoch, in the Stalinist epoch, the army and even “a part of the population of the empire” were the supporting element for the assault against heaven. Trotsky had dreamed of making of the Red Army the army of the “world revolution”, which suggests in all these aspects the signs of an “eschatological frontier”. The phenomenon is one of “apocalypse” of “end of the world” and the world itself is forced towards these states which define the “eschatological frontier”, a sort of “end of the world” and of “historical time”, when the low state collides with the upper state, the Empire of the world collides with the Celestial Empire. This is the form of the complete disclosure of the conflict between the “men of God” and the “creatures of the stratosphere”, the “citizens” of an “ideocratic order” conceived according to a “malefic, antichrist inspiration”. The idea that not only the nations and their armies “clash” in the form of wars, but also civilizations is an idea already acquired for the geopolitical study. What we add here is that historical iconoclasms, both the Isaurian and the Bolshevik one, are historical expression of constantly emerging clashes of human formations that have the amplitude of the great civilizations aiming at an assault over the Heaven meant to bring the control over the *celestial order* meaning over the man soul and the spiritual core of society itself. Behind such a terrible



confrontation we discover the clash between the culture of faith and the “counter-culture” of nihilism, as we have already mentioned. Such a clash permeates history, societies, civilizations, empires etc. Iconoclasm as a phenomenon and as notion covers all those types of the nihilist deconstructivism that emerge cyclical in history.

This phenomenon is propagated in the form of two front waves which clash against each other. Once they rise covering history, time and space, for a relatively long period of time, they will influence everything, they will shatter the structure of the civilizations, they will cross cultures, individual and collective conscience, revealing an overwhelming trend towards a total deconstruction of spiritual fundamentals of life. As a matter of fact, such a countercultural movement aims to reconstruct ontological identity of man in the image of a Godless man ready to announce the victory of nihilism throughout the entire world.

