

## ... et unus non solus, sed in pluribus

### A Citizen as Eikon\*

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The topic of this essay was suggested by a usual parallel between political and artistic representation. Since early modernity raised the issue of whom and how legislatures and elected representatives represent, an answer very frequently given by politicians and political theorists alike has been that a representative or a legislature should mirror his/her or its constituency as a painting mirrors life—i.e. be a true copy of the represented. For example, as John Adams held in his defense of the new US Constitution, in representative assembly, as in art, “the perfection of the portrait consists in its likeness.”<sup>1</sup>

But if representative art frequently serves as a model for representative politics, why cannot non-representative art serve as a model for non-representative politics? This article will consider one of the implications of such a question. I will ignore many strands on non-figurative art of the twentieth century (others are welcome to consider this possibility), and will go back to Christian icons, which are a classic example of non-representative images. Cannot they offer us an analogy, if not a model for what has been frequently called non-representative, direct or participatory democracy—e.g. for the politics of classical republics, Hannah Arendt's emphasis on briefly existing, but self-organizing and non-bureaucratized Soviets, experiments with self-governing communities after the 1960s, etc.?

### Icons as non-representative images

For many Russian thinkers of the twentieth century, attention to icon painting, one of characteristic traits of Russian culture, is nothing new. Let me briefly restate the most frequently occurring interpretations, which popularized the idea that an icon is essentially a piece of non-representative art. Of course, rich theological argumentation was initially offered in central works by Florensky (1922/1996), Trubetskoi (1922/1973), Bulgakov (1931/1996), and Ouspensky (1960/1978),<sup>2</sup> but their secular

followers in art history and criticism would mostly stress the following points. First, according to a conception of “inverted” or “reverse perspective,” the Byzantians knew the law of perspective, perfected and refined later by Renaissance painters like Brunelleschi and Dürer, but intentionally subverted it, making flat, two-dimensional paintings. The idea was to give access to God, rather than depict him, or—even—make God look at the spectator as if from the icon, rather than make the spectator look at divinity. Thus the imaginary rays do not all come from one point in the spectator’s eye (forcing a Renaissance painter to depict things that are far away as smaller objects in a painting); rather, these rays all emanate from God’s eye behind the icon. It is as if the existing world is being perceived by God, rather than vice versa. A different version of a (phenomenological) defense of the efficiency and veracity of this iconic depiction technique would hold that it shows things as they appear to us in the field of our most proximate vision—where only faces matter, and we ignore the background of the figures in the foreground. Such technique allows for depicting the phenomena most proximate and dear to us.

However, many interpretations insist that what is important is not this or that technique of painting, but the anagogic and commemorative experience offered to an icon viewer. Icons remind us of something higher, set us on the road to this higher phenomenon, give us access to this higher realm and perhaps make the observer partake in the sacred act, rather than just see a depiction of it. In the words of a familiar rock song, an icon is a stairway to heaven. Venerating an icon, kissing it or falling in prostration in front of it, a believer is set on this road to a higher realm.

Contemporary mundane analogies to what a religious icon does would of course include screen icons as part of computer programs: they do not so much depict or represent a program, but rather are a way of getting access to it, or of setting it into motion: by clicking on it, we get the program going. The same might be argued about a sacred image—by a correct “double-clicking” on a church icon a believer gets access to a realm where Christ sets Himself into motion. Other mundane things which have icon-like anagogic properties are, for example, a wedding ring or a Communist party card during the Soviet days. They are not so much a representation of marriage or party membership, but something that is part of the game called marriage or membership, which makes the possessor of these a participant in this game. Imagine the consequences of losing a wedding ring or read the descriptions of many people fired from the party for not keeping their card well enough. Such a ring and such a card are not just innocent representations, which thus could be easily replaced; rather, they are part of this phenomenon of special significance, and they are a means of setting it into motion and keeping the process going.

Let us map this argument now onto participatory democracy. If, following Durkheim, we replace God with an overpowering reality of society or a group of people, then we see that iconic politics might be first and foremost about such participation in a higher reality. A member is in the same relationship with the group or a whole society as an icon is with Christ. It does not represent; rather it partakes in the superior existence of the prototype.

As a corollary, we then find the following. First, because each icon offers equally

relevant access to God, then each member of the group, conceived on the model of non-representative iconic politics, is well-suited for the role of a *primus inter pares* of this group, if only for a moment. The icons could be said to be equi-glorious, iso-doxic, venerating the prototype with the same force and basically in the same way. This isodoxic experience should apply to citizens conceived on the model of icons as well.

Second, such iconic mechanisms eliminate concerns with the adequacy of representation: it does not matter whether an iconic citizen resembles the group it is part of (as the representative should) or whether s/he does not—because it is only through him or her (who does not represent, but maintains an iconic relationship with the group) that the group is able to exist at all. Access to Christ is given to us through icons; access to the higher reality of a group is given to us through an iconic performance of one of its members. Destroy this iconic performance and the group becomes inaccessible.

## Mondzain’s contribution

Bernard Manin’s summary<sup>3</sup> of the history of classical republics shows that they offered an effective possibility of more or less equal direct access to the main positions in the legislative, executive and judicial powers, but actual participation of all citizens in governance, given the size even of these city-states, was not what mattered most. Thus, let us also eliminate the stress on taking part in the reality of the group (in its religious version—on partaking in Christ) from our consideration of iconic mechanisms, and concentrate on other aspects of icon-like performance in finer detail. Here, Marie-José Mondzain’s brilliant interpretation<sup>4</sup> of the defense of icons during the iconoclast age will help us a lot in the examination of non-representative mechanisms, both in painting and in politics.

Discourses on the icon, relevant to our consideration, had been spelled out by three Christian authors of the eighth and ninth centuries AD—St. John of Damascus, Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople, and St. Theodore the Studite (of Studium). Stated briefly and in an oversimplified way, the last two held the position that icons do not represent or embody God; the divine prototype and its image are linked in the same way as correlated categories (in Greek: *pros ti*) in Aristotle, *Categories* 6a35–6b2, 7b15.<sup>5</sup> Thus Theodore wrote: “the prototype and the image [*eikon*] belong to the category of related things [*ton pros ti estin*], like the double and the half”.<sup>6</sup> For Aristotle, something is related as when we say that master and slave, half and double, more and less imply one another—for the most part, such a related pair comes into existence together, and one part of the pair is impossible without its correlated another part. One cannot say what is the double of something, unless one knows what is half of this double. However, the phenomena designated by these pairs should not be of the same substance, consubstantial.

This reliance on Aristotle helped the Church Fathers to escape the accusation, coming from iconoclasts, that they implied a presence of the divine nature of God in



the fallen material of an icon. An icon does not embody, circumscribe by its contour line, or represent God; it is just correlated with its existence. The presence of an icon just implies that God exists.

One can single out in Mondzain's exposition, who relied more on the arguments of St. Nicephorus than on his other saintly contemporaries, an attention to the three principal Greek terms that capture the most important aspects of an icon. First, it is *graphie*, an inscription, a trace. We should understand that this is a trace of someone who is not there. Icons do not partake in Christ; He always retreats from the space to which the icon points. In French, the tracing function of the icon is revealed in the following phrase: *le trait est un retrait*. A sign, a trace is always a sign of the retreat of something which is not there.<sup>7</sup> Christ is always absent from the icon: if He were there, the icon would risk circumscribing the infinite and the icon would be consubstantial with God, which is impossible. Even though an image (*eikon*) and its prototype (Christ) are linked like Aristotelian correlates, one does not even touch the other. That is why the Aristotelian category of the related is important for this originary theology of the icon.

This Aristotelian category of the correlated is different from a modern notion of relation, since in Greek *pros ti* means "pointed towards something," as the double is pointed towards a half, or a perception is always pointed towards what it is a perception of.<sup>8</sup> For modern understanding, this vision of relatedness is strange, because it is not reciprocal, but it allows our authors of the theology of the icon to stress this pointedness. An icon points to an ever-retreating Christ, to a void, where he is not: *L'icone est vers le Christ qui ne cesse pas de s'en retirer*.<sup>9</sup> For Christ to incarnate Himself in an icon was not to materialize in some thing or object, but rather to set up a relation of pointedness between an observer and His ever retreating self. In this sense, an icon is not an incarnation, a carnal embodiment of Christ, but it is an en-image-ination. One should not think of the relation icon/prototype on the Platonic model of body/soul, because the invisibility of Christ is a type of invisibility different from that of the soul. It is the invisibility of God's Word, access to which is established through the Aristotelian mechanics of pointedness.

Second, there is a Greek term *perigraphé*—a circumscription or a contour. If the prototype and the *eikon* are not identical or consubstantial, they nevertheless maintain a relationship of sending the observer in the direction of divine existence. The contour of the iconic image does not encircle or enclose (*perigraphé*) divinity; rather it is an engraved trace, which is filled with the burst (in French, *l'éclat*) of divine light. In other words, apart from the usual dogmatic insistence on the non-circumscribed character of the divine, we should also mark in the notion of *perigraphé* a whole field of encircling light. That is why the icon painters use so much gold and try to eliminate the background: an observer, whose natural perception is blinded by this light, is supposed to be given access to divine existence through this experience. The icon does not supply to us an unskillfully drawn anthropomorphic figure, but gives access to the absent prototype, whose modus of existence is an *eidos* revealed in the icon's shining and blossoming. Mondzain notes that the Greek word *anthe* ("brightness, brilliancy, as of gold or bright colors in general") comes from *anthos*, which means "flower" and

"flourishing," "being in full bloom."<sup>10</sup> To blind with light and overwhelm with flourishing and blossom is the second function of an icon; this is radically distant from what we mean by the verb "represent" in our modern perception of the term.

Third, there is an *epigraphe*—the name on the icon. It is not a contingent designation, not just a word added to the picture, contrary to what we may think now. Given the schematic profiles of saints with no resemblance to actual historic figures, one could hardly guess to whom the icon was sending an observer, if the *epigraphe* did not say it explicitly. In an episode in 1438, some members of the Orthodox delegation to discuss the Florentine Union with the Catholic Church could not pray in the churches of Florence because they could not see or read the inscriptions. But even more important is the fact that the *epigraphe* is needed to set up the mechanism of homonymy in action. The *eikon* and its prototype are in a homonymic relationship: that is, they bear the same name, even though they have completely different essences. This statement comes, once again, from the Aristotelian tradition and its definition of homonymy: a man and an image of a man bear the same name, even though their essences are different. A commonplace in iconographic treatises applied the same judgment to the king and the image of the king, or Christ and the icon of Christ. One should stress that homonymy is different from metonymy or metaphor: an icon is not part of something (thus it does not represent something metonymically) and it does not substitute for something (thus it is not a metaphor of something else). In other words, an icon is neither about participation (being part of something), nor about representation.

## Applying this theory of the icon to non-representative politics

Pierre Bourdieu once noted that the real mystery of political representation lies not in the mechanism of a metaphor (when one person, a delegate, substitutes for the group and starts speaking and acting for it), but in metonymy—when the words and actions of a part, i.e. of a delegate, are taken to be words and actions of the whole, i.e. of a group.<sup>11</sup> But if a citizen relates to a group not in a metonymic or metaphoric way, but in a non-representative way—as an icon relates to a prototype—then an *eikon*-like citizen displays the following qualities.

First, such a citizen cannot claim to be part of the group, even though s/he sets into motion a mechanism of access to the existence of this group. The reality of group existence is ever-retreating, in a way similar to how Christ retreats from the graphic grip of an icon, as we remember. Sociologists like Bourdieu or Latour, of course, have long claimed that groups do not exist in some eternal ether, they have to be constantly formed by the actions of their delegates or performed, like a dance: no continuation, no group. A representative can claim that s/he represents a group, but except for the photos from yesterday's rally or bureau meeting that serve as props to persuade us that it exists, who can claim that s/he has seen or touched a group *in toto* or a group as such, an entity separate from its members? An iconic citizen is characterized by understanding this absence and by a determined pointedness to this ever-retreating group

existence. Even a magistrate chosen by lot—as in many classical republics—cannot be said to embody a group or represent it. S/he has access only to the space of absence, a void or emptiness which the group establishes while retreating from the magistrate's claims to be part of it or to act on its behalf. This magistrate has never touched or physically sensed the group that s/he allegedly sets into motion—s/he has seen just separate individuals who are allegedly part of it—yet, it is there somehow, although always retracting from his or her grasp. But an *eikon*-like magistrate helps this group to appear as a group with the help of him- or herself, i.e. its correlate—otherwise we would not be sure of the existence of the group at all.

Furthermore, an icon-like citizen points, like an arrow towards a target, to a group, but their link is co-relational in the sense of the Aristotelian category of *pros ti*. That is, this term—"relation"—should not be taken lightly, as a seemingly non-problematic sociological concept, as if "relation" was always the most generic term to designate links between people or their way of living together. This is not true even if one looks at the time of Elizabethan England and the final lines of "Othello," in which Lodovico promises to "to the [Venetian] state this heavy act with heavy heart relate." *Relazione* were one-way dispatches from the ambassadors and warriors of Venice, not reciprocal "relationships" the way we see them now in sociology. *Re-latio* is thus about moving something from one place to another, about sending—and this activity is different, for example, from *trans-latio* (another seemingly generic term for social processes that has become fashionable after the sociology of translation of Latour and Callon). Only by understanding the character of this sending (do I hear Derrida<sup>12</sup> here?) can we hope to gain access to iconic, non-represented communities.

If we draw parallels with the second, *perigraphe*, feature of iconic mechanisms further, we can see that an iconic sending to or into group existence overwhelms a viewer—if it is skillfully executed—by a burst of something bigger, by an overflow, by access to something that cannot be circumscribed by a contour or expressed in a word, but can command allegiance like some higher reality. This sending thus exacts neither forced obedience nor consent, as happens in authoritarian or liberal politics, but rather what the icon treatise writers called *proskynesis*, prostration. This prostration in front of something bigger should not hide the void that it effectively hails. Walter Benjamin once described a central cathedral in Marseilles as a railway station, a grand hub on a way to heaven. But in contrast to this elevator to heaven, an iconic citizen is sent to what s/he can never hope to reach: the higher existence always retracts.

Third, an iconic citizen is homonymic with the group. If s/he is a magistrate, s/he bears the same name as the group, but is not linked with the group by relations of political delegation à la Bourdieu, of the metaphorical or metonymical kind. Thus, a homonymic *primus inter pares* is not a metonymic leader, a part of the group monopolizing a mystical power to speak and decide for the whole. An iconic citizen and the group have different essences but the same name, and s/he is not part of the ever-retreating group. And since all icons are equal in their veneration of Christ, all citizens (conceived on the model of an icon) have equal access to this ever-retreating reality of group existence. Hence equal access to a claim to put the group into existence: the iso-doxia of equi-glorious icons becomes here the iso-nymy of iconic citizens,

an equal claim for the right to bear the name and for the power of naming itself. However, in contrast with icon-painting, the name does not predate and preexist the image. Naming with proper names is what brings an iconically-conceived group into existence. The first successful namer sets the game of homonymy into action; his or her actions are thus essential for the creation of such groups.

Not many are successful, though. For example: the phrase "we are all oppressed women!" changed the face of politics at the end of the twentieth century, but hardly ever resulted in a proper name for that group, even though there were many failed attempts to occupy the equi-glorious position of a namer. Instead many just tried to point towards an essence, a generic name of how a woman should be defined. By contrast, what changed politics at the beginning of the twentieth century resulted in a new proper name—"Soviet," giving the world a new entity called the Soviet people and its horrible organizational form—a Soviet state.

Of course, some would claim that during the first year or so of its existence this name was not a misnomer and presupposed democratic self-governing mechanisms. By contrast, others would say that iconic politics is not inherently benign, and attempts at its implementation, given the absence of emphasis on checks and balances, individual rights and separation of powers, should be undertaken with utmost caution. Whether the first view or the second is correct, it is clear that in iconic citizenship one enters a realm of the politics of naming. Being homonymic with a group, an *eikon*-like citizen, trying to challenge it into existence, should find a proper name for it. I can hardly elaborate more here, given the shortage of space, on what type of speech acts should be studied in this search for the politics of iconic nomination or non-representative naming. Perhaps this is very close to the naming in proper names that Walter Benjamin explored in his early essay *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*.<sup>13</sup>

## Icon defenders on communities

Now I would like to consider how the authors of iconographic doctrines themselves treated non-representative politics rather than art, notably to explore briefly their views of monastic communities. In this respect St. Theodore the Studite is better than St. Nicephorus. Theodore is usually credited with a reform in coenobitic life, because he had made decisive innovations in the typical routines of a Byzantine monastery. He thus perfected the existing monastic rules of St. Basil the Great and the Desert Fathers. Also, the resulting Studite *Typikon* or statute of monastery life became the main statute in ancient Rus', after it had been accepted by the first Russian monasteries. Thus, one may suspect that medieval Russians held him in high esteem for his reform of the monastery rather than for his defense of icons. When St. Joseph Volotsky (early sixteenth century) introduced his new coenobitic monastery statute—an almost universal model for Russian cloisters thereafter—he cited St. Theodore the Studite and his sources, primarily St. Basil the Great.<sup>14</sup> The major innovation, however,



which Joseph's writings introduced into Russian coenobitic life was ubiquitous horizontal discipline enforced by "council" or "preeminent" or "bigger" brothers—an inversion or diversion of Foucault's Panopticon—which finds striking parallels with Stalinist mutual surveillance techniques.<sup>15</sup> Another innovation—for Russia, not for Byzantium—was the demand to elect a new bishop, substituting for the deceased one, by a decision of the bigger brothers.<sup>16</sup>

Let us take a look at Theodore's injunctions before their interpretation by his Russian followers. First, some grounds for a future imposition of ubiquitous surveillance were there, since Theodore introduced several monks/overlookers in his monastery, making them subordinate to his deputy—otherwise, how could he control behavior in a body of monks numbering over a thousand?<sup>17</sup> Second, on his deathbed he allegedly advised the election of future bishops by a council opinion. Thus: "elect someone by a common vote in a godly fashion and in the manner which the fathers have established, for my desire is to support whomever the community finds suitable"<sup>18</sup> (*ipsi communi calculo divinitus, paterno consilio praeunte*). Third, his vision of the monastic community is characterized by iso-doxia, equi-gloriousness, which we have already found in his approach to icons, even though monks in a cloister, by contrast to icons, have functional specializations like the diverse parts of a human body. Thus he writes in his *Grand Cathechism*, ch. CXVII: "If I am a hand [of a given body—O.Kh.], I am not deprived of the glory of an eye; if I am a leg, I am nevertheless not excluded from the glory destined for the mouth. Because I am in all of them, and share the common glory and the common shame."<sup>19</sup> And as he says in *The Short Cathechism*, following St. Basil the Great, a monastery is "an equi-glorious body of Christ and a common harbor of salvation."<sup>20</sup> Finally, the main rite of the monastery is the Eucharist, because "this sacrament is a summation of all the *oikonomia*, and in its main part it by synecdoche signifies all": *totius eius dispensationis summa quaedam est hoc mysterium; ex praecipua parta totum per synecdochen significans*.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the writings of St. Basil the Great, whom Theodore frequently cites, will help us understand this vision. The *oikonomia* in Greek, or *dispensatio* in Latin, mentioned in the last quote from Theodore, is the subject of the whole first part of the book by Mondzain. It is not mundane household governance, the term we find in the famous pagan book by Xenophon; rather, the Church Fathers used the term *oikonomia* frequently, but for other significations. First, for them it is the plan of salvation, predestined to us by God, that is, he governs the *oikos* that befits him, the whole world. Second, since primordial sin has broken the initial unity of nature, *oikonomia* is a visible structure of this disjointed world, the way this world runs.

Thus, Basil writes in *Ascetical Constitutions*: "The most important in the Savior's *oikonomia* in flesh is to bring the human nature in a singular union with itself and the Savior, and, having eliminated the cunning dissection into parts, restore the primordial unity."<sup>22</sup> Basil frequently used the metaphor of a doctor who mends or restores a unified body, torn asunder, and the term *oikonomia* was also used by early Christian authors to designate the structure of such a torn body, its bones, ligaments, and intestines, opened to a startled external gaze.<sup>23</sup> *Oikonomia* is thus understood here

as the disjointed body of Christ, an initial unity of the world and the church broken into many warring factions and contradictory pieces.

Restoring this body happens from time to time in the central sacrament of the Eucharist, when Christians partake in the flesh and blood of Christ, but in everyday life it can also happen when austere and ascetic monks live together without quarrels over property or over the interpretation of God's words: the humankind and nature that had been dissipated into a thousand parts is gathered by them into a union, as much as they can. In Basil's words:

I call that communion of life most perfect (*perfectissimam vitae societatem*), from which property of goods is excluded (*possessia propria*), the contradiction of dispositions is chased away, from which strife, factions, and quarrels have been torn out with their roots, and everything is common—souls and dispositions, bodily forces and what we need for alimentation and support of the body, in which there is one common God, one common pool of piety, common salvation, common feats, common labors, common crowns, in which many constitute one, and each is not alone, but with others (*ubi multi unus, et unus non solus, sed in pluribus*).<sup>24</sup>

This is a view not only of an ideal life, of course, but a description of a direction, where a good monastery is going. One difference, of course, between a monastic life and what will be achieved in the future divine reconciliation is that in a monastery there is a temporal head, an abbot. If we hold on to a parallel between treatises on iconography and monastic community-building (i.e. communograph, so to say), the problem with an abbot is that he can be seen by many observers as not exactly equi-glorious with the other brethren: it is as if one icon had a more privileged link to Christ in comparison with others.<sup>25</sup> Here a metaphor of the human body helps the argument again. A good, cohesive monastery is like a body, the recognized head of which is an abbot. This statement, of course, recalls apostolic teaching in its Orthodox Christian version: the Church is the body of the Christ, the head of which is Christ himself. So there is paramount equality between brethren, on the one hand, and one accepted sort of inequality, between brothers and an abbot, but this is the natural inequality which the members of the body have in relation to the head of the body, which guides all the members. The monks are thus in such a relation with the abbot as the Apostles were with Christ. As Basil the Great says in the 18th chapter of *Ascetical Constitutions*, "as the Savior, having assembled the choir of the disciples [*choros* in Greek, *coacto discipulorum* in Latin], has made even Himself common to them all, so the monks, being obedient to their leader [Greek—*kathegoumeno*], finely following the rule of life together, are exactly imitating the life of the Apostles and the Lord."<sup>26</sup>

In Russian translations this theory of monastic community found some sort of overlap with a theory of iconic mechanisms. For example, when St. Joseph Volotsky was grappling with difficult passages on this *oikonomia* of Church-building from Theodore the Studite, or with his source, St. Basil the Great, he was looking at the

quotes which I have already mentioned above. Thus, as he writes, echoing in the second sentence the just-quoted instance from *Patrologia Graeca* 31: 1384: "Basil the Great says: if the abbot [in Russian—*nastoiatel'*] carries our God's legislation with precision, he is nothing less than someone with the persona [in Russian—*litse*, a Russian term for a face and a person] of our Lord, while preeminent brothers under him carefully imitate the life of the Apostles and the Lord. And as He assembled the chorus [*lik*, Russian word for Greek *choros*] of 12 disciples, 12 preeminent and senior brothers have been selected so that they carefully imitated the life of the Apostles and the Lord. In the place of Lord Christ, they have the persona [*litse*] of the abbot, and in the place of the 12 Apostles they have chosen 12 brothers preeminent in worthiness and intelligence."<sup>27</sup> There are two links with the iconic mechanisms discussed in the previous section of this article. First, we have a sudden burst of homonymy in the midst of Joseph's argumentation. Indeed, he implies that Christ has made Himself into a *lik* (Greek—*choros*, a choir) of disciples, and when after His death they constituted His Church, it became the body, the face or persona of which (*litse* or *lik* in the sense of Greek *prosopon*) was Christ himself. Every virtuous monastery can try repeating this feat. Now, what is baffling here is neither the intricacies of the dogmatic ecclesiology, nor the *oikonomia* of the visible Church, but the fact that the same Russian word, *lik*, might translate both *prosopon* and *choros* almost in one sentence. Contemporary Russian linguists vehemently assert: these two instances of *lik* are clear cases of homonymy, since the meanings are so radically distant, and dictionaries register that the word *lik* in the sense of *litse* (face, person) appeared only after the fourteenth century, while *lik* as "chorus" or "dance" has existed since the eleventh.

But is homonymy between these words just a strange coincidence? So far, I have stressed only the Aristotelian homonymy between a man and his image, or the icon-defenders' homonymy between a prototype (Christ) and an icon. Here, it seems, we have a case of radically dissimilar phenomena called by the same word. But are they so dissimilar? To what extent are the persona and the face of the Church, on the one hand, and its body, which is a choir or another form of a venerating assemblage of true believers like monks or apostles, on the other, radically dissimilar and non-related? Cannot we start thinking of their homonymy on the model of the icon, but applied to a group: the body of a group and the face/persona of a group have the same name, but do not partake in one another, and this face/persona always points to an ever retreating or disappearing reality of the group body?

The second link with iconic mechanisms is a clear demonstration of how Joseph kills the idea of the iso-doxia, the equi-gloriousness of the brethren. As I already mentioned, his statute of monastery life, which became dominant in Russia from the sixteenth century, had a decisive innovation in that it demanded the establishment in the cloister of the novel positions of "bigger" or "preeminent brothers," who would help the abbot in the constant and ubiquitous discipline of the brethren. These bigger brothers in their very name sound painfully familiar to a modern-day reader; they were supposed to be the most decisive pillars of mutual surveillance that would prop up the saintly cohesion of the monastery. Joseph had to stretch the lines of the statutes of St. Theodore and St. Athanasius to claim that they also demanded the existence

of at least 12 bigger brothers; to fortify his novel argument he had to appeal to the 12 Apostles as an analogy, in the example I quoted above; and then, fearing a rebuke for such innovations, he went into a lengthy polemic with an imaginary enemy who would claim "There is no need for so many council brothers."<sup>28</sup>

Unleashing the picky and minute terror of small righteous bosses was one of the secrets of the Russian Revolution, which resembles Joseph's injunctions, as I have tried to argue elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> Not one Big Brother, but a zillion smaller, but still "preeminent," "council," or "bigger" (all of these terms Joseph used as synonyms) brothers were responsible for turning a dream into a nightmare. Nevertheless, Joseph's innovation, which had such horrible success in Russian history, is based on a willful reading of bigger brothers into the texts of St. Theodore and St. Basil the Great. For example, take a look again at the quote from Basil: one can see that all the monks are imitating the Apostles, and not only the 12 carefully selected bigger brothers. By contrast, when the abbot starts relying on privileged helpers in mutual surveillance to enforce piety, the iconic mechanisms of the equi-distance and equi-gloriousness of monks disappear. Rotation is thwarted; the prevalence of proto-bureaucracy and small oligarchic councils is rampant.

St. Joseph not only stressed the role of preeminent or bigger brothers, which we do not find in St. Basil and St. Theodore without the risk of distorting their texts, but he also limited the conception of the abbot to governance and control, as if he were just the head of a cloister and nothing else. However, even the lines of St. Basil that Joseph was quoting offer other conceptualizations of this role. For example, chapter 22 of Basil's *Ascetical Constitutions* says about the role of an abbot that he "is nothing else than the one in whom the person of the Savior is contained [*o tou Soteros epekhon prosopon* in Greek, *personam Servatores sustinet* in Latin], who has become a mediator between God and people, and who does holy deeds [in Greek—*hierogeron*] in front of God for the salvation of those who are obedient to Him."<sup>30</sup> The end of this quote presents an element ignored by Joseph—the mediation that an abbot (or, for our purposes, another type of a non-representative delegate of a group) performs in front of divinity, facing it and shielding the group, i.e. substituting for the group, but acting for its good and salvation. In the final section let us consider this early Christian conception further. Perhaps it could clarify for us the role of an iconic citizen when s/he acts for the group.

### Standing in front of, rather than sitting in front of or presiding over a group

The relevant term for the abbot in the citation just quoted is *kathegoumenos* in Greek. Other terms for the bishop or abbot who is the head of the cloister, which we find in St. Basil, Theodore the Studite, and other early Christian authors are *episkopos* (which later developed into the English word "bishop") and *proistamenos*. The last term is still the official title of the head of the Russian Orthodox Church. In Russian



it sounds as *predstoiatel'*, which distinguishes it from the mere head of a monastery—*nastoiatel'*, with both terms produced by adding different prefixes to the same Russian root verb *stoiat'*, “to stand.” Given the differences in prefixes, the contrast between the two could be rendered for an English-speaking reader as the difference between a “pre-stander” and an “over-stander.” But instead of analyzing these unreliable and perhaps misleading terms, let us closely consider the important differences between the original Greek words.

First, both *hegoumenos* and *proistamenos* are sometimes translated in Patristic literature as “leaders,” i.e. those who lead the crowd and who are first on the way. But the first term is derived from the Greek verb *hegeomai*, meaning “to lead the way,”<sup>31</sup> while the second comes from the verb *proistemi*, “to set before or in front” or “to put oneself before or in front.” Standing in front is not necessarily linked to leading, so *proistamenos* is more of a front-stander than a leader. Second, the verb *proistemi* is frequently used also in a derivative sense of “to stand over,” which leads to an interpretation of *proistamenos* as a governor, the head of a congregation, similar to *episkopos*, coming from *epi-* and *-skopos*, and meaning “an overlooker” or “an overseer.”

Here, however, one should stress an important difference between these last two Greek terms. *Proistamenos* as a term, similar in its structure to the term *prostates* (coming from the same root and also meaning “standing in front”—we find this word frequently used in Aristotle’s *Athenaion Politeia*, for example, for leaders of the *demos*) can be contrasted with *epistates*, the term also sometimes used to designate the head of an assembly or a household. The prefix *epi-* in this last term is the same as in *epi-skopos*, thus they both are above and over, overseeing and controlling, rather than next to and in front of a group. In the dictionaries one learns that only *epistates* is used with inanimate objects (in the genitive clause): in contrast to *prostates*, who deals with the people, *epistates* deals with goods and property also. And John Chrysostom even claims that a man is an *epistates* of a woman.<sup>32</sup> Thus, *proistamenos*, in contrast to *episkopos*, is next to the people, in front of them, and not over them or overtly concerned with controlling them and governing goods and property.<sup>33</sup>

Why does he stand in front? Two immediate interpretations come to mind. He is in front because of a higher social status, and thus here *prostates-proistamenos* recalls *proedros*, “the one sitting in front,” from which the concepts of presiding and president later developed. *Proedria* refers to some privileged places, i.e. seats in the front rows during public games or in a Greek theater; but the root verb is “to sit,” rather than “to stand.” Both terms thus reflect a privileged status, but the first one is about pre-standing or standing in front, so to speak, while the second one is about pre-sitting or sitting in front.<sup>34</sup> The second interpretation, however, would describe the position “in front” as the position of a mediator, an intercessor, and thus a defender or an advocate—rather than a superior. A *proistamenos* could thus be a defender or caretaker of the group. In some cases it could be its replacement, offering him/herself instead of the group in front of a powerful menace.

Most Biblical commentary, of course, interprets *proistamenos* as “a ruler” or “a leader,” relying on the Apostle Paul’s use of the term in Rom. 12.8, as well as on I Thess. 5.12–13 and I Tim. 3.1, 5. This interpretation was supported by standard

translations of the Bible into vernacular languages (see, e.g. the King James and the Louis Segond versions) and was, perhaps, reinforced by Calvin’s defense of presbyterianism (the recommended rule of a congregation by the elders, not by a priest) in his *Institutes of Christian Religion* IV, xx: 4, when he stressed his view of Rom. 12.8 thus: “This is clearly taught by Paul, when he enumerates governments (*o proistamenos*) among the gifts of God, which [...] ought to be employed by the servants of Christ [...] He is properly speaking of the council of the elders who were appointed in the primitive church to preside over the regulation of the public discipline.”<sup>35</sup> We can find an equation of *proistamenos* with the task of government not only in Western Christianity, but in Orthodox theology as well, e.g. in Schmemann,<sup>36</sup> who interprets this Greek term as equivalent to *kyberneseis*, found in I Cor. 12.28, i.e. “governing.”

However, there are numerous authors who stress the need to translate *proistamenos*, the present-medio-passive participle of the verb *proistemi*, in relation with the noun *prostates*, and thus see in *proistamenos* a caretaker and a “patron,” in the sense of the one who protects the interests of the socially vulnerable.<sup>37</sup> The most astute commentators on the historical context of Pauline theology point to the fact that the “welfare service” of the early church included three ministries—distributing food and clothing, giving financial aid, and “championing the cause of those who had no one to speak and act for them,” with *proistamenos* being the name of this third ministry, to which Paul allegedly referred in Rom. 12.8.<sup>38</sup> Such a defender, advocate, caretaker does not stand over, but stands in front, to submit petitions or articulate demands and give a voice to the heretofore silent group. At the least, such an interpretation would explain the need for a separate word *proistamenos* to be kept as the title of a key Church office (in Russian—*predstoiatel'*), in contrast to *nastoiatel'* (Greek *epi-skopos*, meaning “overseer,” thus “bishop”) and *predsedatel'* (Greek *proedros*, meaning “the one who presides,” “president,” “chairman”).

We can now notice that this notion of *proistamenos* as a front-standing intercessor fits the role of the leader of a cloister or congregation that was articulated in the last quote from St. Basil we have been considering: “a mediator between God and people, [...] who does holy deeds in front of God for the salvation of those who are obedient to Him.” Could it be, then, that a leader is a front-stander, interceding between the overwhelming power of God and a group, rather than an over-looker or an over-seer? Could it be that a leader is thus a front-stander to take the first blow and God’s wrath, if it happens, and not a front-sitter, to get the best views from a privileged seat?

Given this hypothesis, let us get back to the three features of an iconic citizen, formulated above, in the light of what happens to these features when an iconic citizen takes the role of a *proistamenos*, a temporary intercessor and mediator for the group, offering him/herself first for the incoming blow.

First, an iconic front-stander still points to an ever-retreating reality of the group, but s/he has to have more courage than other members of the group, access to which s/he allegedly sets into motion. S/he stands in for the group, s/he takes the place of the group, but the problem is that this group is not there. Thus s/he can be crushed for nothing, it would seem to many, since s/he does not stand for any real group, this group being impossible to touch or to hold upon with other senses.

Second, an iconic front-stander starts to intercede for a group, offering him/herself as a shield, an agent that should first receive an external blow instead of the group, suffer for their sins or fulfill their duties, but may end up as a mediator between two overwhelming forces—the one of external power, in front of which s/he intercedes on behalf of an ever-retreating group, and another one—the power of the group itself. In other words, if the iconic front-stander is *artful* enough to invoke in observers a sense of the overflowing power of the empirically non-observed and non-observable group, this higher experience that demands prostration and awe moves these observers to make wonders. If s/he fails, s/he gets crushed or proclaimed insane or inept; if s/he succeeds—a very rare event indeed—then you have one overwhelming power suddenly facing another.

Third, an iconic front-stander is homonymic with the group on behalf of which s/he intercedes in the face of an overwhelming external power. Here, however, lies the real mystery of proper naming. Only a proper, not a generic, name, will make a group proper to itself, will make its proper existence evident and obvious, even if non-sensory. I have already called for a study of the politics of naming by proper names. But perhaps here political theory ends, and art begins.

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## Notes

- \* A first draft of this text was first presented at a seminar of *Groupe de sociologie politique et morale* at EHESS, Paris, on January 13, 2005. I should like to thank Luc



- Boltanski, Laurent Thevenot, Marie-José Mondzain, and Cyril Lemieux for a most productive discussion there. But it was exchanges with Alexei Chernyakov, Artem Magun, and Dmitrii Vilensky during the UNUM conference that made me want to perfect and finish this piece—I am grateful to them all. I should thank Boris Maslov in particular for his help in the study of Patristic terminology. The last sections were written against the background of the December 2011 rallies in Russia, hence they should be eventually rewritten in calmer times, perhaps.
- 1 Quoted in Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (University of California Press, 1967), 61. Of course, Pitkin stresses that this is only one of the key aspects of representing as “standing for,” another being the fact the representation substitutes for something absent. Thus a symbol, not resembling the original at all, could serve as a representation in certain situations. She calls this second aspect “symbolic representation” in contrast to the first, “descriptive representation.” The other two dominant views on political representation treat it as an activity, but either formalistically (a representative is a formally authorized agent) or substantially, as “acting for the represented” in their true interests. Edmund Burke offers a good example of this mandate/independence controversy as Pitkin calls it: a representative should not only “stand for” his constituency, but also “act for” it. This argument implies that a delegate should act in the interests of the electorate even if the electorate does not understand its own interests—hence a representative is more than just a mirror image. (Pitkin, Chapters 2–7).
  - 2 This “Paris School” of Russian émigré theology of the icon has become subject recently to a very interesting criticism coming from practicing Russian icon painters, who assiduously enumerate its mistakes and stretchings. See Irina Gorbunova-Lomax, *Ikona: pravda i vymysly* [The Icon: Truth and Fantasies] (Statis, 2007).
  - 3 Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), Chapters 1–2
  - 4 Marie-José Mondzain, *Image, icône, économie: Les Sources byzantines de l’imaginaire contemporain* (Seuil, 1996). A translation of this book into English was done by Stanford University Press in 2005, but relevant sections of it were unavailable at Google Books at the time of writing this text, hence I quote from the original French edition.
  - 5 The ultimate Russian authority writing now on the theology of the Iconoclasts and the Iconodules, Vladimir Baranov, though agreeing with the centrality of *pros ti* argument, would disagree with Mondzain’s emphasis on the complete non-presence of Christ in the icon. For example, in his letters (esp. 528), the Studite claims that Christ’s *hypostasis* is present in the icon (V. M. Lurie, *Istoria vizantiiskoi filosofii. Formativnyi period* [History of Byzantine Philosophy: The Formative Period] (Axioma, 2006), 484), while the word “character” that the Iconodules used after the first treatises of John of Damascus to describe which features of Christ entered the icon, was coming from the Greek verb meaning “to engrave,” “to make a mark,” and reflected the common understanding: icons are receptacles of divine *energeia* (Lurie, 431, 435). Also see Vladimir Baranov, *The Theology of Byzantine Iconoclasm (726–843): A Study in Theological Method*, unpublished PhD dissertation (Central European University, Medieval Studies Department, 2002); Vladimir Baranov, “The Second Commandment and ‘True Worship’ in the Iconoclastic Controversy,” in Andre Lemaire (ed.) *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 133: Congress Volume, Ljubljana, 2007 (Brill, 2010).
  - 6 Quoted in Miguel Tamen, *Friends of Interpretable Objects* (Harvard University Press, 2001), 43
  - 7 Mondzain, 123.
  - 8 In the translation of Aristotle 6a36–6b2 by Edghill we read: “Those things are called relative, which, being either said to be of something else or related to something else, are explained by reference to that other thing.”
  - 9 Mondzain, 117.
  - 10 Mondzain, 126.
  - 11 Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Harvard University Press 1991), 206.
  - 12 Jacques Derrida, “Sending: On Representation,” *Social Research*, Summer 1982.
  - 13 Walter Benjamin, “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man,” in Benjamin, *One-Way Street, and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New Left Books, 1979).
  - 14 David M. Goldfrank (ed.) *The Monastic Rule of Iosif Volotsky* (Cistercian Publications, 2000), 62–3, 66; his other main influences were the Jerusalem statute, introduced in Russia in late fourteenth century and originating from the monastery of St. Sabas, and two *typica* (statutes), of St. Athanasius of Mt. Athos and from the *Pandects* of Nikon of the Black Mountain, a Syrian monk, who is little known outside of Russia.
  - 15 Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (University of California Press, 1999), 117–22.
  - 16 Goldfrank, *The Monastic Rule of Iosif Volotsky*, 79. Some Byzantine monasteries elected bishops by drawing lots (Alexander Kazhdan, “Vizantiiskii monastyr’ XI–XII v. kak sotsialnaia gruppa [A Byzantine Monastery of the XI–XII Centuries as a Social Group],” *Vizantiiskii vremennik* [Byzantine Chronicle, Moscow, USSR Academy of Sciences], vol. 31. 1971, 66–7, and fn. 146).
  - 17 See Theodore’s *vita* in Theodore the Studite, *Tvoreniia otsa nashego i ispovednika Feodora Studita* [Works of the Our Father and Confessor Theodore the Studite] (St. Petersburg, 1907), vol. 1., 20; PG 99: 1486.
  - 18 Theodore the Studite, “Testament,” in J. Thomas and A. C. Hero (eds) *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents* (Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), vol. I. 77, PG 99: 1818.
  - 19 Theodore 1907, 951.
  - 20 Theodore 1907, LXXXVIII, 458.
  - 21 Theodore 1907, 126, PG 99: 340.
  - 22 Vassily Velikii [Basil the Great], *Tvoreniia* [Operae], vol. 5: *O podvizhnichestve* [On Ascetics]. (Sergiev Posad. 1892), 391; PG 31: 1386A.
  - 23 Thus, John of Damascus writes of St. Artemius, the martyr who was crushed with huge boulders: “the human form has vanished. He is naked, his bones are crushed, his members disjointed. One could see in bare daylight the economy of his human nature [Greek—*ton oikonomian tis andropinis physeos*]” (trans. in Tamen, 26; original—S. *Artemii Passio*, PG 96: 1309A).
  - 24 Vassily 1892, 391; PG 31: 1386A.
  - 25 Indeed, as we remember from Theodore’s exposition, each monk has a distinct function—one is an ear, another an eye, etc., but all are equi-glorious with each other (similar to icons in their access to an ever retreating God, if we invoke Mondzain once again).
  - 26 Vassily 1892, 390; PG 31: 1384 B-C.
  - 27 Joseph Volotsky, “Dukhovnaia gramota prepodobnogo Iosifa” [A Spiritual Testament of St. Joseph], *Velikie minei chetii* [Grand Church Reading Books, Assembled

- by Metropolitan Makarius], 1–13 sentiabria (St. Petersburg, 1868), column 583; Goldfrank, 266, translation slightly changed.
- 28 Goldfrank, 265–7.
- 29 Kharkhordin, op. cit.
- 30 Vassily 1892: 410; PG 31, 1408D-1409A.
- 31 The Greek word *hegemonia* also comes from the same root verb.
- 32 John Chrysostom, *Orations* 30.5.
- 33 The exposition in this section would have been impossible without the invaluable help of Boris Maslov, who had first pointed me to many of the relevant contrasts between the Greek terms. Possible mistakes in conclusions or in accurately rendering the details of these contrasts are all mine, of course.
- 34 Tertullian adapted these two terms to Latin, rendering *proistamenos* as *praepositus* and using the verb *praesidere* for its counterpart term, relying here on the root “sit” rather than “stand.” The second term after him could apply to translate the Greek term for an abbot—*hegoumenos*—as well, but it came straight from the language of Roman provincial government and was not used to describe church offices heretofore. Some commentators thus see *praepositus* as an essentially ecclesiastical term, opposed to secular *praesidens*, “president” or “chairman” (David Rankin, *Tertullian and the Church* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 154–5).
- 35 Quoted in Eric Voegelin, *Religion and the Rise of Modernity* (The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 23) (University of Missouri Press, 1998), 48.
- 36 Alexander Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission. Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 168.
- 37 See, e.g. Efrain Agosto, “Paul and Commendation”, in J. Paul Sampley (ed.) *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook* (Trinity Press, 2003), 112–13, 131; Daniel J. Harrington, *The Church According to the New Testament. What the Wisdom and Witness of Early Christianity Teach Us Today* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 63; Ben Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Eerdmans, 2006), 160.
- 38 James Dunn, D. G., *Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Eerdmans, 1998), 555.

## Drawing Lots in Politics

### The One, the Few, and the Many

Yves Sintomer

In 1439, the humanist Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444), Chancellor of the Florentine Republic and doubtless the most celebrated European intellectual of his time, published a short treatise in Greek: *On the Florentine Constitution*.<sup>1</sup> Florence was at the height of its splendor and power: during this period, it had seen the invention of perspective in art; it had also witnessed the development of new techniques in textile manufacturing and banking and, most important for our purpose, the rise of civic humanism. In this essay, Bruni positively valued Florence, in an Aristotelian vein, as a mixed constitution. The social composition of its citizenry, he claims, results from two exclusion principles: noble families (the magnates) are excluded from the most important offices (this is the anti-aristocratic principle), and manual workers are excluded from political life (this is the anti-democratic principle). Three other main elements sustain the democratic dimension: the ideal of liberty (*vivere libero, vivere civile, vivere politico*) is at the core of its institutions and political system; offices are held for short-term periods, usually two to four months, including the most important of them, the *Signoria*; those who hold the offices are chosen through random selection (*tratta*). The executive, the legislative councils, and part of the judiciary are chosen in this manner.<sup>2</sup>

On December 11, in 2004, after nearly 12 months of deliberation, a Citizen Assembly, selected by lot from the citizens of British Columbia in Canada, presented its *Final Report on Electoral Change* to the B.C. Legislature. It proposed to change the electoral system by introducing more proportionality (replacing the existing electoral system, the so-called First-Past-the-Post, with a new Single-Transferable Vote system).<sup>3</sup> This recommendation was then put to the electorate-at-large in a referendum held concurrently with the 2005 provincial election. Gordon Gibson, the creator of British Columbia’s Citizen Assembly and councilor of the Prime Minister, justified the initiative in the following manner:

We are [...] adding new elements to both representative and direct democracy. These new elements differ in detail but all share one thing in common. They add to