Concluding Reflections on Mapping the Una Sancta. An Orthodox-Catholic Ecclesiology Today

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The Orthodox-Catholic schism is an evident breakdown in the map of the *Una Sancta*. Understanding its causes, so that reconcile the separated churches unifying them in just one body, is a matter for mostly historical, theological, ecclesiological inquiries. What might the philosopher of language contribute to this topic? Almost nothing if he remains within standard academic boundaries; something more perhaps if he is willing to step outside of such limits and engage in some experimentation. This is what happens in the present paper. For instance, Lacan's optical scheme (the so-called 'mirror-stage') might be a good metaphor to start by. Schisms could be accordingly considered as a special class of events in a given form of life. My thesis is that both in the life of every man and in the life of a community of men, the birth of the rational Subject is achieved by means of schism-events. Through the Catholic-Orthodox schism, new forms of subjectivity emerged as the splitting point of the ecclesial Signifier. If this is the case, the emergence of a split might have something to do with some mirroring phenomena capable of perturbing the reciprocity of the gaze in the accounted ecclesial forms of life. In my analysis a special role—and a theoretical differentiation—is given to the mirrored content of this gaze, now taking the form of an *Image* and now of an *Icon*.

As a scholar of the philosophy of language, I got to the point where, after listening to each of your competent talks, I would be tempted to dismiss my concluding reflections and say 'goodbye'. The reason is that, as represented by the papers offered in this conference, the obstacles to ecclesial unity seem to involve contingent, historical, theological-philosophical, linguistic and ecclesiological, or political notions, rather than reasons *stricto sensu* amenable to the usual notions of a standard philosophy of language. Of course, philosophy of language is included in many of the topics treated here; and this occurs because most theological controversies are based on so-called *tacit knowledge*, whose nature is a matter for philosophical discussions about how language is used both by people in their everyday life and by philosophers in their speculations about the nature and essence of the Church. Moreover, your

papers offer in a very ad hoc way some intriguing arguments to the philosopher of language.

Unlike you, however, most of the analytical philosophers I have met in my life dismiss Christian themes, thinking of them as irrelevant for a properly philosophical recognition of a theory of meaning or a theory of truth.[1] In other words, I have yet to hear of a 'Fregean' ecclesiology, nor I have I met any 'linguistic turn'-oriented philosopher especially devoted to the Christian (ecclesiological, liturgical, ontological) ways of building theories of truth and predication.[2] The atheistic trend in philosophical discussions is of grave concern because it prevents scholars from seeing the connection between semantics and the ontology of language at work. It is when logico-semantical accountability is at its lowest that the question about ontological commitments is key. No matter whether one is a believer or not, the statements 'God is one substance in three persons' and 'The Church is a living body' are very difficult to address and should be taken seriously.[3] These few considerations should persuade me to renounce my task; however, on the contrary, the love and devotion I have for the Church helps me to overcome my fear of failure and propose my reflections as follows.

I will introduce a path seemingly far away from yours. Namely, I shall suggest that some conceptual difficulties raised through our present discussions point to the ways in which languages were/are tacitly oriented by some transcendental judgement or assumption. My question is: 'What semantical premises made the Orthodox/Catholic division possible and so long-lasting?' An exhaustive presentation of this topic would require an entire symposium. I will deal with just one point: the role of images and icons in the Orthodox/Catholic differentiation. Though presumed to be different from one another, images and icons will be taken here as *dispositives* — i.e., as configurations of practices allowing or inhibiting the *shifting* of the communicative actors.

[1] I argued against this view in M. La Matina, 'Does Homily work as a Theory of Truth?', (*Scrinium. Journal of Patrology and Critical Hagiography* 11 [2015]: 261–280) where an ancestor of the Tarsky-style theory of truth is recognized in the original structure of the Synagogue proclamation (Torah/Neviim plus Derasha) as well in the Christian stages of the Scripture proclamation (Written texts plus Homily);

[2] Of course, there are many important philosophers who work to reconcile the tenets of Christendom with the reasons of the philosophical language-oriented theories. In addition to the theologians and the philosophers currently attending the Syros Conference, I have read with great appreciation the works by Johannes Zachhuber, Mark Edwards, Giulio Maspero, Peter Th. Geach, Elisabeth Anscombe, Markus Vinzent, and especially the Greek theologian and philosopher Christos Yannaras, whose books have inspired my present work.

[3] Contrary to this trend is, among others, the movement called 'Radical Orthodoxy'. It was founded by John Milbank and other Christian theologians and philosophers in 1997. Among the theses promoted there is the following one: '[the movement of Radical Orthodoxy] denies that there is a sharp division between reason and faith or reason and revelation, and regards any such notion as a modern deviation from earlier views. It believes that human nature can only be fully understood with reference to our supernatural destiny, and human knowledge with reference to divine illumination'. For a largely argumented exposition of the main theses defended by the Radical Orthodoxy movement see J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

Schism and Divisions: how many churches?

A very frequent comment by the speakers of the present Conference was as follows: 'Yes, we agree there was a schism, but at present we neither are substantially divided nor formally united'. The emphasis was mostly placed on removing the oxymoron of *divided communion*. A shortcut response could consist in taking 'division' as a twofold term: one could say that there are absolute divisions (*divisions-between*) and relative divisions (*divisions-among*). *Divisions-between* usually result in the absence of any relationships: and this is not the case for us. Unlikely, *divisions among* stem from the acknowledgement of a common ground and only concern irreconcilable forms *of life*.

If the latter should be the case, then it would mean that schisms are sophisticated forms of unity. Apart the paradoxical *enthymema*, this very general premise can serve to introduce the expression that could offer the philosopher a theoretical hook: the notion of *form of life* (*εἶδος* or *μορφὴ τοῦ βίου*). On the one hand, this expression reminds one of some very crucial aspects of the modern philosophy of language. Think of the *Lebensformen* theorized by late Wittgenstein[4] or the similar expression ('forms-of-life') by the contemporary philosopher Giorgio Agamben,[5] who has nurtured interest in the forms-of-life (with the hyphens) in his project. On the other hand, it is to be stressed that the locution '*εἶδος* or *μορφὴ τοῦ βίου*' (usually translated as *Lebensform*) is a common one in the philosophies of the imperial and late antique ages.[6]

The schism as the stage of the mirror.

Divisions among Christians, we were saying, are *oxymoron-shaped* forms of life. But are they to be taken as troubles in a relation? Or, on the contrary, as segments of a relation? Are they pathologies? Or, so to say, physiological seasons where a body continues to exist, say, as a substance *ἐν δυνάμει*? Could such discontinuities happen as mere accidents in a structure? Or rather can we recognize in them the features of a *structural lag*—according to the expression by Ogburn[7]—belonging since its origins to the evolution of whatever relation among sensitive beings? In our case, could a schism be a meaningful event rather than a nonsensical accident? Sure, our schism asks to be heard. Perhaps it conceals a sense, a perspective for a new interpretation of

[4] See L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchingen / Philosophical Investigations*, the German Text with English translation by G.E.M. Anscombe and P.M.S. Hacker and J. Schulte, 4th revised Edition (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009; ed. orig. 1953).

[5] See G. Agamben, *The Use of Bodies — Homo Sacer IV, 2*, trans. by Adam Kotsko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

[6] See, for example, Epictetus. *Discourses, Books 3–4. Fragments. The Encheiridion.*Translated byW.A. Oldfather. *Loeb Classical Library* 218 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928).

[7] W.F. Ogburn, 'Cultural Lag as Theory', *Sociology and Social Research*, January–February (1957): 167–174.

the dividing ways of life. By using Gregory of Nyssa's terminology, could we exclude that it is to be read rather as *τυπικῶς* than as *ἱστορικῶς*?[8]

Towards an archaeological investigation of the Una Sancta

If we accept provocations like these, then we should integrate the historical perspective by a new philosophical framework. We propose to term this approach an *archaeology of the ecclesial forms of life*. The locution 'archaeology' was used by Foucault[9] to indicate any retrospective search for *the conditions of possibility* of a given phenomenon. In this sense, searching for the *ἀρχή* of the schism, or regressing to the *ἀρχή*, must not be understood as finding the missing element of the puzzle. (The idea of a philosophical archaeology goes back to Kant's *Lose Blätter*).[10] On this basis, a philosophical archaeology of the schism can be better understood as the research for the *conditions of possibility* inscribed in the Church since its foundation. By an arduous oxymoron Foucault defined such conditions of possibility as a *historical a priori*. It is my opinion that the word *schism*—often used to indicate the breaking-point or the recursive *process of division*—is better understood if referred to some *historical a priori* manifesting itself from time to time as a structural character of a certain form of life. If this is the case, schism is not to be assumed as a single event, to say as a single beat in a musical work, but rather as the *insurgence-point*[11]

[8] Although the distinction between *τυπικῶς* and *ἱστορικῶς* is theorized by other Greek Church Fathers, it is only since the fourth century that it imposes some relevant semantical consequences in the interpretation of Bible's sentences. The best example of this is, in my opinion, offered by Gregory of Nyssa's writings. See especially the *Life of Moses* (pivotal statements in: I, 6, 5–26 and II, 33, 13–22) and the *Homilies on the Song of Songs* (see Prologus, 6, 1–9, 9 and I, 16,13–17, 12), or the *Homilies on the Beatitudes* (see esp. *IV hom*. 116). Some of my recent papers have been devoted to this: M. La Matina, 'The homiletic turn in Gregory of Nyssa's work. A brief study on "De Vita Moysis" and "In Canticum canticorum"', paper presented at the *XVII International Oxford Patristic Conference* (not yet submitted for publication), where I offered this thesis: 'My paper aims at suggesting that two apparently non-homiletic texts by Gregory (a *βίος* and a treatise written '*ἐν ὁμιλιῶν εἴδει*') are built up on the basis of a unique homiletic pattern. The pattern involves a mimetic use of sentences (the Pauline *typikòs* and its false friend *historikòs*), as well as the so-called *epéktasis* seen as the inexhaustible relationship between 'Ancestor' / 'Pretender' pairs. Homily is better seen as a logical device for updating the truth-conditions of the canonized Scriptural texts. In both *De Vita Moyses* and *In Canticum*, the original homiletic pattern might be envisaged (I will show just one example). Accordingly, if Gregory is fundamentally a homilist, then his message is to be searched not only among the words of his text, but also in the oral contexts of his 'speaker-to-auditory' relationship. The homiletic turn is, in its very sense, the re-turn to homiletics, as the spring of Christian way of life and of the care for our own Fathers'. See also M. La Matina, 'Does Homily work as a Theory of Truth? A Possible Bridge for Patristics and Philosophy of Language', *Scrinium* 11 (2015): 261–280.

[9] I refer here to the two seminal works by M. Foucault, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), and M. Foucault, *L' archeologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

[10] I quote from the critical edition of I. Kant, *Lose Blätter zu den Fortschritten der Metaphysik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Akademie-Ausgabe, III, De Gruyter, 1942).

[11] The notion of 'Insurgence' (*Entstehung*) was elaborated by Friedrich Nietzsche in the field of his famous project focused on the *Genealogie der Moral* and was reelaborated in a historical perspective by the theologian Franz Overbeck (1837–1905) in his framework for the study of the Church Fathers; namely, Overbeck speaks of *Entstehungsgeschichte* in F. Overbeck, *Kirchenlexicon Materialen. Christentum and Kultur*, in *Werke und Nachlass*, VI, I, Hrgb. B. von Reibnitz, (Metzler: Stuttgart-Weimar, 1996). Overbeck's ac-

marking the emergence—form time to time—of the crucial differences at stake. Speaking of an insurgence-point means departing from any evaluative or moral stance which condemns one *μορφὴ τοῦ βίου* and absolves the other. I argue that the insurgence-point of the Church (*Entstehungspunkt*) might have to do with images, taken here in a very general but negative sense. If you agree, I would compare the divide between Orthodox and Catholic forms of life to the division that, according to Lacan, takes place in the life of children around the second year of their life. This division lies in the overlapping of the subject and its image, recognized for the first time in the mirror (see *Fig. 1*).[12]

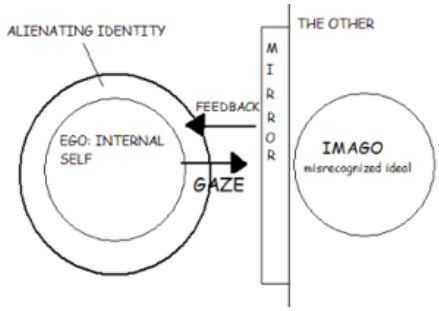

Figure 1: The Mirror-stage (ad hoc revision)

This recognition is a dividing act, for the child does recognize himself in a place where he is not. The mirror succeeds at once in the *creation* of the rational subject and in the *schism* of such a subject from its historical body. Mirroring is equal to somehow projecting such a division in an imaginary (or symbolic) space, where a fiction of unity, a representation of unity shows *the constitutive unaware otherness of any subject in itself*. The child is born *κατ'εἰκόνα*.[13]

This new mode of seeing does allow the child to vindicate its subjective identity, though this latter amounts to accounts for a deception: in other words, specular images are not icons. Let me adapt this model to the the ecclesial context. According to Lacan's theory, the child is faced to the mirror, as in Figure 1. Now, let me show another figure, revised by me in order to represent the West/East mirroring. In our adaptation, there are two opposite Christian priests and a *double-face mirror*

count of *Entstehung*, as well as his distinction between *Urgeschichte* and *Geschichte* have been closely studied by Giorgio Agamben in his essay on 'Philosophical Archaeology', in *Law Critique* 20 (2009): 211–31.

[12] See J. Lacan, 'Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je', in *Écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 93–100. According to the traditional narrative, the theory of the mirror-stage was elaborated in 1936, namely at a Congress held at Marienbad, where Lacan submitted a talk by title 'The Looking-glass Phase'. The talk resulted in a fiasco and this text disappeared under unclear circumstances.

[13] The theological implications of this appearance of the Subject as a specular or image-laden relation (*κατ'εἰκόνα*) were analysed and originally elaborated by the philosopher Christos Yannaras, *Relational Ontology*, translated by N. Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011; or. ed. 2004). In this book, Yannaras focuses on Lacan *Séminaire XI*, and stresses Lacan's concept of mirroring '[t]he appearance of the first signifier in the place of the Other—that is, the progressive insertion of the referentiality of desire into the given linguistic code of the society in which the infant is born—has for the generation of the rational subject', meaning a transition to another mode of existence.

reflecting each one of them as dressing the image of the other (See *Fig. 2*). The *Entstehungpunkt* is the emergence of such a division in the subject space. The mirror works as a camera, showing the negative image (i.e., the fiction of an identity dispositive) instead of the positive face of a real person.

Figure 2: Mirroring as the building up of a schism image of the Self

The power of the mirror and the poverty of the gaze

Now, by applying this model to ecclesial subjectivity, we might recognize the Catholic-Orthodox *division* as (*a*) a necessary bur not sufficient condition for the subject to be born, and (*b*) an invitation and a call for the given subject to engage with an intimate transformation of its gaze. If the divided subject was born through the schismatic power of images, then it is now time for icons to recompose and redeem the gaze of the contenders, *transforming their mirror images into Icons of true communion*. Recognizing Icons means making it possible for us to feel of ourselves as both observing and being observed. Lacan's model, of course, appears as the lay *ἀντίτυπος* of the ecclesial *τύπος*.

'Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror', said St Paul. The deceptive power of mirror images is the very theatre of the schism. After so much time, the two sides of the one Christianity seem not to be aware of this simple semiotics as well as of its consequences. From the point of view of a philosophical archaeology, schism is but our living condition as subjects always taken in this *splitting of gaze*. Jean Paul Sartre, in a famous page,[14] did draw our attention to this gaze that, when it takes me by surprise, makes me feel as if I were under its power: like persons, *things too are looking at us, they are ἀντικείμενα*. It is noticeable that Lacan is not talking about the *real* gaze, but about the 'supposed' gaze that every Subject can imagine coming from some specular image. Schism means that the presence itself of the other is marked by division; by this acknowledgment the human subject arises in a *schismatic communion* of both the real and the imaginary dimensions.

[14] See J. P. Sartre, *Le séminaire : Livre 11, Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, text collected and edited by J. A. Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

Things being in such a way, the *Una Sancta* is a dramatic form for a religious subject because the Church dramatizes the permanent struggle against the schismatic communion in which every one of us was born. If this applies, then a possible task for escaping any interior and exterior schism in the Church lies in transforming the divisive logic of images into the communal semiotics of icons. For a long time, this was a job for painters. Now is the time to reveal this *historical a priori*. Iconic semiotics converts our struggling subjectivity into a free *kenosis* of the subject. Icons are a place where the intrinsically dividing images can be summoned by the ecclesial gaze and thus be heard.

Archaeology and gaze today

At the beginning of the third millennium, both the existential and the ontological consequences of this mirroring show a frightening scenario in which our perspectives for reconciling our gazes are inhibited by the pervasive influence of the internet. In particular, as some theorists argue, the digital man seems to be condemned to live in a 'poverty of gaze'.[15] People interacting through the Internet do not become more proximate to one another; nor they can make anything really distant or close.[16] This happens because of the nature of the network itself. Digital imagery risks neutralizing or nihilating the evangelical distinction between *proximal* and *distal*. How could I continue to live as a Christian if the possibility is denied to me of transforming the distal man I met on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho into *my own proximal*? Which perspectives for an ecumenical dialogue are offered by the pixeled high definition images?

I am moderately critical of the optimism of the Catholic bishops as to the possibility of using the network as a medium for ecumenical purposes. Digital images do not disclose the face of the *πλησίον*, but only replace the real presence by means of an imaginary proxy. The Catholic rehabilitation of the internet must be resisted. One of the most convinced proponents of the network was the philosopher Vílem Flusser,[17] who theorized about both a *future Pentecostal community* and a Messianic prospect as the very end of the present divisions and schisms. Up to now, however, *no Digital Messianism has come* to gather the Christian believers. Rather, the present form of life is, also within the Church, marked by egotism and narcissism.

Turning away from the images must involve rediscovering Icons as dispositives capable of casting a true gaze upon us. *An Icon is a person representing another person by the likeness of another person*. Icons presuppose the personal dimension

[15] I translate here an expression by Byung-Chul Han, *Im Schwarm. Ansichten des Digitalen* (Berlin: Matthes&Seitz, 2013).

[16] An interesting overview on this topic is offered by the philosopher E. Fadda in his book *Troppo lontani, troppo vicini. Elementi di prossemica virtuale* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2018).

[17] See V. Flusser, *Kommunikologie weiter denken: Die Bochumer Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 2007), 251.

and, where this is lacking, icons institute it. This aspect is very far from being a significant topic in the debate among Orthodox and Catholic scholars. Sometimes, in our studies, the West has been opposed to the East as to the modes of knowledge each one developed. The West has developed a form of conceptuality resulting in hard rationalism, and the East elaborated an exclusively mystical path to knowledge. Both these judgments should be emended. One of the protagonists of the debate is the philosopher Christos Yannaras, from whom I quote these few expressions:

> The Greek East understood the image as a means for expressing the truth of persons and things, and spoke an iconic language that signified the disclosure of the person of God and the person of humankind. Image is the signifier of personal relation, the 'logical' disclosure of personal energy as invitation to communion and relation. […] It does not represent a static signified thing or substance, or substitute a reality or fact simply by an example, but discloses a personal energy invitatory to communion and relation, and preserves the character of knowledge as a fact of dynamic relation.[18]

Living under the gaze of Icons

During the early Christian times, icons had symbolic efficacy. They let the human gaze to be turned into a communitarian gaze. The ecclesial body avoided behaving like the Levite and the Priest, who did narcotize the face of the wayfarer they had before them. They did not look at what that man *was*, but at the image that *appeared* to their eyes. They proved to be incapable of converting the image into an icon. Finally, in the lines sketched here, the so-called *σχίσμα* could be better understood as a process of degradation from icons to images. The *σχίσις* of the gaze is the point of insurgence breaking the religious form of life. It fails in transforming images into icons. How could we reverse this condition? I do not know. Anyway, I may show you what a happy end looks like. We find it in the icon of the *κατάβασις*. There perhaps the eschatological recognition is sketched of the divided subject reaching a new stage of mirror (see *Fig. 3* at the end of the present text). I love asking myself: 'Who Adam did see before him?' 'Did he recognize the likeness of the new Adam with the old one?' I think the gaze of Adam discovered in Christ his own identity. There are no images, but just a face-to-face redeemed subjectivity. I think of the *Una Sancta* as the living body where the redemption of the subject, divided at its birth, will be completed thanks to the iconic way of redeeming the gaze. A philosophical archaeology could help to give the divisions a sense. This could be our present task, though we must be aware that only Jesus the Christ—according to the Pauline image—is the

[18] Christos Yannaras, *Person and Eros*, translated by Norman Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2007), 184.

true pacificator, the *μετάτοιχος* capable of reconciling any kind of division in His restored body.

Figure 3: Icon of the Resurrection (Christ, the new Adam facing the old one)