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**SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS
ESCHATOLOGICAL ASPECTS IN ORTHODOX
ICONOGRAPHY**

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SUMMARY

The present doctoral thesis, titled *Fundamental Eschatological Aspects in Orthodox Iconography*, is structured into four chapters, preceded by an introduction.

I chose the theme of eschatology reflected in Orthodox iconography because it has an interdisciplinary character and to highlight the dogmatic teaching reflected in the icon from the perspective of its eschatological meaning, which is indissolubly linked to Christology as its foundation, anthropology, and ecclesiology, inseparable from the liturgical framework where it fulfils its purpose, from the aesthetic side where it reveals the beauty of the Kingdom, from the didactic character where it completes knowledge through sight, and from historicity and art where it reveals its antiquity and material beauty.

Theology of the icon, due to the multitude of approaches until now, seems like a well-trodden path that can hardly be studied further without falling into an irritating repetitiveness. Therefore, we ask ourselves: is it still possible to write something about the icon? Or how dare we approach writing about icons when we have the studies of Father Stăniloae as a testament before us? Is there anything to be found that has not been studied related to icons, or are the research paths so well-known that no one can deviate in

another direction and no new, untrodden path can be discerned? In this multitude of writings, is there still room for another repetition, perhaps in an original form, of what seems well known to all?

If we were to ask such questions, it would be pointless for anyone to write anything about any religious subject. However, it is precisely God's grace and the dynamism of the Church that urge us to seek and uncover new layers of meanings and interpretations, keeping the teachings of the faith unchanged.

The icon encompasses Christological teachings through the very possibility of its depiction, includes anthropology through its image, embodies ecclesiological teachings through its purpose, and incorporates eschatology through its finality. Although it is well known that the icon is a “window to Heaven” and a “door open to the Kingdom,” up until now, little has been said about the eschatological character of the icon from both a dogmatic perspective and the meanings that icons reveal.

Research on eschatology reflected in iconography, in comparison to studies on icons in general, comprises fewer studies and works. When we talk about studies that address the theme of eschatology and iconography jointly, either tangentially or in one or more chapters of some works, very few dedicated studies exist. In their entirety, works that closely analyse the eschatological

message in relation to iconography are limited to only one, with some focus on the liturgical space.

As necessary research methods, we will first use the historical method to elucidate the appearance and evolution of the icon. We will employ the synthetic method and the analysis of icons, aiming to discover their eschatological meanings, reflected in the texts of the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Fathers, and the liturgical texts. Comparison will be used to highlight the differences between the icon and the religious painting to showcase the lack of eschatological meaning in aesthetic religious representation. Besides the analytical and synthetic methods, we will use the problematic approach that seeks to identify to what extent the eschatological dimension of icons is relevant today.

The purpose of this work is to identify and express in the clearest possible form the eschatological dimension of Orthodox icons concerning the path to human deification. We will aim to identify if and how the teaching of faith is expressed in icons eschatologically, along with the Christological, anthropological, ecclesiological, and pneumatological significance. Since aspects of the eschatological nature of the icon have been discussed in part, we will try to develop the search for the eschatological dimension more particularly as it appears in icons. Therefore, we will structure the research in terms of the principles of eschatology and the

themes of the studied icons. Even though the eschatological message is revealed in all icons, we will emphasize, regarding eschatological aspects, those that are evidently belonging to that category and will especially try to identify icons where the message is not evidently eschatological. We emphasize that we do not intend to exhaustively cover the entire theme of iconology but rather as much as possible for greater relevance of the work's conclusions.

In Chapter I, *The Theological Premises of the Icon*, we will first elucidate the meaning of the terminology concerning the etymology of the word icon. We will specify the notion of the icon, its types, and the veneration given to it, starting with the definitions provided by Saint John Damascene and Saint Theodore the Studite, seeking explanatory nuances from saints and theologians who have discussed this topic, especially Father Dumitru Stăniloae.

The subchapter, *The Notion, Foundation, Meaning, and Legitimacy of the Icon*, highlights the theological and dogmatic foundation of the icon in the Orthodox tradition, according to the teachings of the Holy Fathers and the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Father Stăniloae argues that the depiction of the icon is not the result of artistic imagination but has a real basis in the incarnation of Christ, who becomes a visible prototype. Canon 6 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council states that the painting of icons is canonically ordained and respects the tradition of the Church. Paul Evdokimov

distinguishes authentic symbols, which participate in transcendent reality, from signs and allegories without epiphanic presence. The symbol, explains Father Stăniloae, indicates a reality beyond itself, serving as a bridge between the visible world and the divine. This understanding of the symbol supports the revelatory function and the real presence of transcendence in the icon, offering profound spiritual knowledge and communion with the divine.

The subchapter, *The Origin and Development of the Icon*, outlines its beginnings with roots in the symbols of the catacombs, then follows the development of the Byzantine icon, highlighting essential historical and theological events that contributed to its evolution. The sacred icon has existed since the beginning of Christianity and has gone through three stages: signs and symbols, the portrait phase, and the actual image. Initially, the first Christians avoided creating images due to the fear of idolatry and the influence of Jewish spirituality. However, the tradition of painting icons has existed since apostolic times, and holy representations became more common after the Edict of Milan by Saint Constantine, which offered freedom to Christianity. The chapter also discusses the difficulties encountered in the early centuries, such as persecutions and iconoclastic destructions, which limited the number of preserved icons. Constantinople becomes an exceptionally influential cultural and artistic centre, both during the iconoclastic

period and the following era until its fall in 1453. During this period, church painting combines dogmatic principles with chronological ones. The conquest of the capital by the Crusaders in 1204 was a heavy blow, but it was followed by an artistic renaissance under the Paleologos dynasty (1261-1453), known as the "Paleologos Renaissance."

This period was marked by the development of frescoes and the cultivation of a rich and mannerist iconographic style, with Hellenistic and realistic influences. After the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, the Byzantine iconographic tradition survived in the medieval Orthodox states, especially in Mount Athos and Meteora.

In the 20th century, the Byzantine icon experienced a significant revival in Europe, America, and other parts of the world through the restoration of old icons and the growing academic and theological interest. The Orthodox icon also penetrated Western culture, being present in museums and private collections.

Thus, the subchapter highlights the theological and cultural importance of the Byzantine icon, emphasizing its lasting influence and profound significance in the Orthodox tradition.

Next, in the subchapter "The Foundations of the Icon from a Biblical Perspective," we highlight the theological premises of the icon from the standpoint of the Holy Scriptures. The prohibition of

representing God in the Old Testament was related to His indirect sight and the call for the people of Israel to avoid idolatry. Saint John of Damascus explains that the Law was a shadow of future things. Only through the revelation of Christ in the New Testament was the true image of the Kingdom of Heaven opened.

In the New Testament, the revelation is manifested through all senses, not just through words. Saint John the Apostle emphasizes that the unseen became visible through Christ. The incarnation of the Son of God allowed God to be seen and known through the senses.

Christ liberated humanity from idolatry by revealing the true human image of God. Christ is the icon of His divinity, uniting humanity with divinity. The image of Jesus reflects the image of the Father, and the Son exceeds human expectations through this union.

Thus, the icon becomes a necessary expression of Christ's Incarnation, being a window to heaven through which believers see God. Icons are venerated as means to elevate the mind and soul to God, without confusing the image with the idol.

"The Foundations of the Icon from a Patristic Perspective" highlights the theological premises of the icon from a patristic point of view. The fundamental link between image and Christianity lies in the fact that the Church has transmitted the message of the

Gospel through both word and image. The iconoclastic attitude of the past and modern prejudices have created confusion between icon and idol, but the Church has clearly delineated the boundary between the two.

The veneration of icons, established at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in 787, emphasized that honoring them is similar to venerating the Holy Cross and the Holy Gospel. Icons are considered windows to heaven, and veneration directed to them is ultimately directed to the one depicted in them.

The Church views the icon as having a dogmatic, liturgical, and pedagogical significance equal to that of the Holy Scripture. Icons express and transmit the same truths as the Scripture, relying on concrete and precise data, without negating the personality of the iconographer.

Holy Fathers such as Saint John of Damascus, Saint Theodore the Studite, Saint Nicephorus of Constantinople, and Pope Gregory II emphasized that the honor given to icons is directed to the one depicted in them, not to the material from which they are made.

In the last subsection, we will discuss the word and image. Along with the word, the icon is an integral part of the Orthodox Church's message and confession of faith. Both the word and the icon express the presence of Christ incarnate. The fundamental link

between image and Christianity is that, from the beginning, the Church has preached Christianity to the world through both word and image.

Against the iconoclasts who limited themselves to the biblical prohibition (Exodus 20:4-5; Deuteronomy 4:15-16), confusing the icon with an idol, Saint John of Damascus explains the meaning of this prohibition. Confronting Old and New Testament texts, he demonstrates that the Christian image stems precisely from the absence of a direct image in the Old Testament, with the former being the consequence and fulfillment of the latter. His reasoning can be summarized as follows: In the Old Testament, God reveals and discloses Himself to His people only through sounds, that is, through words. He remains unseen, does not appear, and emphasizes the fact that when Israel hears His voice, they do not see any image. Since they had not seen God, they could not represent Him; they could only keep His word in writing as Moses did. The Old Testament law forbade images because they would endanger the purity of worship of the unseen God. The distance dangerously increased because man turned away from the likeness of God from the beginning and sank into dissimilarity¹.

¹ Sfântul Ioan Damaschin, *Cele trei tratate contra iconoclaștilor*, Editura Parohiei Valea Plopului, Prahova, 2000, p. 98-116 și 122-135.

Next, we will try to uncover the meaning, content, and significance of icons in general without delving into specifics about any icon. The fundamental link between image and Christianity is because, from the beginning, the Church has preached Christianity to the world through both word and image.

In Orthodoxy, the icon is a faithful expression of the teachings of the faith and its dogmas. It does not appeal merely to sentiment and artistic sense like religious paintings but primarily to the soul.

The necessity of the icon in the liturgical life of the faithful, which is essentially the life and path to salvation, is due, first and foremost, to the Incarnation of the Son of God and then to the human need for concrete forms to see the Word of the Word. Through the Incarnation, matter became a means for God to express Himself, and humans feel the need to receive the divine message with their entire being, through all channels of access from the external world to the depths of the divine Being. Through the icon, what is expressed through words is revealed to us, because "after Christ was preached at the beginning, through relation, the word about His icon followed. And you will have as demonstrations about Christ's icon all that has been said about Christ Himself."²

² Sfântul Teodor Studitul, *Iisus Hristos prototip al icoanei Sale*, Editura Deisis, Alba Iulia, 1994. p. 81.

Communion with the Son of God, incarnate forever as man and thus entering into an eternal intimate relationship with us, ensures that we become persons for eternity, that we are deified, securing our true, conscious, and complete eternal happiness. The future life, in which we remain eternal as persons, is crucial for the meaning of earthly life because it is not only in the form of an eternally happy life for those who have accepted the full meaning of earthly life in Christ, but also an eternally unhappy life for those who have not accepted this meaning. The eschatological plan, or the eternal life after death, is not, however, only something future because it has begun through and in Christ, who has risen as a man from the dead. And since Christ remains intimately connected with the faithful, or even within them, according to the words of Saint Paul, eternal life has begun as an earnest. "Along with Christ, the end of ages has begun, for these ages have been filled by Christ, who is present in them, with the earnest of eternal life."³

Just as dogmas do not remain solely at the level of reasoning and intellectual knowledge but are concretely lived out in the Christian life, icons do not remain merely at the aesthetic and didactic level. They surpass symbolic limits within the liturgical life. The icon is part of the liturgy dedicated to the divine; it is a

³ Pr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, volumul III, p. 143-144.

means of knowing and uniting with God. The entire Church, with its architecture, frescoes, and mosaics, represents in space what liturgical moments represent in time: the anticipation of the kingdom, participation in the Divine Presence. In the celebration of God, word and image form a whole from which the living meaning and significance of Scripture emanate.

In the second chapter, we will analyze from an eschatological perspective the icons of Christ the Savior, the Imperial Feasts, the icons of the Mother of God, the feasts of the Virgin Mary, and the icons of the Saints. We will also address special icons, important feast icons, and closely analyse those with eschatological content, such as the Pantocrator, the Last Judgment, the Ladder of Heaven, and reproductions of the parables spoken by the Savior.

The meaning and content of the icon emerge from the teaching that the Church has formulated as a response to iconoclasm. The dogmatic foundation of the veneration of icons and the meaning of the liturgical image are mainly revealed in the Liturgy of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, a celebration of the victory of icons and the definitive triumph of the dogma of the divine incarnation.

The Incarnation of the Son of God is not just the restoration of man to his original purity, but also the fulfillment of

what the first Adam could not achieve. By assuming human nature, Christ filled it with glory, making it partake in divine life and forging a path for man to the kingdom of God, the path of deification and transfiguration.

Eschatology is the teaching about the ultimate realities of salvation, namely the establishment of the kingdom of God or the life of the age to come, as the crown of Christ the King's redeeming work, manifested at the end of history, full of glory, to judge the living and the dead (Ephesians 1:20-23; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11). Father Ion Bria warns that "eschatology must not be confused with the 'end of the world' and should not be limited to describing the events accompanying the second coming of Christ, or Parousia: the resurrection of the dead, judgment, heaven and hell. Eschatology refers to a new order of existence, to an ultimate state of transfiguration beyond history, a state that is the object of Christian prayer and hope ... From the Incarnation of the Son, the world is the place of the manifestation of the kingdom of God and of the transfiguration of man, and from Pentecost, the Spirit introduces and maintains the kingdom in history, changing linear, chronological historicity into eschatological, eternal presence. In this sense, history is not only past, 'anamnesis' but also anticipation and real foretaste of eternity. Or rather, history and eschatology

form a single reality in the economy of salvation, which is not confused with this time.”⁴

The icon does not present an ordinary and transient face, but that of a person transfigured by divine grace. It shows the heirs of the Kingdom of God, reflecting their participation in divine life. The icon captures the spiritual reality of the sanctified person, indicating the presence of grace that consumes passions and sanctifies the entire being, both bodily and spiritual. Thus, the icon becomes a visible representation of the person transfigured in the likeness of God.

Furthermore, within the liturgical life, the icon is not just a visual representation of holiness but a means through which divine grace pours upon the faithful, offering them a window into the Kingdom of Heaven and a foretaste of eternity. The content of the icon provides spiritual guidance in Christian life, especially concerning prayer. The icon illustrates the appropriate attitude we should have during prayer, both in relation to God and to our fellow beings. It represents both the path to follow and the means or instrument, being itself a form of prayer, visually revealing the liberation from passions spoken of by the Church Fathers, emphasizing the necessity of asceticism and unceasing prayer as

⁴ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion BRIA, „Eshatologia sau lumea viitoare”, în *Ortodoxia*, anul XLVII, nr. 1-2 ianuarie-iunie, 1995, p. 61.

ways to achieve this spiritual transformation. Thus, it plays an important role in the liturgical and spiritual life of Christians, organically integrating into ecclesial and theological practice. Saint John of Damascus attributes a ritual role to the icon, involving the gesture of veneration, which cannot be dissociated from it and presupposes a certain spiritual state.

The heavenly kingdom and the restored created world are depicted together in the icon as an eschatological unity. All icons are bathed in light, through the golden background, which forms the very essence of the icon, completely replacing the blue firmament. Light, the symbol of holiness, truth, and happiness, constantly emanates from God, from whose grace the saints partake, even in this age and continue to partake in the next, in eternity.

The problem of death, the end of earthly life, the most evident and certain reality in human existence, is unavoidable and undeniable. It is not natural to man, being like a graft, because of sin (Romans 5:12). As the Holy Scripture shows us and as the Holy Fathers tell us, God is not the author of death. By death, we understand the end of earthly life, consisting of the separation of the soul from the body. The continuity between bodily life and the life of the age to come (1 Timothy 4:8) is interrupted by physical, biological death, called sleep, being general for all people. Due to

sin, physical death, the terrifying final hour, has become an imminent and implacable reality. Besides bodily death, there is also another meaning of death, spiritual death, or the death of the soul, namely the cessation of superior earthly life in man. It consists of the separation of man from God, the rupture of communion between man and God. In Christianity, death is taken seriously, but without despair, being a passage from here to God. The Christian prepares for it before it occurs, to attain the eternal happiness of communion with God in Heaven, and when it happens, through the prayers of the Church, this plenitude is even more assured to the departed one.

Death sheds its cloak of inevitable finality through the hope brought by the appearance of Christ, which is the beginning of the end of spiritual death and the meaning of physical death. The icons of the Annunciation, the Nativity of the Savior, the Circumcision, the Meeting of the Lord, and the Baptism of the Lord show us Christ's Incarnation in a special way, containing well-placed elements in iconographic composition, signifying the victory over death through the Crucifixion, the descent into hell, the resurrection of the Lord, and His ascension.

The immortality of the soul, created for eternal life, to dwell in the chamber of light which is Christ, and at the same time for Christ to dwell in it, will be highlighted by analyzing the icons

of the miracles of resurrection performed by the Savior, icons that symbolically express the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and the icon of the Descent into Hell of the Savior.

Regarding the issue of death and its presence in iconography, we will analyse icons and images reflecting original sin as the primary cause of death and the response that comes with the salvation brought by Jesus Christ. We will analyse the icons of the resurrection miracles performed by the Savior Jesus Christ for Lazarus, the young man of Nain, and the daughter of Jairus.

Death and the resurrection miracles performed by the Savior illustrate Christ's divine power to raise the dead, showing that death is not the final word but merely a stage in human existence. The resurrection miracles – the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus – prefigure the universal resurrection at the end of time. These acts emphasize Christ's power over life and death and reaffirm the belief in the reconstitution of bodies at the final resurrection. Physical death is seen as a necessary transition to resurrection, and resurrection in Christ is an eschatological promise of the restoration and renewal of creation.

Next, we will analyse the icons of the Crucifixion of the Lord, the Descent from the Cross, and the Burial in the context of the victory over death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as a pledge of our life in the Kingdom of Heaven. We will analyse the

victory over death and the release of the righteous from hell as an image of the final resurrection in the icon of the Descent into Hell of the Savior Jesus Christ. We will attempt to decipher the raising of the soul to heaven and the image of the resurrection of our soul in the iconography of the Dormition of the Mother of God. The image of the saints lifted to deification and their transfigured image through martyrdom, ascetic life, and confession of faith will be discovered in the icon of the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist.

The icons of the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross, and the Burial profoundly and symbolically reveal the victory over death and evil through Christ's suffering and death. The Descent from the Cross and Burial of Christ are less widespread icons and appear on the Holy Antimensions and Holy Epitaph used in the processions of Good Friday. The icon shows the indissoluble connection between the "Descent" into the tomb and the Descent into Hell, where Christ, descending into Hell, breaks its gates and frees Adam and all the righteous. The presence of the Mother of God, the beloved disciple John, and other figures such as Mary Magdalene and Nicodemus are emphasized, all represented against the background of mountains. The chapter also highlights the archetypal value of the burial, with references to the canonical Gospels and the Orthodox Church tradition, showing profound respect for Christ's body and belief in the resurrection. The

background of the icon features the Cross, symbolizing the purpose of Christ's sacrifice. The chapter concludes that His victory over death and hell is symbolized by the entire tomb or cave, illustrating the resurrection and salvation of all mankind.

The icon of the Resurrection symbolizes the anticipation of the eschatological day and reflects Christ's victory over death. Through His resurrection, Christ abolished the separation between man and God. The Resurrection is seen as the eighth day, full of glory, and is experienced by man in the Church as a foretaste of eternal joy. The iconography shows how Christ lifts Adam from death, symbolizing the raising of all humanity. The encounter between the first and new Adam emphasizes the good news of the resurrection of all the deceased and the return of humanity to life through Christ.

The Dormition of the Mother of God in Orthodox tradition depicts St. Mary lying on a bed, surrounded by the Apostles, while Christ receives her soul. The analogy between the Dormition icon and Christ's Resurrection is emphasized, both suggesting that death is overcome, and that "sleep" is already awakening in God's kingdom. Contrary to Western speculations, it is affirmed that the Mother of God experienced death, but her body did not suffer decay. The Tradition of the Church in Jerusalem mentions that her body was placed in a tomb for three days, and the icon reflects this

reality. Christ raises His Mother to heaven, symbolizing the raising of the souls of the righteous. The icon is considered a model of the souls of the faithful passing to heaven after their sleep. Additionally, the scene with the angel cutting Atonie's hands emphasizes the holiness and divine protection of this moment. The icon testifies that the soul of the Mother of God did not descend into hell and that her body was not subjected to decay. It is transfigured, and the Mother of God knows the fullness of passing from death to life, from time to eternity, before the general resurrection and the Last Judgment.

The representation of this icon shows Saint John the Baptist in various scenes from his life, including preaching repentance and his martyrdom. The icon is a synthesis of several important moments: the sermon by the Jordan, the baptism of repentance, the rebuke of Herod, and his death. The description of the scene "The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist" is based on the account in the Gospel of Mark and the synaxarion text of August 29. The icon emphasizes the victory over death through Christ, showing the saint's body as transfigured and divinized. The death of Saint John is presented as a passage to his mission of proclaiming Christ's coming and resurrection to those in hell.

Further, we will analyse the particular judgment of man in the icons of the Nativity of the Lord, the Presentation of the Lord

as the reception of man into Heaven, and we will try to discover the bridge to Paradise in the icon of the Baptism of the Lord. Then we will discuss the iconography of Jacob's Ladder which illustrates the teaching about the human soul and its spiritual ascent on the path of salvation towards eternal happiness with Christ in paradise. We will address the particular judgment, paradise, and hell by analysing the representation of the parable "The Rich Man and Lazarus."

The Nativity of the Lord Jesus Christ is a feast celebrating the incarnation and re-creation of the world and man, emphasizing the ultimate goal of living happily together with God in Paradise. The iconography of this feast is sourced from the Gospels of Luke and Matthew and is complemented by apocryphal accounts. The traditional Orthodox icon of the Nativity of the Lord highlights the reality of the incarnation of the Son of God and its effects on the world's life, focusing on the divinization of man and the transfiguration of creation. The scene of the Nativity in the cave symbolizes the coming of divine light into the darkness of death for fallen humanity, full of symbols that reflect the passions, death, and resurrection of the Savior. The Nativity of Christ represents the miracle of recreating the world and sanctifying all creation that had previously fallen into sin.

In the icon of the Presentation, the Christ Child is placed in the arms of the elder Simeon, symbolizing the throne of

judgment. Simeon's gesture of receiving Christ in his arms and lifting Him is an image of man responding to the divine call and following Christ on the path of salvation. This path is depicted as a journey towards the Kingdom of Heaven, where Christ, seated on the judgment throne, grants forgiveness and blessing to those who have fulfilled His commandments. Thus, the icon reflects Christ's service as high priest, king, and judge, preparing the human soul for reception into the Temple of Heavenly Jerusalem 40 days after death.

The icon of the Baptism of the Lord highlights man's calling to participate in both worlds, bringing eternity into time and time into eternity. In this vision, Christ's Baptism is seen as a foretaste of the crucifixion and the sacrifice for fulfilling divine justice. The icon emphasizes Christ's role in restoring creation and mankind, achieving what Adam could not, and symbolizes victory over the forces of darkness, the transformation of man and the cosmos through divine grace in an ongoing process of spiritual renewal.

The icon "The Ladder," painted according to the work of Saint John Climacus, symbolizes the spiritual ascent of monks and humans in general, the attacks of demons, and the assistance of angels. Each rung represents a virtue, and at the top of the ladder is Christ, ready to crown the righteous. Various icons depict monks

climbing the ladder, some supported by angels, others pulled down by demons. This ladder is compared to Jacob's dream in the Old Testament. We emphasize that icons do not represent the “aerial tollhouses,” but the spiritual ascent in accordance with Orthodox theology.

Christ's judgment is not separate from the judgment of one's own conscience, and after death, each soul faces the judgment of God. The parable of the merciless rich man illustrates that there is no intermediate place or purifying fire between heaven and hell. After death, the sinner can no longer do anything for their salvation. The degrees of happiness in heaven and condemnation in hell vary according to people's deeds. Spiritual death represents darkness and torment for sinners, while physical death is the liberation for those who resurrect with Christ.

Regarding universal eschatology, the end of the current form of the world in the sense of its transfiguration, and the fulfilment of God's purpose for it to be perfected, we will analyse the advancement of creation towards its final purpose reflected in the icon of the Circumcision of the Lord as a model of the spiritual circumcision of the human heart and as a judgment of the world made by Christ from the temple of heavenly Jerusalem. Then we will discuss the renewal and transfiguration in Christ revealed in the icon of the Transfiguration. In the next subchapter, we will try

to discover the entry of man into the Kingdom of Heavenly Jerusalem, reflected in the icon of the Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem.

We will try to discover the renewed image of the world in the icon of the Resurrection and the appearances of Christ after His Resurrection, together with the Ascension of the Lord as the ascent of man into the Kingdom, and in the icon of the Last Judgment. We will seek the pneumatized character of the renewed world revealed in the icons and the heavenly model of the church with the Heavenly Liturgy centered in Christ Pantocrator, as an eternal dance of prayer of communion of all the saints in the Kingdom of Heaven.

On the eighth day after His birth, the Lord Jesus Christ received circumcision according to the Law of the Old Testament, thus emphasizing His complete humanity. This act marked the removal of physical circumcision and the institution of a spiritual circumcision of the heart.

The eighth day after His Birth symbolizes the connection between eternity and temporality, highlighting the union of eternity with time through the coming of Christ. The icon of the Circumcision, although rarely encountered, is described in the Erminia of Byzantine painting with specific details.

The significance of this day is eschatological, representing the "eighth day of the Kingdom of God" and opening a new perspective for humanity: the dimension of eternity. Through this act, Christ unveils the union of eternity with time, illustrating His incarnation's purpose to transcend spatial-temporal limitations and inaugurate the future age.

Thus, the circumcision of the Lord symbolizes eternity, and through this event, Christ becomes the eighth lawgiver, perfecting the Law through the Holy Spirit and opening the way to the eternal kingdom.

The Transfiguration represents a manifestation of God's desire to offer abundance to the faithful, revealing to them, as much as possible, His glory. The disciples had a foretaste of the kingdom, thus anticipating the trials that were to follow, such as Gethsemane and Golgotha. The divine light seen on Mount Tabor is the same light that purified souls contemplate, which prefigures the reality of eternal goods. The golden background symbolizes the light in icons by, expressing the distance between earthly and heavenly vision.

Through the Transfiguration, the Savior revealed to the disciples a part of His divine glory, preparing them for communion with God and for their destiny in the glory of the Most Holy Trinity. The event is an image and a symbol of the kingdom, an icon of the

transfigured world to come, showing that man is meant to partake in this divine glory.

The Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem holds multiple symbolic and theological meanings. Christ chooses to enter riding on a colt to foreshadow His ascent on the Cross and His glorification. The donkey symbolizes the synagogue, and the colt represents the Gentiles. Iconographic representations accentuate these symbols, depicting children welcoming Christ with palm branches, symbolizing pure and untainted joy.

The prophecies of the Old Testament and the Gospel accounts highlight the connection between the donkey's gentleness and the kingdom of peace inaugurated by Christ. The scene of the Lord weeping for earthly Jerusalem reflects His profound love for humanity and His desire to bring spiritual salvation, not an earthly kingdom.

The liturgical texts of the feast clarify Christ's work as the king of peace and salvation. The readings from Vespers, Matins, and the Divine Liturgy gradually reveal the deep meaning of the entry into Jerusalem and the contrast between the children's joy and the expectations of the Jewish multitude.

Thus, the solemn entry into Jerusalem prefigures the Passion, death, and Resurrection of the Savior, placing them in the context of the Kingdom of God. The heavenly Jerusalem

symbolized by the festive image in icons, and the entire creation will transfigure into a new heaven and a new earth, where humanity will live in perpetual communion with the Lord.

The Lord's Cross offers an essential synthesis of the Gospels and symbolizes the victory over death. The icon of the Crucifixion does not reflect physical suffering but the transfiguration and immortality of Christ's body. The King sleeps on the cross, signifying the offering and receiving of His sacrifice. The cross is considered the Tree of Life, uniting heaven, earth, and hell, and restoring the communication lost through man's fall. Through His death, Christ lifts up Adam and all the righteous, symbolizing the salvation of all humanity. The cross is the barometer of justice and the symbol of final judgment, showing the eighth day of the Kingdom of God.

The icons of the Resurrection, including those of the Descent into Hell, reflect Christ's victory over death and the liberation of the souls of the righteous. They symbolize the removal of the abyss between man and God, uniting humanity with divinity through Christ.

The event of the Resurrection is considered eschatological, showing the inauguration of the eighth day, the day of the future age, symbolizing the transition from earthly time to eternity. The Resurrection of the Lord is celebrated on Sunday, the

day that offers a foretaste of eternal life and reminds us of the continuous presence of the Lord in our lives.

The icon of the Descent into Hell, in which Christ lifts up Adam, symbolizes the salvation of all humanity, inaugurating the day of the future age and offering the gift of eternal life through Christ.

The icon of the Ascension of the Lord illustrates the moment of theophany, showing Christ in ascending glory. Christ is depicted in a mandorla of light, symbolizing the highest heavens and divine grace. Angels and Apostles surround Him, signifying unity and the continuation of His work through the Church.

The Ascension of the Lord is not just a physical ascent but symbolizes the restoration of humanity through Christ. The icon emphasizes the spiritual dimension and the calling of humanity to deification. Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father, remains present in the Church through the Holy Spirit, continuing to guide and share with the faithful until His second coming.

In conclusion, the icon of the Ascension of the Lord reflects the call of all humanity to unite with God and participate in the Trinitarian life, highlighting the importance of this event in the economy of the Church and in liturgical life.

The icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit symbolizes the birth of the Church and its mission to preach the Gospel of Christ.

The Apostles are depicted in an open semicircle, emphasizing the unity and diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and those gathered together symbolizes baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire and their sanctification. The icon of Pentecost reflects Christian eschatology and ecclesiology, linking the historical present to the Kingdom of God, strengthening the unity of believers, and preparing them for eternal life.

The Throne prepared for Judgment is a central element in the composition of the icon of the Last Judgment, placed below the image of Jesus Christ the Judge. It is accompanied by symbolic elements such as the sealed book and images of Adam and Eve, signifying the fulfilment of the prophets and the redemption of humanity. In later compositions, the scales of Judgment and the battle between demons and angels for souls appear, though these are not in accordance with the herminia.

The Apostles are painted on judgment thrones around the image of Jesus Christ, sometimes alongside saintly judges like the prophet Daniel. The Second Coming of Christ is represented by angels blowing trumpets and the resurrection of bodies from earth and sea. The Garden of Eden, distinct colour, is surrounded by towers and a gate, with the Virgin Mary and patriarchs Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob inside. In the centre of the Garden is the Tree of Life, with Christ Emmanuel in its crown.

To the left of the Judge is the Sea of Fire, featuring the Antichrist Dragon, and scenes of the righteous and the sinner's death. The righteous is cared for by angels, while demons take the sinner. The icon of the Last Judgment also includes the scene of the Scales, with triumphant angels and the hand of God holding the scales, protecting the souls of the righteous. Everything is presented within the framework of cosmic love and the omnipotence and love of God.

The dome of the church, considered the keystone of ecclesial space, houses the iconography of the Pantocrator, representing the theological and architectural complexity of Christ. In this icon, Christ is depicted from the waist up, holding an open book with words of comfort and making the gesture of blessing with His free hand.

The eschatological significance of the icon is emphasized by the letters Λ and Ω , symbolizing the eternity and omnipotence of God. The position of the hands and fingers in the gesture of blessing reflects the Christological and Trinitarian theological disputes of Orthodoxy. Christ's garments, a red tunic, and a blue mantle symbolize His two natures - divinity and humanity.

The Pantocrator icon expresses both the human presence of the Incarnate Son and the divine majesty of the Savior, guiding the world towards the Kingdom of Heaven. This eschatological representation emphasizes Christ's presence as Judge and Supreme Authority, linking heaven and earth in a static cosmic vision.

Chapter three will highlight that to understand the meaning of the dogma of venerating icons, it must be seen not only as a support for prayer or an ornament in the Church but also to understand its message and significance for our time, the spiritual testimony it brings from the depths of Orthodoxy, its liturgical framing, a window to the Kingdom, a glimpse of the eighth day, and a vision of the model of deification.

More than ever throughout history, today's society is under the domination of images, whether static or moving, which capture our sight and attention through various means, controllable by the viewer. The visual is present in daily life through a multitude of manifestations, from photography and printed images on different supports to video-TV and cinematographic images and even digital-virtual ones. The spiritual battle is fought at the level of the visual, which through images, whether static or moving, comes to manipulate consciousness due to rapid assimilation by memory, both willingly, consciously, and unwillingly, unconsciously.

Despite this, interest in the icon is waning and there is even a tendency to reject it, more or less consciously, as a result of misinterpreted media coverage but possibly intentionally promoted against not the icon itself but its use in certain environments, such as public institutions, under the mask and pretext of not offending those of other religious beliefs. At the same time, sensitivity towards the icon can be understood today by man's need to have at hand a trans-individual language that opens the way to otherness and offers a justification for the complexity of the reality of which he is also a part. Today society in continuous movement and bustle, the icon represents the very kenosis of the image. The self-emptying of the incarnate Son of God, the Logos, who becomes visible, is the first act of humility that underpins the possibility of the icon. Permeated by this logic, the icon does not claim anything for itself, does not necessarily seek the foreground, and "precisely because the icon does not give itself for itself, but gets rid of its own magical illusions, it can demand veneration - veneration that it does not confiscate but allows to pass through it to the invisible prototype.

We, as humans, need to rediscover the living Christ, as a living and saving Person in His icons, to rediscover the work of Jesus Christ's salvation in our lives, a concrete work and presence of God in our lives. Today's human is lonely and alienated, and the

icon comes as a welcome for them; the living presence of Christ in the icons comes as a response to God's love and as a call to the work of salvation. The icon encourages introspection, awakens us from false illusions, and sets before us the future age towards which we must strive, being a true spiritual guide and a living model for those who love higher, spiritual life and prayer and for those who wish to obtain, not a passing power, but eternal happiness together with Christ and His saints in Heaven.

In the fourth chapter of the work, we will analyse the significance of the eschatological message of the icons in the context of the wooden churches in Arad county, emphasizing that these should not be seen only as religious ornaments but also as windows to the Kingdom of Heaven. Icons serve as visual expressions of divine truth, facilitating spiritual communion between believers and divine prototypes. They encourage introspection and provide a living model of spiritual life, being means of piety and prayer, but also tools for learning and transmitting the faith. Thus, believers can participate in the divine transcendent life through icons, which contributes to the salvation of the human soul and preparation for the Kingdom of God. This chapter emphasizes the importance of rediscovering Christ through icons and reveals how they contribute to reflection on eternal life.

Thus, icons have played an essential role in the Orthodox Christian life in Arad County, encouraging introspection and providing a living model of spiritual life. They are seen as means of piety and prayer, but also as instruments for learning and transmitting the faith. This mystical communion between the one who prays and the figure represented in the icon allows participation in the divine transcendent life.

In essence, the chapter highlights the importance of rediscovering Christ through icons and reveals how they contribute to the salvation of the human soul, reflection on eternal life, and preparation for the Kingdom of God.

The entire place of worship, including its architecture and frescoes, constitutes in space what liturgical moments represent in time, namely the anticipation of the Kingdom of God and participation in heavenly life through sharing in word, image, and culminating in the Eucharist. During the celebration of the divine service, word and image complement each other, thus revealing the profound meaning and living significance of the Gospel.

Finally, we have shown that following the treatment of the subject in the chapters of the work, we have clarified, firstly, eschatological aspects reflected in the icon but also the fundamental dogmas not only Christological but implicitly referring to God one in being and triune in persons, to the Church, to man, to redemption,

through the evident prism of transcendence, as we are presented not with the world here, but the Kingdom of God. In conclusion, after analyzing the icons from the perspective of the eschatological dimension as well as outlining some useful aspects in today's society, we will present future directions of research that will open regarding the eschatological dimension of icons, but also the discovery of dogmas in Orthodox icons.

The Orthodox icon is indispensable in the liturgical space and in defining the identity of the faithful, having an essential function that goes beyond aesthetics, becoming a window to the transcendent and contributing to the spiritual edification of the community. It synthesizes the fundamental dogmas of the Orthodox faith, combining them with historical accuracy and the spiritual aspects of life in the Kingdom of Christ.

In future research, an analysis of other icons is proposed regarding their eschatological meaning and message, focusing on the Royal Feasts, icons of martyr saints, and parables of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the research will continue to explore the answers that the icon can offer in light of technological progress and how they reflect the transfigured image of the contemporary world.

The message of the paintings in the wooden churches of Arad County and the surrounding regions highlights the path to

salvation and should be detailed through the research of each church preserved to this day, all beautifully reflecting the way to eternal happiness in the Kingdom of Heaven.

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