



## ABSENCE OF THOUGHT IN ART: CONTRIBUTIONS OF JEAN LUC MARION

**Francisco Novoa Rojas**

Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Santiago, Chile

fnooa@uahurtado.cl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0451-0599>

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### **Abstract**

**This article wants to deepen into the proposal that Jean Luc Marion offers about the idol in relation to the icon and how it can contribute to artistic thought. For this, we will deepen into the relationship of the idol with the different faces that will try to show themselves as such and then the thought about the Christian icon. In this sense, we will deepen into the Christian aesthetic proposal and the possibility of thinking an art in posteriori, that is, that this surges from an event, extending it and making it more visible.**

**Keywords:** Jean Luc Marion, idol, icon, event, art.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We face a serious and growing crisis of the visible. With the emergence of conceptual art, the way has been opened to different shades of the same dynamic: to abandon, little by little, the visible. To such an extent that works of invisible art have been sold. It is in the face of this problem that we wanted to delve into the thought of Jean Luc Marion in order, from his thoughts on the idol in relation to the icon, to offer a response. It is for this reason that, in the various words that we will express, we will try to define what Jean Luc Marion understands by idol in its relation to the icon - the latter insofar as it is generated by Christianity. This in order to analyse the aesthetic contribution that iconographic thought can give us.

This artistic approach, which many call 'conceptual art', generally based on artefacts, colours and formless shapes, permeates contemporary art museums and has been constantly exposed to criticism. Jean Luc Marion turns against all kinds of conceptual art or, as he calls it, academicism. The first argument he uses to criticise this art is the non-visibility of the *unseen*, as it tells us nothing and exposes the 'concept' as such. Following this, we could say that conceptual art is pre-visual. The production on the part of the artist is not according to what he looks at - at no point does he lose himself in the unseen - but only according to the pre-existing concepts in his own imagination.

The concept is prior to the realisation of the work, which is why it does not make any unseen visible - or, we could even say that it does not make anything visible at all - and provides no more than a definition of the painter himself. If we turn to the definition of the unseen, his critique may become even clearer. The unseen is not properly the invisible, it is what has not yet been made visible. The painter, through his work, exposes what has appeared to him as unseen, that is to say, the painter and his work have a name: visibility of the unseen. Conceptual art, as there is no unseen, but only the expression of a previous idea in the painter's imagination, would not be art in the strict sense of the word. There is no work involved. Work understood as passive synthesis: resisting the gift, as electrical resistors do when overloaded with energy (Marion, 2006).

Based on the thought of Jean Luc Marion, we can come closer to thinking about the gaze. With regard to the idol, we will have to argue that it is only looked at, whereas in the icon an encounter of gazes is generated: the icon looks at the one who looks at it. Despite this, there is something else: the icon emerges and becomes visible as an invisible gaze because that gaze was able to look and be looked at together. There is an encounter that is generated by the power to look at the

gaze that looks at us in the icon. This is why icon finds its origin and foundation in incarnation and, through incarnation, can be embodied in an icon. We will work on this and say that the contribution that art and criticism can make to conceptual art lies in the fact that the icon works the visible, makes it a richer visible and expresses an event of encounter. It is not a portrait or a *record* of something seen, but a *testimony*: it embodies, by means of pigments, an ex-perience.

The icon will therefore be our object of study, although we must be clear: we will approach, through Christian thought, a philosophical reflection on visibilisation. At no time, even though they are themes that intersect and occur together, will our aim be theological; on the contrary, we want to approach philosophical thought. Possibly, in order to get out of this recurrent accusation, Marion also uses the word "*face*". To the same end, we will alternate the word, i.e. we will assume both icon and face as synonyms.

## 2. THE IDOL

The conceptual image is nothing more than a production originating in a pre-existing concept, charged with the transcendental of the *artist*. The visible that he tries to capture does not lead to any invisible because it has not emerged from any invisible, that is to say, the painter has not had to lose himself in anything visible in order to rescue what has not yet been made visible. The industrialised image, following Marion's thinking, is nothing more than a production of the *a priori*. Television, emperor of the expected image, has turned every image it presents into a constant production that, at least, pretends to show reality. The one who looks at this image is captivated by his own idol: catatonic before what he desires and, desiring it, appears to him.

Such a phenomenon can be seen, clearly, in the possibility of changing television content by means of what we have called *control*. What has been produced for jouissance imprisons it in its own *egoity*. The vindication of the call is at its most powerful: the image has been conceived and manufactured for the one who receives it. Transcendental returns to the scene and appears more strongly through mutual necessity. The existing trade of the image with its voyeur is presented. The idol, classically understood as the one who brings forth the idea (εἶδος which generates εἰδωλον), traps its voyeur, defines and reflects him. Despite this, we must make an important point. The image, above all

The television image presents us with *faces*. It is celebrities, or any television personality, who are commonly referred to as faces.

The person, whatever his or her circumstances, can never be considered an object, which is why the crossing of two lovers is always an authentic giving of oneself: without an object in between (Marion, 2005b). Television - or any industrial image - precisely presents us with someone, it presents us with their *face*. Let us think it through. If the appearance of an image does not show us the world, but makes us see a production, can it leave the metaphysical margins - to be *is to perceive* - to give itself as a gift? The answer is clearly no. The image, being previewed in its totality, does not belong to the surrender of an idol that saturates, but to an idol of desire itself. The voyeur only prostitutes himself to the image.

Prostitution, understood in the strict sense: a face (in fact, every other thing) only comes to be, according to the regime of the television image, if it accepts not only to reduce itself to itself-as-itself-as-image [*soi-comme-image*], but above all to adjust this image to the draconian norms of another image - the idol (of desire) of the voyeur. Hence the illusion of expecting an absolute reality to emerge among the new images, a new original, finally adapted to the televised regime of the visible: images cannot deliver any other original than the one they themselves know; the most beautiful image in the world cannot give more than what it has - an original-in-image, a counter-world where the original is always an image. In such a case, being will never be more than being seen. And to be seen will never be more than to prostitute oneself, imitating the idol of the voyeur. The great prostitute - Babylon - designates nothing less than a world, ours, a modality of presence, the television image. To be, one has to be seen, so one has to exhibit oneself as the image of an idol - the original is immediately inaccessible, since it manifests itself as an apparition of itself. The original disappears, unless it becomes an image - to *be is to be perceived* (Marion, 2006, p. 101).

The production of images, presented by the paradox of the television regime, presents us with a reality that does not respond to an original, because the original adapts itself to what it is intended to show. Prostitution, therefore, comes from the voyeur who surrenders and is trapped by an image that will never emerge from itself, but only insofar as it responds to selfish pleasure. Selfish pleasure, isolated, not together with other flesh. He causes the gift, reduces it and receives it. It is the paradox of the reign of the *ego*, of the object, of what *is*.

Secondly, the image is prostituted, being transferred from original to original, as long as the production always presents an image of it. This responds to a classic question of metaphysics: the conception that everything that appears and exists is

understood by means of categories. This has led to the idea that to be is to be seen - to be *is to perceive*. In Jean Luc Marion's phenomenological proposal, there is a counterpoint to the metaphysical postulate. Every gift, in order to be seen, must be given, but this does not indicate that every gift is properly visible. Cases such as death or birth, or even love, present us with a gift that does not become visible as such, but only through what they evoke, that is to say, they are a gift without being: a gift to come in its happening.

This is how we can come to say that the dissemination of images does not aim to present the world, but to present on the screen what has been produced from it, always based on the transcendentalism of the 'ego'. "The television image, structurally idolatrous, obeys the voyeur and produces nothing but prostituted images" (Marion, 2006, p. 102). The dynamic of the idol is not intended to be in a negative sense, it is only used negatively when it refers to the *eidōs*. The idea, the pre-seen, generates the prostitution of the image and thus traps the voyeur in a mirror that only refers him to himself, refers him to his own desires to look. The gaze, therefore, finds itself at a crossroads by enclosing itself. The face of the one who appears will never be a real face, it is only a self-image, arising from egomaniacal desires.

Inevitably, inspired by the critique of the prostituted image, we may wonder about the face that supposedly appears before us. The images that supposedly present us with a face can be, in general, of three types: television faces, (self-)portraits or icons. On the first, Marion immediately clarifies the impossibility for television to present a face. This impossibility is because the face, properly speaking, is never visible, and television supposedly makes a famous face visible.

With regard to the portrait, or self-portrait, our author points out that, although it shows a face, this face loses its essential quality: to look. The face, whatever it is and however it is given, looks. To review the question of the portrait, or even the self-portrait, we can focus on Dürer. In the self-portrait in Munich, unlike the others in the Louvre or the Prado, the painter's gaze is enhanced. In the painting "the painter's gaze is not exchanged, in this case, with any other invisible one, but stops in visibility to become its own spectacle" (Marion, 2006, p. 49). Spectacle of himself, although worked and thought out, never shapes or expresses the advent of any invisible. The invisible of the painter's gaze has been made visible, the unseen has fulfilled its own existence. The crossing of the visible and the invisible has been realised and, from the moment the work is finished, it becomes an idol - albeit far from the negative sense. The gaze, therefore, does not appear on television or in the (self-)portrait.

One option remains: the icon. The gaze that looks at the screen or the (self-)portrait is never a gaze; in the icon, the gaze of the gazer is not only gazed at, it is faced. "In the icon, the gaze walks along itself towards an invisible gaze that faces it from glory" (Marion, 2006, p. 139). The icon, where a human figure is (re)presented, is charged with a crossing of gazes. The person praying, in looking at (or, rather, venerating) an icon, is looked at by the invisible gaze that resides in it. The paradox of the icon lies in *who it is* painted. Jesus Christ certainly does not correspond to an image of God, but rather to a face. It is the face of Christ that invisibly presents the face of the Father. To understand the icon, therefore, will require us to tear it away from the logic of the image.

At least historically, one model of image has opposed iconoclasm and, at least in the Church, has triumphed. This is the icon. *Icon* does not designate a particular pictorial genre, for example, 'icons' on wood (since Roman frescoes and Byzantine mosaics or certain Gothic statues are no less icons than 'icons', perhaps even more so than some of the latter, late and anecdotal). *Icon* here designates a doctrine of the visibility of the image, more precisely, the use of that visibility (Marion, 2006, p. 110).

The icon has remained in the Church. The Church has composed, protected and promoted it as a form of prayer, an encounter between the faithful and the Saint. Certainly, the person praying is not concerned with the image, but with the invisible visibility it provokes. The prayerful person experiences himself as being looked at: by looking he is looked at. Faced with this, it generates a paradox: in the icon, the gazes cross, one is lost in the glory of the Other.

The Church, in Nicea, proposed a strong philosophical and theological approach to the visibility of images. On the question of type and prototype, on the meeting of gazes, on incarnation and on aspects critical of other concepts of image. However, what we are interested in emphasising in terms of the gaze is its contrast. The art painting, on the other hand, obviously presents the crossing of the visible with the invisible, which is created by means of the *invistos*. In the icon, on the other hand, there is no intention to be seen, but it allows seeing. The crossing of the invisible gazes weakens the image, it loses itself in its own visibility and thus leads to the other gaze.

### 3. THE ICON

The first thing we see in another is the face. It opens us up to their history, to their thoughts and to thinking in a reality that is alien to - but composable with - our own. The face, as a window of the flesh, presents us with the other. It is immirable, because it escapes from space-time and, therefore, cannot be encompassed by this category. However, it saturates not only according to modality, but also with the categories of the previous phenomena: it saturates quantity, quality and relation. The icon is the saturated phenomenon that saturates the four Kantian categories (Marion, 2008), precisely because it is the face of another flesh that it bears visibly, referring to the invisible of its face.

If we think of the face, the concept of the face immediately comes to mind. In the face, we can see biological features that identify a person. The colour of their eyes, the shape of their nose or the thickness of their eyebrows show us, in the first instance, who we are in front of. Despite what we see, the face remains hidden. His face is not enough to signify the reality of his face. This is why being trapped and amazed by the complexion of his skin only keeps us catatonic before an idol, anchored as an entity according to his being. To know the face it is enough to see; as for the entity it is enough to remain. To approach the face, we must look at the immirable. The word look, in French, *regarder*, is not only related to the senses, but to what is given and kept, *garder*. We could ask ourselves what it is, precisely, that which can be kept. We would say, along with Marion, that what we can *keep* is the gaze that we place on objects. The nose, the hair or the eyelashes will never be more than an object, precisely because they are looked at - and because they do not look.

The face has a gaze that intersects with the gaze of another face, thus amplifying the relationship that is being composed. When one person sees another, he or she marvels at the other's face, but to remain there is to make the other an object of one's own satisfaction. The face, invisibly, looks at us. A gaze that summons and invites a response. Levinas calls this an ethical gaze, the commandment not to kill the other face (2016). In spite of this, Marion seeks not only to refer to the commandment not to kill, but to think about the possibility that the other face summons us to love it or to identify existence jointly<sup>1</sup>. In the phenomenology of the face, the call is not only to fulfil a commandment, but also to act. The gaze of the other invites us to look at it invisibly. To look together, to discover together. We have discovered, together with Levinas: the gaze of the

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<sup>1</sup> On this, Vinolo says very well: "In the phenomenology of the face, Marion wants to insist on everything that it impels me to do, without limiting himself to the ethical call" (2019, p. 137).

face is epiphany (2016). Marion amplifies it: it is an epiphany, but one that does not only summon *a priori* responsibility, but also the love that is composed between faces.

### 3.1. Icon and idol

The study of the icon-face implies approaching it from its relationship with another saturated phenomenon: the idol. We have already said that, when we approach the study of what an icon is, the need arises to refer to the visible. The idol is that which is seen, which shows a previously hidden reality. The painter who loses himself in the unseen brings them to light and presents them: the idol is properly the visible that emerges from the rescue of the unseen. In the icon-face, the counterpart occurs. The face, although faced, can never be looked at. "The idol does not deserve to be denounced as illusory, since, by definition, it is seen - eidōlon, what is seen (*eidō*, *video*). It consists only in this: that it can be seen, that it can only be seen" (Marion, 2010, p. 27).

The idol only needs to be seen to be known, its being is visible-being. This presents us with the manifestation of an idea (*eidōs*). The knowledge one can have about an idol, therefore, is encompassable by what it presents; hence the idol is not to be understood in a negative sense. The difference it has with the icon lies only in the way it is given in its appearance: "The icon does not result from a vision, but provokes it" (Marion, 2010, p. 36). While the idol arises from the satisfaction it provokes in the gaze, the icon summons it. As we have said, the icon is a gaze that looks, hence it is also assigned as a face. The gaze summons the gazer to the invisibility of the other gaze.

The painting must educate us to see it. The distance between the idol and the icon is defined at this point. The idol still remains, in one way or another, the measure of the expectations of desire, whose anticipation it fulfils (perhaps to an unexpected degree). The icon definitively surpasses expectations, drives desire mad, annuls foresight: the icon can never and will never attempt to correct this separation; it will reverse it by substituting our mention of him with his - of him with us. But make no mistake: for the painting, however, it is already a great achievement to reach the rank of idol, since the idol, the visible, impassable to the gaze, stops it and fills it. The idol fixes an invisible mirror: the gaze measures itself against it and learns from it, as from the echo sent back by a radar to situate us in space, what magnitude allows it to fill it. (Marion, 2006, p. 67)

Between the idol and the icon, there is a distance that cannot be crossed. The idol remains in desire, in the visible. The icon, on the other hand, does not remain in anything finished.



and that's it<sup>2</sup>but only happens insofar as it calls. The picture of art is only as long as someone sees it, it does not call for anything else than seeing it. The icon, far from being a picture of art, calls to be responsible and to love. That is why they are different, they generate and generate different events. This does not mean that the icon is superior to the idol: for the artist, generating an idol is a great task: the idol comes into play like an invisible mirror: the painter is not properly seen, but lies what the painter has revealed. Against this, we can say that the icon-face, although it enters into the visible, does not belong to the aesthetic. "The icon does not concern any aesthetic, since, as it is not objectifiable, its presentation does not obey the power of apprehension of sensation" (Restrepo, 2009, p. 283). The idol thus belongs to the aesthetic, to the visible. The icon, far from the senses - precisely because it is in-mirabile - is removed from any aesthetic possibility. This may lead us to ask about the beauty that a face gives us.

We know that I can be attracted to a face (and very strongly) by an insignificant feature (for any other person) and that, conversely, I can never notice an obvious feature of the person I love (the colour of their eyes, etc.). Is this a misdirection? Not at all, since my gaze, possibly in love, is intensely directed towards the face of the person I want to see everything, since I expect everything from him (Marion, 2006, p. 105). (Marion, 2006, p. 105).

Faced with the face of the beloved, the face does not play a predominant role. The case proposed by Marion is common, it can happen in all cases. Often, couples are criticised for not noticing some 'aesthetic' change they have undergone or for not knowing some details: moles, eye colour, nose shape, etc. This, although it may seem crude to us, is far from being so, it is more real than we think. The lover who does not attend to the details of his lover's face does not do so out of indifference, but out of preponderance. The lover expects nothing more than to see the face of the other, otherwise he could only see a photograph. He expects everything, he even expects to find his own face. The face that summons him, evokes his existence. To expect to see the face embodied in the face, in the visible, is tantamount to simply wanting to see. It is to fall into the reductionism of pornography. To prostitute oneself before the disembodied image.

I do not see the visible face of the other, an object that can still be reduced to an image (as the social game and its make-up demand), but the invisible gaze that emerges from the dark pupils of the other face; in short, I see the other of the visible face. To face seriously (passionately, then) the face of the other is tantamount to mentioning therein the

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<sup>2</sup> The icon is clearly not a *positive* thing. It is not finished and put there on hand to be useful. For more depth on the *positive* and its relation to philosophy, it is useful to see Heidegger, M., (2014). *Fundamental concepts of ancient philosophy*. Buenos Aires: Waldhuter.

invisible itself - namely, its invisible gaze upon me. The intentionality of love is thus exempted from the power of the image, since my gaze, by definition invisible, seeks to cross the other gaze, invisible by definition. Love subtracts itself from the image and, therefore, when the image wants to take over love by representing it visibly, it falls into pornography, insignificance or its mixture. (Marion, 2006, pp. 106-107)

The 'face' that can be seen causes the real disappearance of the face. The invisible can only look invisibly into the depths of its pupils - which give us nothing to see, only the black void (Marion, 1993). This is why facing the face is tantamount to mentioning the invisible. Thus, the face is not given according to what the other face wants to see, distancing itself from all intentionality. Love is subtracted from transcendental, since it does not generate the other face. To pretend to see, equivalent to the idol that is generated by desire as an invisible mirror, is equivalent to eliminating the face and reducing it to pornography. It is in pornography that we can find an example of this self-deception.

When a person looks at pornography, he or she goes back to a sexualised body. The sexual encounter presented by pornography presents nothing but body: genitality, despite its preponderant role in sexual intimacy, never manages to embrace the totality of the flesh - in the sexual encounter of lovers there is not only genitality, but an encounter of love that excites the flesh in its totality: each lover follows his own logic, eroticising through voice, breathing, feeling; far from only stimulating the genitals. Pornography, therefore, presents nothing but the body and does not even present the body as such, but only an image of it. We could say that pornography, like virtuality in general, tries to go back to the flesh, but in its very attempt, it disarms itself: it pretends to present flesh, but it is far from it because it is nothing more than an image, an image that arises from and announces the need for flesh. There is, in virtuality and the image, a contradiction that puts an end to itself: attempting to supply the need for flesh, it presents itself simply as a substitute that evokes the carnal encounter - or rather, that reveals the need.

This is the dynamic of pornography: to present nothing but a visible image provoked by the desire to see. The viewer of pornography creates his or her own idol, which reflects and arrests him or her. This is how self-excitement arises - if it were possible to call it excitement without another. "Self-excitation: always, even if only by fantasy and imagination, it is necessary for another to give me my own flesh, which he does not have, and which I, who become it, nevertheless cannot give me" (Marion, 2005b, p. 144). This invokes without summoning another flesh, without any face to be looked at. Pornography, empty of carnality, presents only image, only spirit and, therefore, leads to a desperate cry

of flesh. The face, far from the dynamics of the image, cannot be produced as the image. The various 'television faces' we have today are nothing but image, image that cries out for flesh. The face, therefore, cannot be reduced to the image.

That it cannot be pre-seen indicates precisely the distance from transcendentalism, from the unknowability of the donor and the adonate. The absence of the face as such, since in its unpredictability it cannot be encompassed, indicates the absence of the gift. The triple phenomenological reduction continues its own logic. "The icon does not claim to be seen, but allows us to see and be seen through it. Image undone, weakened, in short, pierced, the icon allows the other gaze to emerge through it, thus allowing us to see" (Marion, 2006, p. 112). We can say, after comparing the icon with the idol, that the difference lies in the gaze. The idol, on the other hand, exists insofar as it is visible. The icon, in its occurrence, arises by invoking a gaze that can look at nothing, *regarde qui ne garde rien*<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.2. The Christian icon

As we announced earlier, the Church has generated and exploited, as an inheritance, a visibilisation that moves away from the rank of image. This is the icon. Let us see what we really mean by the visibilisation of the Saint, or rather, the visibilisation of the invisible. Far from being a screen of the divine being, it is a gaze that happens by looking. This is precisely because, in the icon, the gaze always emerges as an (ad)prayer.<sup>4</sup>

The gaze looks at the one who, praying, raises his gaze towards the icon: the painted gaze invisibly answers the invisible gaze of the praying person and transfigures its own visibility by including it in the trade of two invisible gazes - the gaze of the praying person, through the painted icon, to the invisible holy gaze, and the invisible holy gaze benevolently covering, through the visibly painted icon, the gaze of the praying person. The invisible transits through the visible, so that the painted icon supports the pigments to a lesser extent thanks to the wood of the panel than to the liturgical and oratory exchange of the gazes that meet there. The visible, which the painter himself, praying, places on the wood, unfolds saturated by the invisible of the exchanged gazes. The invisible is already

<sup>3</sup> A look that holds nothing back.

<sup>4</sup> To go deeper into the parenthesis, it is advisable to approach another French philosopher: Jean Luc Nancy. He understands adoration in its most literal meaning: a word addressed to, a response to a con-vocation. It is through this recourse to faith that Nancy seeks to elaborate a political proposal, for it is faith that enables con-trust. Without being able to go into it in depth, we recommend it in order to understand the political quality of (ad)prayer. This can be found in Nancy, J.L. (2013). Adoration. New York: Fordham



University.

is neither consecrated nor lost in serving the visible, as in perspective. On the contrary, it is rather the visible that serves the invisible, whose real play, outside any frame, is finally exercised freely: the exchange of crossed gazes between the praying person and Christ (or his lieutenant) passes through the visible, in accordance with the healthy economy of Creation and of the Incarnation, but is not reduced to it. (Marion, 2006, p. 46).

The visibility of the icon is evident. It is enough to look at the painted panel to see the pigments that seek to (re)present the saint - in this case Christ or some Christian, his lieutenant. But the gaze does not emerge from the painting, but from what is invisible in the painting. The (re)presentation of the saint is not enough to embrace the saint himself, since he always remains invisibly gazing. The person praying in front of the icon not only looks, but is looked at. It is in the meeting of invisible gazes that (ad)prayer takes place. The pray-er, therefore, goes through the visible in order to meet the invisible; going through the visible, the invisible comes out to meet him; the invisible serving the visible. This is why the icon is a journey through the visible that presents the invisibility of God. Thus, the icon, far from presenting itself as an image, presents itself as an encounter. The icon is not possible because of its visibility, but because of its possibility of prayer.

We will say, therefore, that the icon is insofar as something happens there: an encounter, a friendship, a liturgy. The linguistic way of referring to the being of the icon only goes through existence, since it exists, but it does not exist as something static and permanent, but as an event, that is to say, as a composite encounter between gazes. This is why, in the face of the icon, freed from all the dynamics of the image, pigments and forms are of little importance, but rather the crossing of gazes is enhanced. The icon, to be understood in its real purpose, must be studied in the dynamics of love.

To continue our research on the Christian icon, we must therefore go back to the true icon, that is to say, to Christ. To do this, we will say that, with the birth of Christ, the economy of salvation approaches its fullness: the incarnation of Christ enables us to form a friendship with the Trinity. It is precisely because of his incarnation that we can see the 'face of God', that is to say, the incarnation presents us with the visible icon of the invisible Father. Therefore, the icon is possible insofar as God is incarnate. This is how the Second Council of Nicaea describes it, in the face of the iconoclastic question. The presentation of the type takes us back to a prototype: the type is the icon that represents the prototype, namely the Holy One.

The conciliar declaration thus establishes the first point of the status of the icon: it has the status of *τύπος*, but this *τύπος* is to be understood as an approximation to the

first τύπος, that of the Cross where Christ died, as the crucifix and all the other icons of the cross make it accessible to us (Marion, 2006, p. 128).

The icon has the possibility of giving itself to us in the event of a πρωτότυπον (prototype). The person who prays in front of the icon does so knowing that the icon takes him back to the prototype. It is the πρωτότυπον the invisible that is intended to make the τύπος (type) visible. This is why Nicea II concludes by saying that the visibilisation of the Saint is made possible by his own visibilisation, even though visibilisation is always invisible - as a gaze of the face, as a feeling of flesh. In the face of this, we can question how visible Jesus Christ makes the Trinity.

We must therefore understand how Jesus Christ offers not only a visible image of the Father who remains invisible, but a (visible) face of the invisible itself (the Father), a visible image of the invisible *as invisible*. If we ignore this paradox, we can only interpret it on the basis of the logic of the image: if every image of the invisible God offered only a caricatural usurpation, Jesus Christ would have to be put to death for blasphemy, which is what was done (*Matthew 26, 66*). Only the paradox of an iconic display of the invisible in the visible would make it possible to receive Christ, without crucifying Him for blasphemy. However, this paradox is only intelligible if we can tear the icon out of the logic of the image. Thus, only if we tear ourselves away from the tyranny of the image (Marion, 2006, p. 107).

Christ is an icon of God. This is why the Greek translation of the seventies, the *Septuagint*, translates Christ as εἰκών (icon) and not as image. Far from the Greek conception of image: "according to which the image obviously signifies something inferior to the model it represents" (Schönborn, 1999, p. 22). The translation as icon shows us that it is possible to see in Christ the invisible visibilisation of the Father. He who sees Christ sees the Father. Precisely because there is no inferiority between the Son and the Father, it is the unity of the Trinity. The disciple who sees Christ has an encounter with the Trinity in its fullness and not in its parts. He who prays to the τύπος (type) knows that before him is the πρωτότυπον (prototype). There is certainly no possibility of caricaturing, of referring, of reflecting: he is in front, ready to meet, in seeing the Father seeing the Son.

The gaze, therefore, does not go back to the visible, but travels through the invisible until it reaches the invisible itself, which it can never see, otherwise it would kill it by turning it into an idol. This is why Christ breaks with the paradigm of the image, especially with the existing Greek conception (Schörborn, 1999). Tearing the icon out of this paradigm will therefore offer us a crossroads of views. Between the icon made possible by the incarnation of Christ and the

Christ's incarnation as the invisible visibilisation of the Father, there is a way of thinking that has not yet been exploited except by iconographers. This crossing of gazes is particularly evident in the liturgy. It is the *work of the people<sup>5</sup> that* gives us the possibility of understanding the invisible closeness of God. "Christ speaks in the readings, he allows himself to be seen, touched, eaten and breathed in his Eucharistic body. Every liturgy makes Christ appear and comes from him" (Marion, 2006, p. 118). Liturgy is the mystery of Christ through the living signs of faith. The sacrament makes Christ's coming visible - and announces his second coming. This is why every liturgical action has as its source and origin the life of Christ himself. The living signs presented by man, offered to God, converted by the action of the Holy Spirit, present Christ himself to us. Every liturgy is therefore God's action in the midst of the world (SC 7), and thus breaks with the dynamic of the image.

The Eucharist is not a representation of Christ, but his very presence. The person praying does not approach the piece of bread, but approaches to receive the body of Christ: he is aware that their gazes meet, that, just as he became incarnate in Mary, he also becomes incarnate in his life. Far from experiencing it as an image, he experiences it as a meeting of faces, as a crossing of faces. This is because "the icon is also founded on a gaze, only this, instead of being human, comes from the icon itself" (Restrepo, 2009, p. 286). The possibility of the icon is precisely because of the presence of Christ. The visibilisation of the artisans of the icon, the iconographers, is only possible insofar as Christ has made himself visible. His visibilisation gave us the possibility of getting to know the Trinity and, through this, that our gazes crossed, that we formed a friendship.

The ordinary icon does not therefore imitate the Cross any more than the Cross imitates invisible holiness; the ordinary icon repeats the transition from the visible to the invisible which makes the Cross the sign of the Saint's glory. Just as Thomas recognised his Lord in the extreme type offered by the imprint of the nails, so the faithful can recognise their Lord in the visible types traced by the craftsmen. In both cases, the visible must not be seen as a spectacle, without identifying the imprint that marks the passage of the invisible. In the same way, the icon can only be contemplated with honour through a gaze that venerates it as the stigma of the invisible. Only prayer can thus trace back from the visible to the invisible (by means of the typical), while the spectator can only compare the visible with the visible (by means of mimicry). To the saints, the holy things: only prayer

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<sup>5</sup> Literal translation of liturgy. λειτουργία (leitourgia): composed of λάος (láos), meaning people, and ἔργον (érgon),



meaning work or labour. It can also be understood as "public service", but public (υργία) is derived from έργον. Probably this may indicate that "public" always requires work.



(Marion, 2006, pp. 133-134).

The icon, being made possible only by the incarnation of the face of God and removed from the rank of image, is not imitation; it has no totality to which to refer, no spectacle to fulfil; on the contrary, everything is in advent, to come, to be composed. The icon maintains a distance to be covered invisibly. The gaze of the icon looks at the person praying who looks at the icon. The icon refers to the Saint as the Cross refers to the Holy Cross. Just as Thomas believed by touching the flesh of Christ (Jn 20, 28), so the Christian can believe in Christ through the gaze of the icon. They are the workers of the icon, evangelisers, continuers of Christ's presence in the midst of the world. The person praying experiences this every time he kneels before the face that gazes at him and thus distances himself from the spectacle of the identical. Each gaze is, in its own happening, an imprint that is written on its crossing. Thus, the icon destroys every attempt at idolatry; every attempt to turn Christ into something identical, static and predictable.

The historical antecedent of the icon is not the pagan idol, but the prohibition of representing God in the Old Testament. However, from the moment that God became incarnate and became one with mankind, this prohibition lost its force, because we have been able to experience His Person with our senses and intelligence. For this reason, the icon has been understood not only as an instance of veneration, but also as a guarantee that the incarnation has indeed taken place. Because the story of Christ is real, we can represent it sensitively with the colours that move our eyes (Solís, 2019, p. 158).

We insist: the incarnation is what makes the icon possible. Far from being a painting, it is an incarnation of Christ's thought, it is the trace of his history: if the icon crosses our gaze it is because the iconographer was looked at and looked at. It is the possibility of turning the composition of a friendship between the Trinity and humanity into history. The prohibition not to represent God in any form was abolished by God himself with his incarnation. Now, with his incarnation, he can look at man himself with human eyes. His own face appears in the face of other men.

This is why the Church understands the incarnation within the dynamics of the economy of salvation: it is God happening as God so that man can live his friendship with Him, in communion. The icon is an incarnation of thought, an event of love: the crossing of gazes. Far from belonging to aesthetics (idol), it belongs to and provokes a gaze. The icon is precisely the witness. Faced with the encounter of veneration of the faithful, it appears before the community. The person who prays, the icon and the Saint - the type and the

prototype. There is no I-Thou relationship, but a communal encounter. The icon is that which makes possible the non-confusion of the 'I' with the 'You'. In its deepest sense - and most beautiful, by the way - the icon acts as a witness precisely because it bears witness to the incarnation of Christ. We would say, therefore, that the icon is that presence-absent of Christ, who looks invisibly, summoning a response: the witness appears before the community of witnesses. Crossing of invisible gazes that make vindication impossible. Icon that visibly presents the invisible: gift without gift, faithful to the phenomenology of gift.

In conclusion, we must point out that Christ's thought is incarnated in those whom he himself meets. It is they who, incarnated - and incarnated - with the thought of Christ, incarnate in others the gift received. This presents us with the collaboration of the human with the divine: the face of the Christian serves, as a means, to know God; the mission of Christ is enhanced by the mission of man. The thought of Christ, which is enriched by his incarnation, enriches the thought of the one who is formed with him - perhaps this is what conversion consists in: to pour oneself into the other, to conform the same flesh from the diversity of flesh, the same thought in the same happening from the encounter of men with God, that is to say, in *ecclesiastica communione* (LG 13).

We would say, then, that the tradition and evangelisation of the Church is nothing more than the incarnation of Christ in different human flesh throughout history - just as the iconographer incarnates the thought of Christ in pigments. We see it, therefore, in the happening of Christian thought: "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 14:35). Love giving itself, love happening in the different flesh, manifests the happening of God. This is why we can see in the other the face of God, that is to say, the face of the third one who comes.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, Jean Luc Marion's proposal can contribute much to our thinking from different perspectives: philosophy and theology. This thought, although it emerges from different perspectives, tries to understand and approach a single dynamic: donation. It is in the face of this that, starting from the stigmas left by its

We can become worshippers and givers. Thus, we can find ourselves *between* the dynamics of the icon and the idol in order to think from the fissure they face.

We could place ourselves in front of the idol and say that any 'art' that emerges from *a priori* concepts is not properly art: it does not make unconsciousness visible. In spite of this, the conceptualist defence of art probably raises in its defence the impossibility of thinking of art *a priori*, since all art responds to a given epoch and a given experience, but this would still be insufficient. The idol, its very appearance, is visible. Although not everything that is visible is an idol, it fulfils a distinctly visible function because it emerges from the invisible. The artist, as a guardian of the limits of appearing, rescues the unseen and makes it visible. In conceptual art, which appears precisely as a negation of all previous art (Ortega y Gasset, 2020), there is no search for an unseen in the midst of the world, but only in its imagination.

The conceptual artist enhances the transcendence of the subject and, on the basis of his own egoity, of his own conceptualisation of the world, gives shape to his idea. Basically, he does not set out in search of the different events of the world to make them more visible, but he tries to make visible what he wants to make visible. In this way, he becomes a conceptual idolater: what he thinks, what he believes, what he conceptualises, he shapes and intends to make visible simply for that reason. It guides the thinking of the *viewer*, the observer of the work of art, to the *egotistical* interpretation of the artist. Despite this, the icon can provide an even more artistic gaze.

As we said earlier, the icon is based on the incarnation of Christ. This is the guarantee of his appearing and, for this reason, of his com-*parecer*. He appears and in his incarnation he com-*pare*s divinity; he becomes a partner and friend, but he is also judged to death. In short, his whole life is a life that shares our time, that experiences it and lives in the only sense of it. Thus, with his incarnation, he becomes a historical life and, in this way, can extend himself. This is where, in his absence, he makes himself present (Marion, 1993). The Christian, and in this case the icon, is his lieutenant. This is because, in the end, the icon does not present itself as a possibility of visibilisation through the simple desire to make something visible, but appears as a historical testimony of an event.

If we have been able to see the icon it is because the iconographer's gaze was encountered, was gazed upon by another. He appears as the extension of an event. He is not an allegorist, a referencer; he is a witness who embodies the event of the gaze. He makes, with his art and his community, "an increase of visibility or, more precisely, a double increase of visibility and invisibility" (Nancy, 2006, p. 16). That which is seen and experienced makes it visible.

He sees the visible and, seeing it, extends its visibility to those who have not been able to see. It is by capturing it in pigments and wood, allowing the event of Christ to be witnessed and increasing the visibility of the flesh of Christ, but he disappears. His testimony is captured, but he does not capture his own signature. He tries to make a reduction of the experience: to capture only what is given and to be absent in its appearance.

Between idol and icon, we can say that conceptual art, new art, loses itself by presenting nothing more than a dictatorship of thought: neither an inventory nor a gaze, but only an a priori idea of the world, a captured concept. This is why, in the various examples of conceptual art, the author has to explain what his work consists of or how to approach it: he himself imposes the interpretation that they make. It is not an interpretation given to a third party (Marion, 2019), but an imposition of thought. While the observer is surprised by the colours or shapes, the conceptual artist can indicate to him that in front of him there are neither colours nor shapes, but a presentation of a guided and directed thought.

The painter resists the force of the donation in order to capture it in an artistic work. The iconographer faces the gaze that looks at him. In either case, the visibilisation arises in his or her journey through the world, it arises *a posteriori*. There is no forced, imposed and directed conceptualisation, but a *flâneur* of the world. In this same sense, we could say that art, in order to appear as authentic art, can be enriched by iconic thought insofar as it extends an event; insofar as it does not only try to make visible for the sake of making visible, but breaks with the purely visible. By this, we mean that it is not making visible for the sake of making visible, but in order to manifest something. We would say, in other words, that the artist also listens to the signs that appear, to the events that take place and, in this way, is not simply a contemplative of the real, but a listener, a witness who breaks with the visible (Levinas, 2016) to make it more visible (Nancy, 2006) and, in this way, to present himself as the witness (Marion, 2006b) of an event. In the face of this, it is not only conceptual art that can find itself collapsed between the idol and the icon, but any artistic proposal that does not emerge from an unseen or a gaze. The contribution, therefore, offered by iconographic thought and its relationship with the idol, can clearly be in its *a posteriori* relationship and the impossibility of establishing it prior to the experience of the journey of the world, extending it and manifesting it. In short, art will be art insofar as it expresses and manifests an event which, inter-preceded, takes shape to open up an endless gift.

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