

Andrei Rylov. «Трапеза».

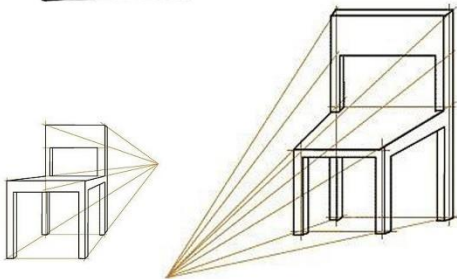


Sacred geometry.



Rabbinic legend that God clothed Adam and Eve with skin in exchange for their garments of light, the garments in which they had been clothed in Paradise. The pun is formed with the Hebrew, for both skin and light sound exactly the same but are written with different initial consonants.

Calligraphy by Roland Leblanc for my exegeses of this theme.



Reverse perspective

NOTES on aspects of THE SPIRITUALITY OF ICONS, not the talk itself



Ancient iconographers' Dependency on the Shroud. Iconographers from the early centuries have studied the Face of the Shroud to produce iconographic interpretations of the Pantocrator. That of the ancient monastery of St Catherine in the Synai desert is among the oldest of such, dating from about the 6th century AD. In her study of the ancient connection between iconography and the Shroud, Emanuela Marinelli makes a convincing case. I would draw attention in this image to the V shaped impression between the eyebrows of the Shroud and its stylised reproduction in these early icons as may be seen on p. 6 of her paper here referring to an icon of the 12th century, church of the monastery of Daphni,

Athens area.¹ I have painted similar representations based on the Face of the Shroud, in the traditional medium of iconography.



But I have also worked on a digital superimposition of the Shroud and the Manoppello cloth to show His eyes opened. In this example, I show a sequence, the open eyes gradually emerging from the background of the Shroud where the characteristic V shaped Impression is evident. The Manoppello cloth is a byssus cloth and when the famous last surviving master of byssus weaving was interviewed, Chiara Vigo made this statement while gazing at the cloth's Image: "*It has the eyes of a lamb... and a lion...*" Paul Badde's article has further: "...Inexplicable peace fills the gaze out of the wide-open eyes. Amazement, astonishment, surprise. Gentle compassion. No despair, no pain, no wrath. It is like the face of a man who has just awakened to a new morning..."²

ANCIENT ICONOGRAPHERS UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY WERE LOOKING AT THE NEGATIVE OF A POSITIVE. That is a statement about light from within. The iconographer paints from darkness to light. Genesis.

A step back to prepare for the light in the clay...

"God is Light" as John says in 1 John 1:5. But this is not only a moral statement. As a young novice I read some Quantum Mechanics because I believe that it expresses something of the nature of the spiritual as well as the material, of their manner of being, and of the One who created all reality. Light is used as an image poetically in sacred texts, to describe something of the Creator. But it is increasingly understood scientifically to be essential to creation, and its energy inherent in what we perceive and experience including the spiritual. "...If the image on the *Shroud of Turin* was created by particle radiation from within the body, it could also be considered a form of light. Particle radiation can exhibit wave-like properties, and some particle radiation, like ultraviolet light, is in the electromagnetic spectrum, which includes visible light."³ In a section on the light of the Resurrection which I want to develop I will include Rabbinic discussions on light and its origins and character. When it came to the nature of Resurrection Our Lord would not have departed from what He had already revealed to His beloved Chosen People. Related to this, Cardinal Ratzinger makes the point in an article on the Face of Christ as perceived in the Johannine texts, that one cannot begin to seek His visage in the Gospels but must begin the search in the ancient texts of the Old Testament and the discussions there on the Face of God. This is related to the prophecy I referred to and will develop later. See also Goethe on the suffering of light in creating colour. Light in his terms is a dialogue with darkness. In that colour happens.

"He knows the clay[dust/earth] of which we are made." This is a quotation from Psalm 103.14 and is translated "He knows the clay..." in a sermon attributed to Peter Damian.⁴ Adam was formed from the earth and Guerric of Igny sees the Second Adam as the Light in an earthenware lamp. "Notice the light in a lamp of earthenware, the sun in a cloud, God in man, the splendour of glory and the *brightness of eternal light in the clay vessel of your flesh.*"⁵ I find this metaphor by Guerric poignant when read alongside the identification of the Word with the Light in John's Prologue: *In Him was life and the life was the light of men, and that light in the darkness shines and the darkness did not overwhelm it.* Translation from the

¹ *The Shroud and the iconography of Christ* by Emanuela Marinelli, St. Louis, October 9-12, 2014, P.6. where there is a direct image comparison.

² *Inside the Vatican: The Holy Face*, October 2004. Pp.25 ff. Paul Badde, journalist and historian.

³ <https://online-learning-college.com/knowledge-hub/gcses/gcse-physics-help/electromagnetic-spectrum/> (Accessed 24/05/2025)

⁴ As used in *Lectionnaire Monastique* for The Transitus of St Benedict.

⁵ From the Sermons of Guerric of Igny as used in *Lectionnaire Monastique*

Aramaic Peshitta. Also there is the mystical theology of St John Chrysostom echoing the opening of John's Gospel and exploring this theme: "In the beginning man was formed from the clay of virgin earth..."⁶

I believe the psyche has within it certain 'gifts' from the Creator which seek expression and sometimes emerge 'veiled'. Artists, and psychologists understand this. One such residing in the unconscious from antiquity intuitively that light belongs in the stuff of earth be it clay, wood or dust. Perhaps this is a premonition of when the Eternal Light, the Creator of Light, would shine in the clay of our flesh? Perhaps it is a prophetic instinct in the creative psyche. It is characteristic of these prophecies to *return to certain themes* and metaphors at different levels and moments, and from different directions. These contemplative intuitions are also materially expressed in art. For example, I use the oldest traditional method of water gilding whose roots can be traced to the 14th Century. It achieves a brilliant reflection of light on gold leaf when it is placed on clay bole and agate burnished.⁷ This is light *placed upon* clay bole, not light *within* it, of course, but expresses the ancient instinct that light 'belongs' within created matter. Consider the fields of light created by burnished gold on clay bole as haloes around the heads of saints, or the technique icon painters use to express light issuing from *within the body* of the saint, flooding the clothing and not from outside it. The use of gold foil in Northern Africa to ornament wood dates from 2,000 years before Christ. In Peru gold work dates to 3,000 BC. Gold has been used to create sacred objects, statues, and artifacts to symbolize the connection between the material and spiritual worlds.

To illustrate this from another perspective: The choice of the word for Adam's clothing is deliberate, and gives rise to the Rabbinic legend that God clothed Adam and Eve in עֹר ('ō-wr) *skin* in exchange for their *garments of light*, the garments in which they had been clothed in Paradise. The pun is formed with the Hebrew for both skin עֹר ('ō-wr) and for light אֹר ('ō-wr).⁸ "And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin ('OR), and clothed them (Gen 3. 21). In R. Meir's Torah it was found written, 'Garments of light ('OR): this refers to Adam's garments, which were like a torch [shedding radiance], broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. Isaac the Elder said: They were as smooth as a fingernail and as beautiful as a jewel ..."⁹ The reference to 'jewel' in the Midrash echoes the vision of Julian of Norwich, for the light would be returned to Adam through the radiance of the wounds of Christ which she sees as jewels. The German mystic Anna Katerina Emmerich speaks fully of Adam's radiance before the Fall: "From Adam's mouth I saw issuing a broad stream of glittering light. And upon his forehead was an expression of great majesty. Around his mouth played a sunbeam, ... I saw Adam's heart very much the same as in men of the present day, but his breast was surrounded by rays of light. In the middle of his heart, I saw a sparkling halo of glory. In it was a tiny figure as if holding something in its hand. I think it symbolized the Third Person of the Godhead. From the hands and feet of Adam and Eve, shot rays of light. Their hair fell in five glittering tresses ... The glittering beams on Adam's head denoted his abundant fruitfulness, his glory, his connection with other radiations."¹⁰ This German visionary was not the only mystic to speak of this Mystery. Bernard of Clairvaux and others have done so likewise, even if they have concentrated on different aspects of it. Monastic chant has the Marian antiphon 'Ave Regina Caelorum' which includes the line: "...she is the door through which the Light has poured..." We cannot discuss the Word becoming Flesh without reference to His Mother through whom the Light streamed.

Returning to Guerriq of Igny: this '*brightness of eternal light in the clay vessel of your flesh*' is what was seen at the Transfiguration, and I select an aspect of it for exploration in the context of the *Word became Flesh*. The Transfiguration, this One in whom was Life which is the Light of men, is the spiritual illumination of all that exists, the Shekinah in the interior depths of all that is. Bulgakov would say that in the Transfiguration, the Shekhina entered the created world, and in that sense divine beauty was no longer hidden, but visible and knowable, and abiding. Louis Bouyer says when writing of monasticism "... as St John hints in his Prologue, the Shekinah is established for the future in the human nature of the Saviour...."¹¹ The Liturgy for Lent 2 has the Transfiguration Gospel account as its focus and the accompanying Vigils lesson which acts as a commentary upon it reads: "Christ is not divided in any way. He is believed to be One, Unique and true Son by all who adore Him. ... *the image of the invisible God, the splendour of the glory of the Father's substance, the imprint of His essence*... Would it be right, therefore, to doubt that there is one, unique, true Son, the Word from God the

⁶ St John Chrysostom *Homilies on St John's Gospel* as used in *Lectionnaire Monastique*.

⁷ In this process the clay is flooded with water. Gold is grasped from the tip by the water's surface tension. As it is absorbed it draws the floating gold down onto the clay. I find this process numinous, spiritually symbolic.

⁸ I explore this more deeply in *The Passion of the Word*, chapters 1, 4, & 7.

⁹ From the *Midrash Rabbah - Genesis XX:12*:

¹⁰ Anne Catherine Emmerich, *The Life of Jesus Christ and Biblical revelations*, Tan Books, Vol I, page 8: 'I have always thought that by the Wounds of Jesus there were opened anew in the human body portals closed by Adam's sin.'

¹¹ Louis Bouyer: *The Meaning of Monastic Life*, Light Inaccessible, pp. 69 and 70

Father, *with flesh united to Himself...*"¹² The Liturgy does not only express the phenomenon of the Shekinah in the Transfiguration but also the unique and undivided oneness of Christ. Why this emphasis upon the Oneness in the Liturgy of the Transfiguration Gospel?

I am primarily discussing John's Gospel, but the Transfiguration account of the Synoptics expresses what John terms the *Light coming into the world*. Essential to John's Prologue is that Christ is the One, the Only Begotten off the Father. John devotes an entire chapter on the eve of the Passion to the nature of this Oneness, so essential to His Gospel as it is.¹³ This

chapter winds round and round the אֶחָד (ekh-awd) in Hebrew, and ܬܝܬܝܢ (KhaD) in Aramaic of Chapter 17 of his Gospel which is at the Passion's threshold, drawing His disciples through His Incarnation into this essential Oneness. It is clear to me that both John and the Synoptic Evangelists made the profoundest Christological associations between the Light of Christ and His Oneness. Cyril of Alexander on the Transfiguration, and Augustine commenting on the Light as depicted in the Prologue to John's Gospel evidence this. "... Christ the Lord is called Light coming from the Light. This Light which does not come forth from another Light, and that Light which is co-equal with Him but which does come from the Light, *together form but one Light, and not two Lights.*"¹⁴

The Transformative Look... the mutual encounter of contemplation in the icon. This recognition by God, the look of his Face, has a transforming effect on us. It is no passing illumination like that on the face of Moses, but the *lux Sancta*, the holy light of salvation and life.

Traditional iconography utilizes reverse perspective, or inverse perspective, where lines that are parallel in reality are drawn to diverge to a vanishing point outside the picture plane, effectively placing the focal point in front of the painting, at the viewer's position. This technique creates a sense of the icon "looking at" the viewer, drawing them into the sacred space of the icon rather than presenting a window into a separate, three-dimensional world, as linear perspective does.

The Shroud has the Image, and we are compelled, invited, fascinated by this Image. I have described it as creating an interior pathway in the soul, in the spiritual self, through contemplation. The Shroud is a *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans* creating this mutual contemplation, in prayer, between the Divine and the creature. In relation to it I would like to refer briefly to a phenomenon in Quantum Mechanics which I have believed to be relevant to spiritual experience since reading of it as a novice. It has implications for the *I-Thou* relationship of which Martin Buber has written so magnificently.¹⁵ The double-slit experiment in Quantum Mechanics has shown that the *act of observing* can change how particles behave. This has given rise to further research as to the power of observation, attention, and its effects on what is observed. The implications for contemplative prayer are immense. We are, when contemplating the Image on the Shroud, in the presence of the numinous, yet contemplation as used here is prayer as relationship, it is the *I-Thou*. This relationship is initiated by the 'Other' the Truth and Love, the author of life. God's omnipresence is here concentrated in the Image but He looks out at us from within it, as I will explore soon. The contemplation is mutual but with unimaginable differences and has transformative potential.

The interior pathway in the soul created by the Image of the Crucified, formed on the cloth at the moment of Resurrection, is the pathway upon which a great Gift is travelling. "...Inner perception must free itself from the impression of the merely sensible, and in prayer and ascetical effort *acquire a new and deeper capacity to see*, to perform the passage from what is merely external to the profundity of reality..."¹⁶ There is a *travelling towards* on this pathway between the Divine and the creature, and an encounter happens. The praying self *knows* the encounter happens, but contemplatives find it difficult to articulate this and so it should be. A skilled spiritual director may with questions and allusion help the person to bring some aspects into the light. But the transformation happens out of sight, felt, known, but in essence 'beyond' articulation. This is characteristic of Divine action upon a soul and is unique to each person. By praying with the Shroud Image we are the recipients of the gaze of God, we are observed by God, and thus subject to change and transformation. Quantum Mechanics shows that this is true even for matter. We are more than matter. We are in the realm of spiritual realities.

¹² A reading from *St Cyril of Alexandria's Dialogue: Christ is One* as used in *Lectionnaire Monastique*

¹³ John 17 and 10.30.

¹⁴ From Saint Augustine's commentary on St. John's Gospel as used in *Lectionnaire Monastique*.

¹⁵ See Rudolf Otto: *The Idea of the Holy*, for this concept.

¹⁶ *Op.Cit.* Cardinal Ratzinger