

# The Cosmological Potential of Byzantine Ascetic Aesthetics

**Andrey Tsarenok** — PhD, Associate Professor  
Chernihiv Shevchenko National Pedagogical University  
(Chernihiv, Ukraine)

E-mail: tsarenok-sever@ukr.net

*The study explores the peculiarities of the cosmological senses, which exist in Byzantine ascetic aesthetic doctrine. Underlining the obvious strong connection between theological aesthetics, ontology and cosmology, the author of the article points out the interpretation of world's beauty, order and harmony by representatives of ascetic culture of Byzantium (sts. Grigoriy the Theologian, Grigoriy, bishop of Niss, Ioann Chrysostom, Ioann Damaskin, Simeon the New Theologian and others).*

*The aesthetics of the asceticism is characterized as theocentric ontology of beauty. Its development has been influenced by theism, trinitary monotheism and theocentrism of Christian world-view tradition. The theologians speak about the existence of the Highest Absolute Beauty, Who is the cause of the beautiful things in created reality. The impressive qualities of cosmos are considered as evidence of being of their Almighty Creator. Therefore, the sensual cognition can help believer in his or her search of God.*

*At the same time, ascetic aesthetics prevents from unreasonable enjoying of the sensual (material, somatic) beauty for such enjoying is able to make the true person's spiritual perfection impossible. Moreover, according to Christian theology, absolutization of the cosmical beauty regularly distorts the person's belief: Byzantine ascetics point out the "aesthetical" cause of paganism appearance.*

*Appealing to Bible, theologians differentiate two periods in history of cosmos, which can be interpreted as the pre-sin and the post-sin ones. The beginning of visible world existence was marked with being of original beauty, order and harmony, but the transgression, committed by the first people, distorted the cosmos to a great degree.*

*Acknowledging of this sorrowful fact does not ruin quite an optimistic character of ascetic aesthetic, ontological and cosmological conceptions of Byzantium. According to them, the beauty of Universe will be completely renewed in future by Merciful Creator.*

*Key Words: cosmology, ontology, aesthetics of the asceticism, Byzantine culture, asceticism, theism, trinitary monotheism, beauty, order, harmony*

## Introduction

As we know well enough, philosophy differs from sciences in classical meaning of this word to a great degree. On one hand, its subject can be changed due to definite reasons. On the other — philosophical discourse impresses us with its universalism: actually, there are no theoretical problems, which philosophers of different historic epochs and nations do not focus on.

Quite natural fact is that all dimensions of being should be considered as the subjects of philosophy. To put it in other (“less-bookish”) words, the latter tends to cognize everything as effectively as it is possible.

The being regularly appears to be the main aim of philosophical quest. As Russian and Ukrainian thinker of 19<sup>th</sup> century priest Nikolay Markov states, “...the true being — subject of philosophy” [Markov, 1881: 120]. That is why the ontology as the doctrine of being represents the inseparable part of philosophical discourse of different cultural traditions.

To our opinion, cosmology is one of the most important components of ontological conceptions. This metatheory tries to point out and to interpret the basic principles of organization, which exist in the world.

It is remarkable, that cosmology (as well as all the province of ontology) is closely connected with the aesthetical discourse. Such connection is strong, objective and natural. “Aesthetics is the doctrine of wholeness and perfection of the being...” — stresses the famous modern philosopher Viktor Bychkov [Bychkov, 1990: 6]. Scientists just cannot achieve the adequate understanding of organized (well-organized) sensual reality without usage of the classical aesthetical categories, such as “beauty”, “harmony”, etc. “Cosmos-provoking” organization prevents chaos and causes ORDER, understanding of which sooner or later completely coincides with understanding of the BEAUTIFUL-in-the-Universe. Therefore, aesthetics as philosophy of beauty, expression and expressiveness in particular, has much to do with cosmology: as a rule, the aesthetical doctrines (at least, to some degree) possess the cosmological potential.

Impressive cosmological senses one can meet, exploring the Byzantine aesthetics of the asceticism.

In fact, the further study of history of the aesthetical traditions represents one of the most important tasks of the modern philosophical discourse. It goes without saying, that the good understanding of the aesthetical doctrines of the medieval Europe is impossible without taking into consideration the specific features of the Byzantine aesthetics. This evident fact proves the actuality of exploration of the aesthetical thought of Byzantium — the state, which existed in the 4-15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The medieval aesthetical thought existed in very strong and quite natural connection with the sphere of religious ideas. The cultural traditions of Byzantium have especially strong religious character: the level of development of Byzantine asceticism both in monasteries and out of them was very high. It must be considered as remarkable factor of aesthetical discourse development. Thus, exploring the ascetic culture thoroughly, one receives a good opportunity to cognize the important principles of ascetic aesthetics, its valuable senses, including the senses of cosmological character.

Traditionally Byzantine religious aesthetics (as well as aesthetics of the whole Christian East) draws attention of specialists in different spheres. First of all, we should mention numerous theologians (e. g. archbishop Vasilii (Krivoshein), archimandrite Kiprian (Kern), archimandrite John Panteleimon (Manussakiss), priest Georgiy Florovskiy, priest Ioann Meyendorff, priest Pavel Florenskiy, priest Sergiy Bulgakov, priest Aleksiy Ostapov, Vladimir Losskiy), historians (George Dubi, Aleksey Kazhdan, Zinaida Udal'tsova) and scientists, who study the religious culture and arts (Sergiy Abramovitch, Sergey Averintsev, Leonid Ouspensky and others).

Many representators of domestic and foreign philosophical discourse tries to explore the Byzantine religious and aesthetical tradition directly. The corresponding problems are touched

upon or analyzed more or less thoroughly in works by Vladimir Lychkovach, Gervage Mathew, Leonid Stolovich, Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz and Liudmila Usikova.

Besides, it is necessary for us to pay attention to studies by mentioned above modern historian of aesthetical doctrines Viktor Bychkov, especially to his well-known monograph “Little history of Byzantine aesthetics” [Bychkov, 1991]. Exploring the religious and philosophical conceptions of spiritual and sensual beauty, harmony in Universe and artistic creativity, this scientist points out such remarkable phenomenon in history of Byzantine aesthetical thought as “aesthetics of the asceticism” [Bychkov, 1991: 92].

At the same time, definite aspects of ascetic and aesthetical tradition of Byzantium have not been explored enough. Among the actual problems of modern historical and aesthetical byzantology we find the problem of further systematization of Christian East ascetics’ corresponding statements and adequate understanding of their theological and aesthetical positions, including their interpretations of beauty and order in cosmos.

The aim of the article is to make a general survey of Byzantine aesthetics of the asceticism and to point out its impressive cosmological potential.

### **Aesthetics, Ontology and Cosmology: sphere of interaction**

The well known in scientific world fact is that such philosophical doctrine as aesthetics can be defined in different ways. There are lot of opinions, what precisely aesthetical thought is. Summarizing the theoretical experience of many thinkers, who tries to fill the term “aesthetics” with more or less definite sense, we can conventionally formulate some laconic definitions, which, according to our point of view, pretend to be classical ones.

First of all, aesthetics can be certainly regarded as philosophy of beauty. This definition is very popular in society. However, it is not perfect. Subject of aesthetical discourse should not be mentioned in so “reduced” way, for it is much more wider: not only the beautiful phenomena in reality draw interest of aesthetics.

At the same time, this branch of philosophical thought represents the doctrine of expression and expressiveness (see studies by Benedetto Croce, Aleksey Losev, Vladimir Lychkovach). Aesthetics tends to understand the process and results of expression of definite senses, ideas, feelings, psychoemotional states, etc. The products of such procedure possess different quality: they may be not only beautiful, but also ugly, disgusting, horrible and so on.

Of course, we meet the mentioned expressiveness in sphere of artistic culture in particular. That is why the other popular definition of aesthetical quest is the following: aesthetics is the philosophy of arts (or even a special art-criticism and metatheory of arts).

Finally, it is necessary to recollect one more definition now. It was used in the beginning of the history of aesthetics as conventionally independent part of philosophical knowledge. We mean the definition by “father” of aesthetics — German philosopher of 18<sup>th</sup> century Alexander-Hotlib Baumgarten. According to his opinion, the term “aesthetics” should signify the science, which studies the sensual cognition of the world. While such philosophical doctrine as logics explores the intellectual processes, human thinking, its forms and laws, aesthetics appears to be a kind of supplement to the logical quest. Sensual reality (to put it in other words — sensual cosmos) and cognition of this reality are the subjects of aesthetical discourse as well.

This short review helps us to get some much better knowledge about the specific features of aesthetics. The subject of this doctrine is really wide, and it has obvious strong connection,

in particular, with theory of cognition (gnoseology), with theory of being (ontology) and, as it is mentioned in Introduction, with theory of cosmic being (cosmology).

By the way, this circumstance gives us enough ground to point out such inseparable components (dimensions) of aesthetical discourse as aesthetical and ontological (including aesthetical and cosmological) and aesthetical and gnoseological ones.

### **Cosmological Senses of Byzantine Ascetic and Aesthetical Doctrine**

Such remarkable dimensions, which interact one with another actively, scientists can find, exploring the aesthetical tradition of Byzantine ascetic culture.

Analysis of these dimensions must be preceded with the review of some peculiar features of meaning of the very term “asceticism.”

Its worth of attention of scientists, that originally the general sense of the word “asceticism” included definite philosophical and aesthetical component: it could be used to define a kind of human activity, which aimed to decorate some things, that is — to make them beautiful. In Christian culture the corresponding terms — “asceticism”, “ascetic”, etc. — have not only ethical, but also aesthetical senses. The true ascetic practices can be defined as the creative activity, in the result of which the person becomes able to see and admire God as Absolute Beauty and to receive its own spiritual and somatic beauty.

Besides, before analysis of Byzantine ascetic aesthetics’ cosmological senses we must mention the important feature of the whole Byzantine religious culture again. It represents the culture, in which the ascetic ideals are very popular. That is why, to our opinion, some philosophers may make a mistake, conventionally characterizing as the aesthetics of the asceticism only the doctrine accepted by the Byzantine monks. Moreover, it is methodologically incorrect not to identify the Orthodox ascetic and aesthetical tradition with the aesthetics of the patristic doctrine. At least the vast majority of representatives of the latter (e.g. st. Vasilii the Great, st. Grigoriy, bishop of Niss) are the true champions of the asceticism, as one can understand, having read their works and having analyzed the description of their life ways.

Aesthetical and cosmological ideas of Byzantine ascetics are closely connected with Orthodox general doctrine of being and doctrine of being of the beauty. It is impossible not to mention, that these doctrines, in their turn, exist in obvious connection with such world-view principle as *monotheism* — strong belief in One God.

As the Ukrainian philosopher Serhiy Vasylenko states, the scientists can even point out the special aesthetosphere (province of aesthetical) of the monotheism, which has its own peculiarities [Vasylenko, 1978: 23]. It is understood, that it differs from the aesthetosphere of the polytheism. As the component of pagan culture, the latter understands the divine being not as only the beauty being: the numerous characters of the mythology (Atotarho, Chornobog, Pan, Typhoon and others) are ugly and horrible.

According to the Christian theology, the Divine Being can be interpreted as the Beauty Being only. God is the Absolute Being — the Being as It is, — stress both the theological ontology and aesthetics, — and it is a big mistake to consider True Divinity as something non-beautiful.

Besides, scientists should be conscious of the most remarkable and impressive feature of Christian monotheism. There is a substantial difference between it and monotheistic traditions of, for example, Islamic or Judaistic religious cultures. Christians believe in Only God, Who is, at the same time, Trinity.

*Trinitary monotheism* influences the development of Christian aesthetical doctrine to a great degree. This fact must be taken into consideration by those philosophers, who tries to explore the Byzantine ascetic aesthetics as thoroughly as it is possible. Believing in Holy Trinity, representatives of Orthodox theological and aesthetical tradition do believe in existence of the Highest Harmony — eternal harmonic interaction between Three Persons of Trinity — God Father, God Son and God Holy Spirit.

This Beautiful Harmony is absolute, perfect, spiritual, non-created and constant: it has neither its beginning, nor end. Of course, there is no place even for a little chaotic change in such great interaction. Actually, accepting and preaching this idea of eternal ORDER, theological ontology and aesthetics except the possibility of chaos as the starting point of being.

It is necessary to mention one more important factor of Byzantine aesthetics of the asceticism development. The ascetic aesthetical tradition has been influenced by the theocentric character of Orthodox ontological and cosmological doctrine. Studying the specific features of the aesthetosphere of the Christian monotheism and analysing the corresponding opinions of the famous Byzantine theologians-ascetics (sts. Vasilij the Great, Grigoriy the Theologian, Ioann Chrysostom, Grigoriy Nisskiy, Ioann Damaskin and others), scientists regularly receive the ground for interpretation of aesthetics of the asceticism as the true *theocentric ontology of the beauty* [Tsarenok, 2013: 9]. It is based upon the theological axiomatic statement, that God — the Creator — is the Absolute Beauty, Who causes the being of the beauty, harmony and order in spiritual and material worlds, created by Him. Here we must stress, that, according to Christian theology, this creation has nothing to do with the so-called emanation: Christian theistic ontology and cosmology does not accept ideas of the doctrine of pantheism, for example, of the “naturalistic pantheism”, which tries “to dissolve” Creator in nature [Aliaiev, 2013: 227]. At the same time, theologians of Christian world criticize the ontological conception of the “pre-being” of the material for the creation: Almighty Creator is not in need of existence of such sensual matter, but He does create everything *from nothing* [comp.: Gukhman, 2016: 66].

In fact, the being of the material (sensual or somatic) beauty represents one of the most important problems of the Byzantine religious aesthetics. The author of this article does not agree with the statement that the asceticism turns the Christianity in the principally anti-aesthetical religion (see works by Moisey Kagan). Such interpretations are based upon the popular stereotype, according to which Christian ascetics preach the radically negative attitude to the material being and to the material beauty in particular. However, the thorough and objective analysis of the main principles of the aesthetics of the asceticism helps us to understand that these stereotypical opinions are not true.

Analyzing the aesthetical ideas of sts. Vasilij the Great, Grigoriy the Theologian, Kirill, the bishop of Jerusalem, Simeon the New Theologian and other famous Byzantine religious philosophers, we do become able to point out their views on the beauty of sensual world, which should not be interpreted as anti-aesthetical views.

First of all, traditionally appealing to texts of Bible, theologians state, that beauty and harmony are quite natural qualities of created world (cosmos). Absolute Being created spiritual and material worlds good and well-ordered: results of the Great Artist’s creation just could not be bad.

At the same time, Christian aesthetics, ontology and cosmology differentiate two periods in history of cosmos or two kinds of cosmical being state. Developing this philosophical tradition, we can call them *pre-sin state* and *post-sin state*. The point, which chronologically

demarcates one of them from another, is connected with transgression, committed by the first people Adam and Eve (Genesis, 3). Original good, beauty, order and harmony were the characteristic features of the pre-sin state of world. The transgression distorted the state of cosmos to impressive degree: evil, chaos and disharmony appeared in sensual world.

However, due to mercy of Creator, this horrible perversion of cosmos was not total, insuperable and incorrigible. World's post-sin state still bears definite (though, in fact, very little) resemblance to the pre-sin one. Changed in the cause of the mentioned above human mistake cosmical being, possesses reduced good, order and beauty.

According to Byzantine theologians' numerous reflections, the sensual cognition of the world (cosmos) and the perception of the sensual beauty and impressive order of Universe are able to help people in their true search of Absolute Being. Orthodox ascetics are conscious of material beauty objective value. Holy Writ helps them to understand this value well enough.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. *There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world*" (Psalm 18:1–4).

Since "...the creation of the world His [God's] invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even His eternal power and Godhead*" (The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans, 1:20).

Such Bible messages as well as all the sources of Church religious experience prevent unreasonable negation towards sensual world and its beautiful phenomena in Orthodox ascetic culture.

Order and harmony in material cosmos are considered by religious thinkers of Byzantium as impressive evidence of being of the Almighty Creator (such proving of existence of God is well-known by the name of teleological one). According to ascetic aesthetics, right perception of cosmical beauty helps people to understand, that Creator and Artist of Universe does exist. Such remarkable aesthetical, ontological and cosmological accent we can find, for example, in one of the numerous sermons by st. Grigoriy the Theologian. The famous Byzantine philosopher underlines: when somebody enjoys a well-made musical instrument and pleasant sounds of it, he is conscious of true being of author of this impressive artifact. Sensual Universe as well as good musical instrument impresses humankind with its beauty and well-ordered organization. He, who enjoys these qualities righteously, becomes able to acknowledge, that cosmical being for sure has its Author [Grigoriy Bogoslov, 2010: 35]

Considering of sensual reality as true *natural Revelation*, which should effectively supply the Revelation of super-natural character (senses of the Holy Writ, righteous person's mystical experience, etc.), represents the remarkable feature of Christian doctrine. Here we meet the strong connection between aesthetical, ontological and gnoseological reflections. The cosmos is understood in ascetic culture not as something (*some-thing!*) like an "offspring" of the total "accident game", but as the regular result of Free Creative Activity — as the real sphere of senses, accepting of which plays important role in human spiritual life.

Cosmos with its beauty and order cannot be considered as something accidental. St. Ioann Damaskin, developing the mentioned tradition of teleological proving of existence of God, stresses, that it is obviously incorrect and, in fact, impossible to understand both the appearing of the world and its organizing as simple accidents. One may think (though, this thought has nothing to do with truth), that Universe begin to exist in accidental way. However, in such a case, would it be right to consider the making the world to be well ordered as non-regularity,



as accident as well? Thinking so, one must acknowledge too many accidents, which change one another. This logical contradiction proves that neither birth of the cosmos, nor ordering of it are accidents. We should acknowledge not the accidentally, but the existence of the Highest Wise Being, Who creates the sensual world and gives order and harmony to it, — the existence of Creator and Artist [Ioann Damaskin, 2011: 19].

Thus, Byzantine aesthetics of the asceticism points out the important sense of the cosmical beauty. The latter is the real message — aesthetically expressive message — for human being: enjoying of it helps people to believe in God, to get rid of any world-view hesitations and make one's believe more strong and perfect. The right perception of sensual beauty is able to lead human soul to Absolute Beauty — that is the one of the keystone ideas of Orthodox ascetic aesthetical discourse.

Order and harmony of cosmos represent the important subjects of ascetic aesthetics. Impressive aesthetical and cosmological senses fill, for example, theological works by st. Grigoriy, bishop of Niss. This well-known Byzantine preacher of Orthodox faith and ascetic way admires the world harmony, created by God. Resembling such philosophers of ancient Greece as Pythagoreans to some degree, Grigoriy tells about the total Universal music. Well-ordered and gradual interaction of different things in cosmical being makes (or appears to be) the first, archetypical and true music (“musikia”). Of course, it has its Author — Lord of Universe, Who is the First Artist (Musician): He creates the world and gives a start to this music in artistic way [Tsarenok, 2013: 17].

Ascetic culture does value the beauty of the visible world. Studying of history of Christian East proves that ascetics in their search of places for foundation of monasteries could choose the picturesque landscapes. They understood well, that beauty of nature, which surrounded centers of intensive spiritual life, would benefit to monks.

It is interesting to mention the following fact. The ascetics' ability of enjoying of the sensual beauty was appreciated even by the lord George Gordon Byron. This famous English poet of the 19<sup>th</sup> century underlined (though, in his specific way) the aesthetical potential of ascetic culture in “Child Harolde’s pilgrimage” [Byrone, 1812]:

“More blest the life of godly eremite,  
Such as on lonely Athos may be seen,  
Watching at eve upon the giant height,  
Which looks o’er waves so blue, skies so serene,  
That he who there at such an hour hath been,  
Will wistful linger on that hallowed spot;  
Then slowly tear him from the witching scene,  
Sigh forth one wish that such had been his lot,  
Then turn to hate a world he had almost forgot.”

Of course, ascetic aesthetics preaches the *reasonable enjoying of the sensuality*: asceticism has nothing to do with hedonism — with absolutization of sensual joys. Perception of beauty of the world should not pretend to be the main aim of human life. It must not prevent people from active searching of God and communication with Him.

That is why, according to ascetic doctrine principles; the human attitude towards beauty in cosmos represents the difficult task. In order to resist the numerous temptations, the true Christian ought to control his or her sensual activity thoroughly.

The cognition of the sensual (material, somatic) world must be realized with great caution: many sin-provoking impressions are considered as a real danger for people, who want to improve their soul being. The well-known ascetic practice of severe aesthetic isolation, when a person tries to avoid to percept bad impressions, helps to improve person's good qualities.

Such a useful practice assists to achieve *hesychia* — the particular state of one's soul, — which helps believers in their search of God. The Byzantine ascetics' mystical experience proves, that *hesychia* is the substantial factor of improving of one's sensual activity: the true ascetic-*hesychast* receives ability to percept the sensual reality righteously and even becomes able to enjoy Absolute Beauty (see works by sts. Vasilij the Great, Simeon the New Theologian, Grigoriy Palama and other famous Byzantine ascetics).

Moreover, warning humanity of numerous sensual temptations, the representatives of aesthetics of the asceticism stress, that unreasonable enjoying of cosmical beauty is able to distort a person's religious belief. In fact, Byzantine theologians point out the aesthetical cause of origin of paganism.

As st. Grigoriy the Theologian teaches, many people in their quest of Divine Being, made a rude mistake and began to worship the material objects (sun, stars, pictures, etc.), which seemed beautiful to them [Grigoriy Bogoslov, 2010: 45–46].

The blessed Feofilakt, exarch of Byzantine province Bulgaria, underlines the existence of “aesthetical roots” of paganism as well. As this theologian wrote in his “Exegesis of the Gospel according to John”, after the first sin, human nature committed the adultery with idolatry: in particular, many people made sacrifices for some trees in the cause of their beauty [Feofilakt, 2010: 115].

Therefore, one more remarkable accent of ascetic aesthetics is obvious. The perception, cognition and enjoying of the sensual world must help person to find the Absolute, but not to cause such unreasonable act as the absolutization of the creature.

Byzantine ascetic culture values the cosmos as the marvelous creature of God, but, at the same time, it does not absolutize this reality (as well as it does not absolutize the created spiritual reality — worlds of Angels and souls).

According to ascetic aesthetics, material world just could not be worshipped. True Divine Being is Absolute. However, our sensual experience proves that material reality possesses not only different good qualities: it is non-perfect. For example, the things of the somatic sphere (e.g. human flesh) are eternal in no way. They start to exist and, sooner or later, disappear.

Well-known Byzantine preacher st. Ioann Chrysostom (*Zlatoust*) is sure, that the sensuality is impressively beautiful and, at the same time, impressively non-perfect and non-eternal due to Wise Providence. God, knowing about future intention of pagans to worship material things, creates the visible world not only as the marvelous reality, but also as the reality, which bears many signs of imperfection [Ioann Zlatoust, 2007: 153].

Ascetic aesthetical, ontological and cosmological conceptions of Byzantium have quite an optimistic character. They are closely connected with *christology* — theological doctrine of Messiah, Who saves the world and people from sin, evil and death — and with *eschatology* — theological doctrine of future of created reality. According to religious thinkers, due to Lord Jesus Christ the creation receives opportunity to renew. Post-sin state of world has its end. The original beauty and harmony of cosmos certainly will return in future, and righteous people will be able to enjoy and admire renewed Universe.



The new cosmos would impress humankind with its particularly good qualities. As st. Simeon the New Theologian states, the sky will become incomparably brighter and the land will receive the new unspeakable beauty [Simeon, 2011: 30].

It is necessary to add, that, exploring the created reality, aesthetics of the asceticism traditionally pays attention not only to numerous problems of being of Universe — macro-cosmos. The so-called *micro-cosmos* (“little cosmos”), that is the human being, represents one of its invariant subjects too.

First of all, we should underline the specific way of usage of term “micro-cosmos” in works, written by Byzantine champions of the asceticism.

As we know, the mentioned concept appears in Old Greece. The ancient philosophers try to compare a man with Universe, which seems to them as a kind of ideal being. In fact, the cosmos used to be considered by ancient people as an aesthetic ideal. Its order and harmony impressed thinkers, and they tried to emphasize the important status of a human — “the order and harmony in miniature”, — interpreting it as “a little cosmos”.

Byzantine ascetic culture accepted this interpretation. However, this acceptance was a particularly critical one. Christian theologians could use the term “a little cosmos”, speaking about a man. However, at the same time, they stressed, that the corresponding ancient concept, in fact, was not ideal.

According to Byzantine Orthodox doctrine, comparing a human being with the visible world only does not underline man’s value and dignity, man’s main and true advantage over the cosmos. The creature, which surrounds humanity, is non-perfect, non-eternal and non-constant (i.e. changeable), so such comparison cannot pretend to be a pointing out of man’s majesty. Actually, interpreting a human as “a little world”, pagan thinkers humiliate it unconsciously, — states st. Grigoriy, bishop of Niss.

Christian interpretation of a man differs from the described one to a great degree. Theologians call everybody to pay attention to the most impressive feature of human essence: every man and every woman have the image of Creator in their inner world (Genesis 1:26). This is the greatest advantage of humankind, which should be the wise ruler of the cosmos, according to God’s decision [Tsarenok, 2013: 16].

The mentioned above transgression, committed by the first people, casts a gloom over this beautiful image, but does not destroy it. Ascetic doctrine considers a way of spiritual perfection as a search of one’s original beauty in particular. Due to mercy and grace of God, the true believer becomes able to admire the Absolute Beauty; at the same time, he receives his own beauty in the cause of the communication with Creator.

The Byzantine ascetics’ mystical experience proves, that enjoying of the Beauty of God is connected with the enjoying of the Highest Light, Which has no analogies in the sensual reality (see the works by sts. Simeon the New Theologian, Grigoriy Palama and other Byzantine religious philosophers). According to the theology of Christian East, This Light should be regarded as the non-created Energy of God. One of the results of true ascetic activity is the communication with This Energy, which transfiguration the whole human nature: both the soul and the body of ascetic receive their true beauty.

## Conclusion

The aesthetical theory, which can be understood as philosophy of beauty and sensual cognition of reality in particular, exists in obvious and strong connection with ontological and

cosmological discourses. As well as other aesthetical traditions, ascetic aesthetics of Byzantium regularly possesses cosmological potential: numerous representatives of the aesthetics of the asceticism explore the phenomena of beauty, harmony and order in Universe actively.

Christian theism and trinitary monotheism represent the important factors of Byzantine religious and aesthetical thought development. According to theological doctrine of being, it is just impossible to speak about the so-called chaos as a starting point of existence of everything. It is Absolute Divine Being and eternal harmonic interaction between Persons of Holy Trinity, which precedes the beginning of the created invisible and visible world's history. Moreover, one cannot consider the cosmos as a result of God's emanation for it is a rude mistake to "mix" being of Divine Creator and being of non-perfect (non-divine) creature in philosophical conceptions.

The theocentrism of Christian world-view tradition influences the development of ascetic aesthetics too. We can even characterize the latter as a true theocentric ontology of beauty. It underlines the being of the Highest Absolute Beauty, Who is the cause of the beauty in created reality.

Thorough analysis of Byzantine theologians' aesthetical reflections proves that stereotypical pointing out the "anti-aesthetical" character of Christian religion is not true. Ascetics do value not only the spiritual, but also the material (sensual, somatic) beauty. According to their doctrine of visible things, the harmony and order in cosmos are the evidence of existence of God, of His Wisdom and Power. Thus, the cognition of the beautiful and well-ordered sensual reality is able to help a person in search of the Absolute Reality.

At the same time, aesthetics of the asceticism preaches the reasonable and righteous enjoying of sensuality: many impressions are sin-provoking, and the true believer must control his or her acts of perception severely.

Besides, the Byzantine religious thinkers stress, that absolutization of cosmical beauty prevents people from natural for everybody searching of the true Absolute. Such absolutization regularly causes the distorting of one's belief.

Exploring the being of cosmos, ascetic aesthetics differentiates two periods in its history — the pre-sin and the post-sin ones. Transgression, committed by the first people, represents the point of demarcation between these periods. In the cause of described in Bible sin the original beauty, harmony and order of Universe got a serious gloom, but they did not disappear at all. The adequate perception of them is still able to help humankind in its quest of Good. Moreover, due to God's grace, the post-sin state of cosmos has its end: Creator will renew the Universe completely in the future.

Certainly, the survey of Byzantine ascetic aesthetics cosmological senses, we have realized in this article, is rather general. There are many other statements of Christian East theologians, which should be analyzed in order to get a better understanding of Orthodox aesthetics and cosmology. For example, the scientists must pay more attention to the theological comparison of the mentioned pre-sin and post-sin beauty of Universe. Taking into consideration such facts makes actual the further exploration of Byzantine ascetic tradition, based upon the active and effective interaction of aesthetical, ontological and cosmological discourses.

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