

5. The Icon of the *Trinity* by Andrei Rublev

While the compositions of the Anastasis and the Transfiguration represent the realm of *oikonomia* (all the works by which God reveals himself and communicates his life), the figurative representation of the Trinity circumscribes the domain of *theologia* (the mystery of God's inmost life within the Blessed Trinity).¹ Prior to the hesychast controversy, Latin fathers introduced the *filioque* clause as an addition to the Nicene Creed, but the hesychasts condemned and refuted this dogma. In their endeavour to defend the Christological and Trinitarian dogma, the hesychasts affirmed the ontological distinction within the Triune God. They accepted the difference between the hypostases of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and, at the same time, acknowledged the unity of nature in the Trinity. Palamists also developed an elaborate teaching concerning the Soteriological role of divine grace. These theological presuppositions were founded in the steadfast parameters of *theophania* (the Epiphany) and *theoptia* (the vision of the Triune God). The art of the Palaeologan era reflected the theological dogma of the hesychast, with the iconography of the Hospitality of Abraham acquiring a Trinitarian rather than Christological connotation.² Rublev's version of the *Hospitality of Abraham* (Old Testament Trinity) is the best example of this iconographical trend (Fig. 51).

The Old Testament Trinity in theology

Images of the Trinity in the form of three angels represent Chapter 18 of the Book of Genesis. Abraham treats the visit of the three angels as a revelation of God (contrast Judges 13), but what he sees is not God alone but 'three men standing nearby' (Genesis 18:2). Abraham meets the men and greets them with low bows; initially he addressed his fulsome words of welcome to one of the men only (18:3), but he subsequently addressed all three (18:4–5a) who respond. The shift from one to three (18:1–3) matches the corresponding shifts that occur in Abraham's speech (18:3–5). In the follow-up, however, the reverse happens, and the focus shifts from the three to the one. The three men dine together

1 A. Strezova, 'Relations of Image to its Prototype in Byzantine Iconophile Theology', *Byzantinoslavica*, vol. 66, no. 1–2 (2008). In using the term theology, the Byzantine fathers understood it to be about God as he is in himself; this is Trinitarian theology. The term *oikonomia* (divine dispensation), on the other hand, also presupposed a Trinitarian basis, and focused on two facts: the work of Christ (Christology–Soteriology), and divine and continuous work through the Spirit (Pneumatology and Ecclesiology).

2 In the earlier representations of the Trinity the main emphasis was on the figure of the middle angel–Christ (Christological connotation), whereas in later centuries the painters aimed to represent the unity of the Trinity (Trinitarian connotation).

under a tree and they invite Abraham's wife Sarah to join them, but it is one of them (God) who proclaims to Abraham that Sarah 'will give birth to a son'. He also expresses his displeasure at Sarah's incredulity (18: 8–15). When they finish the meal, however; 'the three visitors' depart for Sodom together with Abraham. God decides to inform Abraham about the purpose of their journey (18:17–19); although the declaration that follows seems atypical in this situation (18:20–21) and it is not clearly addressed to Abraham, but it is communicated in the first person rather than in plural ('I will go down to see ...' in contrast to 'come, let Us go down and there confuse their language' (Genesis 11:7–8). 'The two men' now continue their journey to Sodom, but Abraham questions God about his plans for the town (18:22).

God is shown as one of the 'three visitors', and not, for example, as speaking and acting through all three of them. A clear difference exists between God, who leaves once he finishes the dialogue with Abraham, and the 'two travellers' (18:33), who 'came to Sodom in the evening' (19:1, cf. 18:1). The 'three men' (18:2) thus consist of God himself and 'two angels', even if the narrator does not, surprisingly, affirm this difference, or dismiss the likelihood of three divine beings, two of them unknown to Abraham, visiting his home. The two visitors are identified as 'angels' (19:1–15), but their relationship to God is puzzling. The men take Lot and members of Lot's family and lead them safely out of town. However, it is only one God who states, 'Flee for your lives! Do not look back, and do not stop anywhere in the plain!' (18:17). The reference to one God raises the question of whether God has met the two angels outside the gates of Sodom, after they escorted Lot out of the city? It is not clear that such a meeting ever took place as the narrator tried to preserve God's essential mystery. However, the Septuagint's plural reading brings this statement into an agreement with Lot's response: And 'Lot said to them. "No my Lords please!"' (18:18). In spite of this, Lot discusses a possible shelter for himself with a particular partner (18:18–20) who openly identifies himself as the Lord, the cause of the forthcoming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:21–24). There is no further information about the angels. The angel who said 'I cannot do anything until you reach it' is obviously identical to God who 'rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah' (18:22, 24). Does this denote that God reverted to heaven after conversing with Lot, in order to begin the destruction from there? Or, does the odd repetition of Yahweh's name indicate that he exists simultaneously in heaven and on earth? If the Lord is indeed almighty, as Abraham points out (18:25), one would not expect him to leave his heavenly throne vacant.

There are three distinct but interrelated problems in the narrative of Genesis 18–19. First, the affiliation between the Lord and the 'three angels' is uncertain in Genesis 18. Secondly, while Adam identifies two of the visitors as 'angels' (19:1–15), their function is puzzling, especially the one who acts as authority.

Thirdly, there is the difficulty of accepting the presence of God in heaven and on earth at the same time. The first and the second issues describe the dogma of *perichoresis* (the interactions among the three). The third deals with the issue of the hypostatic union in Christ, which affects the liaison between the visible God and the Godhead.

Interpretation

Philo was one of the earliest writers to provide an allegorical interpretation of Genesis 18.³ He supposed that it was a mystical vision of God in which the three angels are the self-existent, beneficent, and sovereign powers of God.⁴ Hence, Abraham's vision of three travellers was only a sighting of three men because he could not perceive their divine nature.⁵ Flavius Josephus avoided the ambiguity, which is present in the Holy Scriptures, the Septuagint and Philo's writings, and claimed that angels can and did assume human form and even eat men's food.⁶ Origen affirmed that the revelation of the uncreated light of God given to Abraham was a prerequisite for his vision of God and the two 'angels'.⁷ The appearance of the angels, on the other hand, signifies the mystery of the Trinity.⁸ Origen considered Abraham a model of a spiritual person who could see the ultimate mysteries of God.⁹ Western fathers, such as Ambrose of Milan from the 4th century, Peter Chrysologus from the 5th century, and Caesarius of Arles from the early 6th century, affirm Origen's interpretation.¹⁰ The Origenist tradition continued in the theological tradition of the Eastern fathers, in particularly in the writings of the 5th-century Cyril of Alexandria, and Procopius of Gaza from the 6th century.¹¹

Justin the Philosopher discussed God's apparition to Moses and to Abraham and other Old Testament prophets, but did not perceive those visions as revelations

3 S. Sandmel, *Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study of Conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature* (Jersey City N.J. 1972) 119.

4 Philo, 'De Abraham', 119–132 in L. Cohn (ed.), *Philonis Alexandrini Opera Quae Supersunt*, vol. 4 (Berlin 1902) 1–60.

5 A. Arterbury, 'Abraham's Hospitality Among Jewish and Early Christian Writers', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* (2003) 359–376.

6 L.H. Feldman, *Judaean Antiquities 1–4: Translation and Commentary* (Leiden 2000) 74.

7 R.E. Heine, 'Introduction', in R. Heine, (trans), *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, vol. 17, *Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C. 1982) 21.

8 Origen, *Commentarium in Canticum Canticorum* 2; in N.P. Lawson (trans), *Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies* (Washington D.C. 1957).

9 Origen, *Commentarium in Evangelium Johannis* 20, 10, 67, in C. Blanc, (ed.), *Commentarii in Evangelium Johannis*, 5 vols., Sources Chrétiennes 120, 157, 222, 290, 385 (Paris 1964–1992).

10 Ambrose of Milan, 'De Excessu Fratris sui Satyri 2.96'; *Patrologia Graeca* 16, 1401AB; Peter Chrysologus, 'Sermo 99', *Patrologia Latina* 52, 478C; Caesarius of Arles, 'Sermo 5', 2–5, in Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons*, M.M. Mueller (trans), (Washington D.C. 1964); also *Patrologia Latina* 39, 1747–1748.

11 Cyril of Alexandria, 'Adversus Julianum Libri Decem' 1', *Patrologia Graeca* 76, 489–1058; 29C, 532D. Procopius of Gaza, 'Commentarius in Genesin 18', 1–3; *Patrologia Graeca* 88, 19–511; 363AC.

of the Godhead, who cannot be a subject of vision.¹² Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not see the Father and the ineffable Lord of all (even of Christ); rather, they saw the invisible God becoming flesh. The Logos conducted the providential and creative work of the Father. God did reveal himself in the form of angels; he also took a human body and appeared to Abraham. Tertullian also claimed that Abraham received a vision of the Son, but this revelation was not about the Trinitarian exegesis.¹³

Eusebius of Caesarea argued that the Hospitality of Abraham was a theophany. Abraham saw one 'man' whom he worshipped as a deity, he fell down immediately and addressed one of them as Godhead. John Chrysostom upheld that the righteous Abraham referred to the three strangers as 'my Lord', but he gave precedence to one of them. Chrysostom elaborated further by stating the two angels went to destroy the town while the Lord continued the conversation with the righteous.¹⁴ He further read this story as a revelation of Christ to Abraham. The two angels shared in his redemptive work and divine mysteries. Cyril of Alexandria established the episode at Mamre was a revelation of the Holy Trinity because, although Abraham saw three people, he addressed them as one.¹⁵

The tradition that affirmed this episode as a revelation of the Holy Trinity continued in the later Eastern exegetic tradition. The author of the *Anonymous Dialogue with Jews*,¹⁶ as well as Maximus the Confessor, wrote extensively about this aspect. Maximus perceived the spiritual world as mystically imprinted on the sensible world in symbolic forms. This reciprocity allowed any material image, like Abraham's three angelic forms, to serve as signs manifesting the invisible and unknowable Trinity to those prepared to see it properly with their spiritual sight. For Abraham, it was a true contemplative, transcending matter through the recognition of the *imago Trinitatis* (image of the Trinity) in his soul. The Hospitality of Abraham affirms the fusion of antinomical nature of God, both the Monad (unity of the Trinity) and the Triad (the three hypostases of God).¹⁷

Gregory the Theologian claimed that Abraham received a vision of God, not in his role as deity, but as a man.¹⁸ Augustine of Hippo affirmed Abraham's

12 Justin's Dialogue with Trypho, 127, in P. Schaff & H. Wace, 'Justin Martyr: Second Apology (Dialogue with Trypho)', *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, (Grand Rapids 1955) 188–270.

13 Tertullian, 'Adv. Marc. iii. 9', in E. Evans (ed.), *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem*, (Oxford 1972).

14 Maximus Confessor, *Избранные Творения: Пер. и Комментарии*, vol. 4, chap. 1 (Moscow 2004) 449.

15 R.M. Grant, 'Greek Literature in the Treatise the Trinitate and Cyril Contra Julianum', *Journal of Theological Study*, vol. 15 (1964) 265–299.

16 E. Grypeou & H. Spurling, *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity* (Leiden 2009) 196.

17 L. Thundberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago 1965) 137–139.

18 J. Bortnes & T. Häggw, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images And Reflections* (Copenhagen 2006) 45.

understanding of the Unity of the Trinity:¹⁹ ‘while greeting the three strangers Abraham confessed to one God in three hypostases.²⁰ This event was, therefore, a symbolic prefiguration of the Trinitarian nature of God.²¹ In his later writings, Augustine of Hippo refrained from any visual representation of the doctrine of the Trinity.²²

Athanasius of Sinai and Ambrose of Milan noted the event to be a Trinitarian revelation.²³ Procopius of Gaza summarised the Christian view about the identity of Abraham’s three guests as follows: the three men were either three angels, or possibly one of them was God while the other two were angels. Most probably the three men addressed by Abraham in the singular served as a type for the holy and consubstantial Trinity. Finally, the great defender of icons, John of Damascus, wrote that Abraham did not see the divine nature. ‘For no one has ever seen God, but he saw an image of God to whom he made a sign of supplication’.²⁴

The *General Vigil Service of the Holy Fathers* describes the event as a revelation of the triune hypostatic God to Abraham (song 5). In addition, the Canon of Joseph the Psalt reads ‘you saw the Trinity as was possible for humans and provided them with hospitality, the righteous Abraham’ (song 5). Similar statements are found in the *Canon of the Metropolitan of Smyrna* (from the middle of the 9th century).

The iconography of the Trinity

The desire to represent the ineffable mystery of the Trinity goes back to the early stages of Christian iconography. Any iconographic evidence of the Western composition of the Trinity is sparse, however, perhaps reflecting the weight of Augustinian authority.²⁵ Also, due to the iconoclastic controversy, only limited examples remain from the Christian first millennium in the East.²⁶

19 Since three men appeared, and no one was said to be greater than the others, either in form, age, or power, why should we not understand, as visibly intimated by the visible creature, the equality of the Trinity, and one and the same substance in three persons? Augustine of Hippo, *De Trin.* ii. 20, in F. Meiner (ed.), *De Trinitate: (Bucher VIII–XI, XIV–XV, Anhang Buch V)* (San Francisco 2001).

20 Bishop Sylvester, *Опыт Православного Догматического Богословия* (Kiev 1892) 213–217.

21 S. McKenna, ‘Saint Augustine: The Trinity’, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 46 (Washington DC 1963) 7.

22 B. McGinn, ‘Trinity Higher than any Being! Imagining the Invisible Trinity’, *Aesthetic des Unsichtbaren* (Erschienen 2004) 77–93.

23 A. Lebedev, ‘Ветхозаветное Вероучение во Времена Патриархов I’ (St Petersburg 1886) 118.

24 John of Damascus, *John Damascus: On Holy Images*, M.H. Allies (ed.), part 3, chpt. 4 (London 1898).

25 F. Boespflug & Y. Zaluska, ‘Le Dogme Trinitaire et l’Essor de son Iconographie en Occident de l’Epoque Carolingienne au IVe Concile du Latran 1215’, *Cahiers de Civilisation Medievale*, vol. 37 (1994) 181–240. From beginning of the Christian era, simple geometric shapes were used in the West to symbolise the Trinity.

26 T. de Régnon, *Etudes sur la Sainte Trinité*, vol. 1 (Paris 1892) 167–215.

Analysis of Western images of the Trinity shows that, until the 13th century, the Western tendency to emphasise one substance (*ousia*) of the Trinity, rather than affirming the characteristics of the three hypostases of God, was reflected in art. In fact, the image of a single Godhead as a symbol for the grandeur of the Holy Trinity was common in Western art. Occasionally, however, the image of Christ symbolised all three hypostases of the Trinity.²⁷ Panofsky stated that it was essential to use a single image to represent the Trinity in the West, and for that purpose the painters in the Western tradition introduced the image of glorified Christ (*Majestas Domini*).²⁸ This evolution passed through the stages of polymorphic images of Christ, such as compositions of the Paternitas, the Synthronoi and the Throne of Mercy as seen in Carolingian examples of the 9th and 10th centuries.²⁹

Because of the complexity of the hypostatic relationships of the Trinity, the search for an acceptable representation of the Holy Trinity in the Eastern tradition started from a different perspective than in the West.³⁰ The use of anthropomorphic iconographic variants for circumscription of the Trinity proved unpopular in the East. The first stage in this direction dates from the time of Photius; however, after the schism of 1054, new iconographic models of Christ Emmanuel and the Ancient of Days arose, as well as anthropomorphic images of the Holy Trinity, especially the Paternitas images.³¹ Despite the spread of archaic images of the Trinity, only one iconic type; e.g., the Hospitality of Abraham (the Old Testament Trinity), was in accordance with the doctrines of the Church.³²

The earliest evidence of the Hospitality of Abraham (Genesis 18) comes from the catacombs of the Via Latina, Rome; the paintings in these catacombs date to about 320–350. This composition represents only the first phase of the biblical story —Abraham's meeting with the angels. A bearded Abraham sits at his midday meal under the oak of Mamre with three youths in white garments standing before him on the right, on a raised circular platform. Abraham greets the approaching youths with his raised right hand, and they respond with the same gesture.³³ To his right, a calf symbolises hospitality. The treatment of this subject in the following two centuries came in the form of magnificent

27 A.M. Di Achille, 'Sur Iconographia Trinitaria Medievale: La Trinità del Santuario sul Monte Autore Presso Valapietra', *Art Medievale*, vol. 2, no. 5 (1991) 49–73.

28 M. Alpatov, 'La Trinité dans le Art Byzantine et l'Icone de Roublev', *Echoes de Orient*, vol. 30 (1927) 151–186; E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford 1939) 433.

29 M. Kuyumdzieva, 'The Face of God's Divinity: Some Remarks on the Origin, Models and Content of the Trinity Images of Synthronoi Type in Post-Byzantine Painting', *Scripta & e-Scripta*, no. 5 (2007) 161–182.

30 A.C. Moore, *Iconography of Religions: An Introduction* (Minneapolis 1977) 250–260.

31 C. Galavaris, 'Στη μνήμη του Ανδρέα Γρηγ. Ξυγγόπουλου (1891–1979)', *Δελτίον ΧΑΕ*, vol. 10 (1980–1981) 85–94.

32 S. Papadopoulos, 'Essai d'Interprétation du Thème Iconographique de la Paternité dans l'Art Byzantin', *Cahiers Archéologiques*, vol. 17 (1968) 132–136.

33 N. Malickii, 'К Истории Композиций Ветхозаветной Троицы', *Seminarium Kondakovianum*, vol. 2 (Prague 1928) 33–45.

mosaics, which combined several scenes in a single picture; the 6th-century representation from San Vitale, Ravenna, and the 5th-century mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, are good examples (Figs 52, 53).³⁴ In these monuments, the regular scheme of the Hospitality of Abraham takes on a dogmatic character. The three beardless youths are notable in being depicted with halos; a mandorla encloses the central figure. The clothes of the three angels are the same; with slight variations in the gestures. The youth on the right points his finger at the bread, whereas the youth on the left holds up his hand in blessing; he slightly turns towards the figure of the middle youth, who points at the calf. Clearly, the focus is on the sacrificial meal, which suggests the artist had an interest in the symbolic meaning of the event. Similar in the San Vitale *Hospitality of Abraham* in which the three youths are almost identical to each other, even as far as gestures. The central angel and the angel on the right make a sign of benediction with their right hands. The left- and right-hand of the figures point to three disc-shaped loaves each marked with an X. Besides the figures of angels in the iconographic scheme, Abraham, Sarah and the servants are represented. Symbolic images of Abraham's hamber and the oak at Mamre fill the landscape surrounding the figures.³⁵

At the beginning of the 11th century, the iconography of the Hospitality of Abraham gained new momentum, presenting its characteristic components and roles in a direct and distinct way. The central angel is in the guise of the historical Jesus, wearing characteristic costume and depicted with symbolic adjuncts. The middle angel is larger than the two flanking angels, who move to the corners of the table and are turned to the side.³⁶ The meaning of this composition is Christological, the middle angel (Christ) serves as a prototype for the Trinity. Infrequently, the flanking angels also had a cruciform halo as well, as in the icon of the 14th-century *Paternitas* composition from Tretyakov Gallery.³⁷ The setting differs as guests sit around a semi-circular, as opposed to square, table. These representations are regularly labelled as images of the 'Holy Trinity'. A miniature found in the Greek Psalter of the 9th century is a good example of this trend. The central characteristic of this image is the fact that the three figures have no wings. The middle angel has a nimbus decorated with a cross.³⁸ The *Armenian Gospel of Vehap'ar* (unknown in the West until 2000), is of importance, presenting the Biblical narrative of Genesis

34 A. Grabar, *A Christian Iconography: A Study of its Origins* (Princeton 1986) 113f.

35 V.N. Lazarav, *История Византийской Живописи* (Moscow 1986) 117–118, pl. 384.

36 A. Heimann, 'L'Iconographie de la Trinite: L'Art Chretien', *Revue Mensuelle*, vol. 1 (September 1934) 37–54.

37 S. Bigham, 'Image of God the Father in Orthodox Theology and Iconography', *Studies in Orthodox Iconography* (Crestwood 1995) 45–57.

38 'Codex Vaticanus Barberinianus Graecus 372', in G. Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity: The Icon of the Trinity by the Monk-Painter Andrei Rublev*, f. 85, pl. 8.

18 in a theological context.³⁹ This was a gradual process culminating in the 14th-century manuscript of Kantacuzenos.⁴⁰ Although Abraham and Sarah are visible in this scene (Rublev removed them), the manuscript illumination of the Trinity was decisive for Rublev.

It is important to note the positioning of the figures in the previous two examples. Their arrangement was not consistent with the principle of *isocephalia* (the heads of the figures in the composition brought to the same level), but in a semi-circle. The table has a semi-circular shape. The middle angel is slightly higher in the pictorial plane with the two other angels standing on both sides of the horizontal plane. This is the so-called Syriac model of the Trinity, commonly used in the Eastern provinces,⁴¹ and later spreading to the Western world.⁴² In its fundamental conception, this iconographic type remained almost unchanged during the 12th century. Slight variations are evident in the Cappella Palatina at Norman Place, Palermo (12th century), where the three men have wings and messengers' staves; one of the angels has a nimbus with a red outline, and above the scene is the inscription 'Holy Trinity'.⁴³ During the Comnenian era, the moment of greeting and the reception of the three personages at the table became separate compositions, for example, in the Cathedral of Monreale (end of the 12th century).⁴⁴ A tendency to unify all three angels, by slightly bending the heads of the side angels towards the middle angel, was initiated in the late Byzantine artistic tradition.⁴⁵

The 'medieval' model of the Trinity continued in the late Comnenian and Palaeologan periods. An arduous contrapposto substituted the frontal position of the central angel;⁴⁶ who turns his head towards the left angel. As a result, the affective relations between the three angels are elicited, creating a revived sense of movement and spatial depth. Churches of the Forty Martyrs, Turnovo; St Sophia, Kiev; St Sophia, Ohrid; are excellent representations of the Trinity.⁴⁷

39 The Armenian Gospel of Vehap'ar was shown for the first time in the *Treasures from the Ark* exhibition at the British Library. M. Golubtsov, 'Икона Живоначальной Троицы', *Журнал Московской Патриархии*, vol. 7 (Moscow 1972) 69–76.

40 C. Lock, 'The Space of Hospitality: On the Icon of the Trinity Ascribed to Andrei Rublev', *Sobornost: Incorporating Eastern Churches Review*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2008) 21–53.

41 Malickii, 'К Истории Композиций Ветхозаветной Троицы', 34.

42 Alpatov, 'La Trinite, dans l'Art Byzantine et l'Icone de Roublev', 6.

43 *ibid.*, 7–9.

44 Bunge, *The Rublev Trinity*, 65–67.

45 *ibid.*, 10.

46 *Encyclopedia Britannica*, online version, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/135385/contrapposto> (accessed 10/11/2011).

47 M. Conceva, 'За Търновската Живописна Школа', *Търновска Книжовна Школа 1371–1971* (Sofia 1974) 343; Detailed information about the Church of Forty Martyrs, Turnovo, can be found online at <http://www.st40martyrs.org/> (accessed 03/02/2012); A. Комес, 'Роль Княжеского Заказа в Построении Софийского собора в Киеве', *Древнерусское Искусство: Художественная Культура Домонгольской Руси* (Moscow 1972) 50–64; C. Grozdanov, *Saint Sophia of Ohrid* (Zagreb 1991) 25–34.

In the late Palaeologan period, depictions had an indefinite architectural coulisse (background), serving to abstract the figures from their historical context. Moreover, Abraham and Sarah abandon their original post and all other elements and superfluous objects were removed from the pictorial plane. The figures of the three angels were no longer depicted in semi-circle, with a special position given to the middle angel, as in previous times. Rather, the three angels are equal and represented in a full circle. The table changes shape from circular to square.⁴⁸

The *Trinity* of San Marco, Venice (13th century), heralds the beginning of a new type in the West, which aims to reflect the history of Hospitality of Abraham, rather than portraying the Trinity. There is a tendency to unify the three angels by inclining their heads toward the centre. The figures are positioned according to the standard of *isocephalia*; they resemble a frieze.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, no similar icon of high artistic value can be found from 13th-century Constantinople except, possibly, a small circular icon bearing the title of the Holy Trinity. Greek in origin, this example goes back to the same prototype as that of Rublev.⁵⁰ The knees of the central angel rise and the shape of the chalice and the gold lines of the table are reminiscent of Rublev's *Trinity*. This detail, the semicircular shape of the table, around which the angels sit, comes from the Oriental model of the previous century. It is not repeated in the Palaeologan iconography. Whereas the purpose of this icon was to highlight the central angel, Rublev aimed to present the three angels as equals.⁵¹

A 13th-century Italian miniature in the British Museum (Ad. 15, 268) resembles a Byzantine example from the 12th century (in particular, the figure of Abraham resembles that of Amos from the 12th-century Vatican manuscript), with the proportions of the drapery almost reproducing that of Vat. Gr. 1153, fol. 20. A singular angelic form is subordinate to the figurative scene (in the curve of the body), and the central angel is slightly shifted, resembling the middle angel of Rublev. The motion of the oak repeats the movement of the body of Christ, as is the case in Rublev. This iconographic novelty contributed to the development of a new composition of the Trinity.

In Russia, this innovative development in iconography surfaced before Rublev. Some of the finest artworks of this period include a mural in St Sophia Cathedral, Kiev (11th century), and the bronze south door of the Church of Nativity of the Virgin, Suzdal (13th century).⁵² Two famous frescoes from the Church in

48 V.N. Lazarev, *Feofan Grek i Ego Shkola* (Moscow 1961) 18.

49 A. Robertson, *The Bible of St Mark, St Mark's Church the Altar and Throne of Venice* (Venice 1898) 109.

50 Alpatov, 'La Trinité dans le Art Byzantine et l'Icone de Roublev'.

51 R. Arnheim, 'Inverted Perspective in Art: Display', *Leonardo*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring 1972) 125–135.

52 L.W. Mitrovic & N. Okunev, 'La Dormition de la Sainte Vierge dans la Peinture Orthodoxe', *Byzantinoslavica*, vol. 3 (1931) 134–174.

Alexandrovo near Moscow, and the Church of the Transfiguration, Novgorod (14th century), are also good illustrations.⁵³ In all three models of the Trinity, the central angel alone has a cross nimbus and holds a scroll in his left hand, while the other two angels hold messenger staves. Three breads and three chalices are placed on the table, with a large chalice being in the middle of the table. The most significant details are the gestures of the three angels; the one on the left points to the chalice, the one on the right blesses one of three loaves, and the one in the middle blesses the table.⁵⁴

The advent of the Anaphora Troparion (of the third hour) and the liturgical reforms brought by Metropolitan Cyprian and patriarch Philotheus brought out new elements into the figurative scene of the Trinity. The fundamental importance of the anaphora predetermined significant changes in the structure of the iconostasis in Russia, with a new iconography of the 'Trinity' arising for the first time as part of the Feast cycles.⁵⁵ The image of the Old Testament Trinity gained popularity after hesychasm's spread into Russia. It was no longer overloaded with details of the Biblical narrative of Genesis 18 and, instead, an allegorical reading of the narrative occurred, and the story itself took on a more rudimentary character in art. The best example of this trend is Rublev's Old Testament icon of the Trinity.

Andrei Rublev and his art

Little is known about the life of Andrei Rublev, the famous painter of the Trinity. Many scholars agree that he was born between 1360 and 1370. For a short period, he lived in the Trinity Lavra of St Sergius near Moscow. He was under the spiritual guidance of monk Nikon, a hegumen of the monastery after the passing of Sergius of Radonezh (1392).⁵⁶ Afterwards, Rublev lived in Zvenigorod, in Vladimir Suzdal and at the Spaso-Andronikov monastery near Moscow.⁵⁷

The first mention of Rublev comes from the chronicles which testify that in 1405 the Grand Prince Vasily Dmitrievich, commissioned three iconographers,

53 M. Cheremeteff, 'The Transformation of the Russian Sanctuary Barrier and the Role of Theophanes the Greek', in A. Leong (ed.), *Millennium: Christianity and Russia, A.D. 988–1988* (Crestwood 1990) 107–121; M.E. Frazer, 'Church Doors and the Gates of Paradise: Byzantine Bronze Doors in Italy', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 27 (1973) 145–162.

54 A.A. Saltykov, Иконография Троицы Андрея Рублева, *Древнерусское Искусство XIV–XV* (Moscow 1984) 80.

55 O.G. Uliyanov, *О месте Иконы Живоначальной Троицы в Праздничном Ряду Русского Иконостаса Троицкие Чтения 2003–2004 гг. Большие Вяземы* (Moscow 2004) 153–154.

56 L. Hughes, 'Inventing Andrei: Soviet and Post-Soviet Views of Andrei Rublev and his Trinity Icon', *Slavonica*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Nov. 2003) 84–85.

57 V. Kopylov, 'Hesychasm and Creative Activity of Andrei Rublev', paper given to the 16th International Patristic Byzantine Symposium in Thessaloniki 26th May 1999, *Patristic and Byzantine Review*, vol. 18–19 (1999) 41–47.

Theophanes the Greek, Prokhorov of Gorodets and Rublev to work on the Annunciation Cathedral in Moscow's Kremlin. Rublev's name, with the designation 'the monk', is last on the list of masters, which suggests that he was the youngest.⁵⁸ Researchers assert that seven icons of the festival cycle in this cathedral, including *Baptism*, *Birth of Christ*, *Presentation of the Lord*, *Transfiguration*, *Annunciation*, *Resurrection of Lazarus* and *Entry into Jerusalem* belong to Rublev. These works are in a Byzantine style and demonstrate Rublev's exceptional talent. Rublev created another work of art during this period, a book illumination of Khitrovo Gospel. This wonderful miniature contains an image of an angel, which as Alpatov claimed, symbolises Evangelist Matthew.⁵⁹ The chronicles also mention that Rublev and Daniil Chernii (another famous Russian iconographer) worked on the Assumption Cathedral, Vladimir in 1408. The frescoes painted by Rublev exist in fragments and occupy the western wall of the church. The fragments depict images of the trumpeting angel, of Apostle Peter as well as of the Last Judgment.⁶⁰

Extensive research has revealed that in 1410 Rublev painted one of the Zvenigorod churches. The icons *Saviour*, *Archangel Michael* and *St Paul* from Zvenigorod are attributed to Rublev and they feature a new stage in Rublev's painting, expressing the beginning of the Golden Age — the flourishing of icon painting in Russia. About the same time, Rublev created another outstanding work, a version of the famous Byzantine image of *Our Lady of Vladimir*. The image indicates that Rublev created this icon as an experienced master, who had his own school of painting.⁶¹

From 1425–1427 Rublev worked together with Chernii on the new stone cathedral of the Holy Trinity. It is probably during this time Rublev painted the main feature of the monastery — the icon of the Holy Trinity. Epiphanius the Wise claimed that Rublev helped with the decoration and construction of the church. Rublev painted his last works at the Cathedral of the Saviour at Andronikov Monastery, Moscow, where he passed away in 1430. He was buried in the altar vaults near his close friend Chernii. Rublev was canonised a saint in 1988 by the Russian Orthodox Church and his feast day is celebrated on 29 January and 4 July.⁶²

58 Uliyanov, 'The Deesis Painted by Andrey Rublev from the Annunciation Church of the Moscow Kremlin (on the 575th year of the demise of the reverend icon-painter)', *Hierarchy in Ancient Russia*, M. Mozhaishk-Terra (trans), (Moscow 2005) 172–223.

59 O. Popova, *Russian Illuminated Manuscripts* (London 1984) 36–39.

60 L. Bourdeau & S. Chassé, 'Actes du Colloque Sites du Patrimoine et Tourisme, 2–4 Juin 2010, Québec, Canada', *Conference Proceedings World Heritage and Tourism: Managing the Global and the Local, June 2–4, 2010* (Quebec City 2011) 621–622.

61 L.A. Aleksandrovich Fyeoktistov, *Город Родина* (Moscow 2007) 13–15.

62 'Moscow Patriarchate Glorifies Saints', *Orthodox America* IX (82), August 1988, <http://www.roca.org/OA/82/82e.htm> (accessed 16/03/2008).

Rublev's biography raises questions as to the possible influences on his art, particularly on his icons. The Byzantine canon of icon-painting, which spread to Russia under the influence of Theophanes, as well as the legacy of the older Russian school of art, are often mentioned in connection with the development of Rublev's style. Also, the Novgorodian school of painting, as well as Rublev's spiritual beliefs and monastic life, were important influences on him. Sergius of Radonezh's affinity to the hesychast dogma and the cult of the Trinity, as well as Theophanes's artistic style, penetrated by a mystical spirit, affected the development of Rublev's style of painting.

Sergius of Radonezh and the cult of the Trinity

Sergius of Radonezh was a crucial influence on Rublev who lived and worked under his auspices. In fact, Rublev painted his famous icon of the Trinity to serve as a memorial to Sergius of Radonezh.

Sergius was a Russian ascetic who exercised significant influence on domestic spirituality as well as on Rublev's personality. In fact, the life of St Sergius, the hegumen of the Holy Trinity Lavra, was often taken as a model of ascetic existence by contemporaries of Rublev. The Monastery of the Holy Trinity, in turn, was a place where notions of love of God, calm and self-discipline, and mystical union with God were propagated.

Sergius was a prayer enthusiast; he revived monasticism in Russia in the 14th century and brought the tradition of *bezmolvie* (*hesychia*) to Russia, both in theory and practice (his disciples were on Athos at the height of the hesychast controversy). In the *Vitae of St Sergius*, Epiphanius stated that the saint had frequent visions of the uncreated light during prayer and other beatific revelations.⁶³ The most important of them is the icon of Theotokos, when the Virgin Mary promised to Sergius the protection of Russian people. The particulars of the epiphany are reminiscent of Abraham's vision of the three angels in the Old Testament (Genesis 18). Apparitions of the Virgin Mary were uncommon in the 14th and 15th centuries and Russian monks took it as a divine sign that the Lord granted Russia a special protection.

Sergius apparently had other spiritual visions during prayer, which were also witnessed by his followers, whose testimony asserts the frequency of his visions of the divine light. Some aspects of these visions are reminiscent of those experienced by Byzantine practitioners of hesychasm, such as Symeon

63 Епифанием Премудрым, 'Житие и Чудеса Преподобного Сергия', Chpt 31, online version <http://www.stsl.ru/lib/book2/index.htm> (accessed 10/07/2012).

the New Theologian.⁶⁴ For instance, one of Sergius's disciples, Simeon, stated that when Sergius conducted the liturgy, the 'divine light' was often seen at the altar situated around the Eucharist. On one occasion, when Sergius wanted to receive communion, 'the divine fire moved up from the altar, curled up as a kind of cloth, and entering the holy chalice'. Simeon claimed that this insight gave Sergius his wonderful mystical knowledge, and many other gifts such as healing the sick, casting out demons, and even resurrecting the dead.⁶⁵

Apart from the fact that Sergius was a recipient of visions and a miracle worker, the most significant feature of his spirituality was his special affinity with the Holy Trinity.⁶⁶ In the *Vitae of St Sergius*, Epiphanius recorded Sergius's founding of the Monastery of the Trinity and aspects of his devotion to this cult.⁶⁷ To give sound support to this claim, Epiphanius referred to the hymns written by Sergius in praise of the Trinity.

Sergius was the first Russian religious to give a sound idea of the Holy Trinity. He transformed it into a symbol of the Christian dogma of unity, the accord to which all must strive to live on earth. In the religious and philosophical sense, this image of the Trinity, as the ideal of life on earth, opened the way for the removal of the dilemma — national or universal. Consequently, the cult of the Holy Trinity, in whose honour Sergius dedicated a monastery, became a symbol of the unity of Russia. As a result of this dogma, images of the Holy Trinity appeared throughout Russia as a possible way to save the real state.⁶⁸ Interestingly, before Sergius accepted the dogma of the Holy Trinity, the cult of the Trinity was not seen as a necessary part of orthodox life in Russia. For example, pictorial cycles were usually devoted to Christ, the mother of God, St Nicholas, the holy warriors and the fathers of the Church. Only in the Kiev-Pechersk Monastery was the cult of the Trinity followed in the early 12th century.

It is possible that Sergius was familiar with the cult of the Holy Trinity established by the monks of the Kiev-Pechersk and that he used it as an example. The cult of the Trinity in the 14th and 15th centuries spread to such extent that Sergius of Radonezh was actively followed by a constellation of students and believers. Some of them testified to receiving visions of the Trinity themselves. St Alexander Svirsky (1433) spoke about his vision of the Triune God, showing in the form of three men. St Macarius Zheltovodsky (1444) also experienced a similar kind

64 H. Alfeyev, *Saint Symeon, the New Theologian, and Orthodox tradition* (Oxford 2000) 226.

65 J.L. Opie, 'The Trinity in Andrei Rublev's Icon of the Holy Trinity', *Il Mondo e il Sovramondo del'Icona* (Florence 1998) 197–209.

66 R. Dulskis, 'Hesychast Ideas in the Oeuvre of St Andrei Rublev', *Logos-Vilnius* (2007) 126–142.

67 D. Likhachyov, *Культура Руси Времени Андрея Рублева и Епифания Премудрого Конец XIV–Начало XV в* (St Petersburg 1962) 52–63.

68 K. Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood 1995) 39.

of vision in 1435, after which he founded the monastery of the Holy Trinity.⁶⁹ Joseph of Volokolamsk described such exalted mystical experiences in his writings. The *Acts* of the Church Council headed by St Macarius of Moscow mention visions of light experienced by the monk, as well as the Council of Hundred Chapters (Stoglav) in 1551 and the councils of 1553–1554, which further affirmed the possibility and necessity for sacred images of the Holy Trinity.⁷⁰ Sergius called the Russian people to brotherly love, unity and spiritual creation. He embodied the image of the Trinity as a symbol of Russian unity, which was sought so eagerly in the 13th and 14th centuries. Shortly after his death in 1392, he was canonised and later honoured as the patron and defender of Moscow.

Sergius's devotion to the Holy Trinity was later reflected in Rublev's icon of the Trinity. The creation of this icon had a personal meaning for Rublev: it was a gift to his mentors from the Trinity Sergius's Lavra, who enriched his moral values. This scene represented the significance of Sergius's spirituality for Russian people; a symbol of immersion in the mystery of the divine being, God's unity and indivisibility.⁷¹

Theophanes the Greek and Andrei Rublev

Rublev's art has arguably diverse influences, the most prominent of which is Byzantine, and Greek Christian art, particularly of Theophanes the Greek, the famous iconographer who came to Russia at the end of 14th century.

Theophanes was born around 1330, and died sometime between 1405 and 1409. During his short-lived residency in Novgorod, Theophanes painted the famous murals of the Church of the Transfiguration. He also decorated the Church on Volotovo-Field and the Cathedral of St Theodore Stratelates. After finishing work in Kostroma in 1390, Theophanes relocated to Moscow in 1395. The production of miniatures for the illuminated *Khitrovo Gospel* was the first of Theophanes's Muscovite work.⁷² He also prepared the design of well-known manuscripts, such as the *Psalter of Ivan VI Grozny* (Ivan IV the Terrible, from the last quarter of 14th century) and the *Pogodin's Manuscript* (second half of the 15th century). Moreover, he is credited as the painter of the famous icon *Our Lady of the Don* (c. 1395).⁷³ While Theophanes probably produced many art works during the

69 A.V. Motorin, 'Образы Пресвятой Троицы в Русском Государственном Самосознании', <http://spbda.ru/news/a-1856.htm> (accessed 12/05/2010).

70 E.B. Kravyets & L.P. Medvedeva, Иосиф Волоцкий (Moscow 1993) 89, 142, 144; C. Bartolo-Abela, *The Icon of the Divine Heart of God the Father* (Apostolate-The Divine Heart 2012) 18–19.

71 Alpatov, 'О Значении Троицы Рублева', *Этюды по Истории Русского Искусства* (Moscow 1967) 119–122.

72 J. Lawler, *Encyclopedia of the Byzantine Empire* (2004) 284.

73 'Prominent Russians: Theophanes the Greek', online paper <http://russiapedia.rt.com/prominent-russians/art/theophanes-the-greek/> (accessed 07/06/2011).

course of his life, scholars accept the following nine paintings as his: *Dormition of the Virgin*, *Virgin of the Don*, *St Paul*, *Saviour in Glory*, *St John Chrysostom*, *St John the Evangelist*, *St Basil* and the *Archangel Gabriel*. He created these icons in 1405 for the iconostasis of Moscow's Cathedral of the Annunciation. The utilisation of complex drawing techniques and the mystical qualities of these representations suggest that Theophanes was a master painter.⁷⁴

Epiphanius described the discipline and austerity characteristic of Theophanes's art:

while he [Theophanes] sketched and painted, no one saw him glancing at models as some of other painters do, staring at forms with amazement, looking here and there, doing less of the actual painting than observing. In his spirit, he encompassed distant and intellectual realities. With his spiritual eyes, he contemplated spiritual beauty.⁷⁵

The relationship between Theophanes and his pupil Rublev was enigmatic, but he invited Rublev and Prokhorov of Gorodets to work with him on the Annunciation Cathedral. In the process, he advanced Rublev's genius.⁷⁶ Rublev later refrained from the dramatic expression, which characterised the style of Theophanes and instigated his own style of painting. Theophanes's use of monochrome colours and his use of pure forms, however, testify that he was an extraordinary master who played a great part in development of the mature Moscow icon painting.

A single hesychast dogma influenced both Theophanes and Rublev, but their differences in artistic style are the result of the humanist debate, a poignant part of the hesychast controversy within Byzantium, but not in the Slavic lands.⁷⁷ Certain tension between the humanist and hesychast trend existed in Byzantine culture from its beginnings. Russian people, however, who felt no loyalty to the classical Hellenic tradition, experienced no conflict between humanist and hesychast thought. Liturgical practices, monastic obedience and icon painting were the main spiritual practices in Russia before the 14th century. Hesychast components were integrated in Russian consciousness without the humanist thought which affected the hesychast movement in Byzantium.⁷⁸ It is on this basis that the art of Rublev was created. On the other hand, Theophanes's affinity with Byzantine hesychast tradition presented through his adoption of

⁷⁴ D. Talbot Rice & T. Talbot Rice, *Icons and their History* (Overlook Press 1974) 102.

⁷⁵ Alpatov, Феофан Грек (Moscow 1990) 113.

⁷⁶ P.D. Steeves, *The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia and the Soviet Union*, vol. 2 (Accademic International Press 1988) 5.

⁷⁷ Alpatov, 'Искусство Феофана Грека и Учение Исихастов', *Византийский Временник*, vol. 33 (1972) 190–202.

⁷⁸ I. Ekonomtseyev, 'Исихазм и Возрождение: Исихазм и Проблема Творчества', *Златоуст*, vol. 1 (Moscow 1992) 139–170.

an energetic style of painting and the creation of vivid and memorable images. The frescoes of the Church of the Transfiguration, Novgorod, testify to his spiritual insight, knowledge of the mystical contemplative experience, as well as his sympathy with the ancient past.

Although the frescoes of the Church of the Transfiguration, Novgorod, are preserved in small fragments, such incomplete forms show the skill, depth and exceptional qualities of Theophanes's creative genius. Most notable is the adoption of a monochrome technique of painting, in ochre and white. Theophanes's unusual colour palette has been the subject of substantial research, with some scholars suggesting that a fire bleached the frescoes of the Church of the Transfiguration. Extensive archaeological investigation, however, has not discovered traces of fire and restorers have confirmed that the layer of painting is preserved in its original form. The colours of the original monochrome black and white installation are an analogy to the hesychast method of prayer where monks recite only few words ('Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner') during meditation. The aim of this meditative practice was to reach the final stage of mystical contemplation and acquire unity with God (by grace).⁷⁹ The affirmation of the Palamist dogma of the 14th century shaped to an extent Theophanes's unsurpassed painting style. Even greater, however, was the influence of the mystical spirituality of St Macarius of Egypt and St Ephraim the Syrian (in the 4th and 5th centuries) on Theophanes's personal style of Byzantine art.⁸⁰ His most famous frescoes, in the Church of the Transfiguration, Novgorod, depict saints Macarius and Ephraim.

The fresco of St Macarius has a striking quality, reflecting all stages of the spiritual journey of the saint and his mystical ascent to God. It illustrates the state of transformation of St Macarius and his participation in the uncreated light.⁸¹ The heavenly light, in the form of a white flame, envelops his long ascetic figure. A bleaching flare burst shows the face of Macarius, but his eyes are not defined. This unusual depiction is a deliberate statement that the saint does not need sight because he could see God through his inner (spiritual) eye. The face and the hands of the saint point against the light, with the subtle shape of the saint's body being transformed into an image of exceptional strength. St Macarius plunges into the light, into the divine reality, but he does not dissolve like salt in water. On the contrary, he retains his identity. St Macarius lives in the light, and he is the light. This is a classic illustration of the hesychast mystical experience.

There are other important images in the ensemble of the Transfiguration Church, Novgorod. Frescoes painted by Theophanes, which can be found in the Chapel

79 T.A. Subbotin, *Отражение Идей Исихазма в Творчестве Феофана Грека* (Moscow 2011) 6–10.

80 *ibid.*, 114.

81 V.S. Pribitkov, 'Сквозь Жар Души: О трех Древнерус', *Живописцах: А. Рублеве, Диониси, С. Ушакове* (Moscow 1968) 22–25.

of the Trinity are, however, the most important, at least in relation to Rublev's icon of the Trinity.⁸² These relatively well-preserved murals in the small chapel are designed for individual prayer. The program of the paintings is dedicated to the contemplation of the ascetics of the Holy Trinity. In particular, the Old Testament Trinity largely defines the style and personality of Theophanes.

Rublev's icon of the *Trinity*

Rublev's icon of the *Trinity* is the best known of all his paintings and the only one that is fully authenticated. He painted it in honour of Sergius and at the request of Nikon, the new abbot of the Lavra. Rublev was commissioned by Nikon to paint an icon that would represent Sergius's devotion to, and understanding of, the Holy Trinity. Rublev painted the icon between 1392 and 1427 when Nikon became abbot of the Holy Trinity Monastery. During those 30 years, two churches were dedicated to the Holy Trinity: the wooden church (1411–1412) and the stone cathedral (1422–1424). The 15th-century *Life of St Nikon* by Pachomius the Serb reports that Rublev and Daniil Chernii went to the Holy Trinity Monastery for adornment of the stone church of there. It is probable, therefore, that Rublev painted his icon for one of these two churches.

For more than 170 years after its creation, Rublev's icon of the *Trinity* was hidden under darkened oils and covered with surrounds of silver, gold and precious gemstones.⁸³ It was then repainted with fresh colours. The modern restoration began with the cleaning of the icon in 1904–1906, a landmark in the rediscovery of the icon and elevation of Rublev into the artistic canon. Restoration of Rublev's *Trinity* in 1918, by the team of Grabar and Anisimov, which involved cleaning three layers of paint, revealed not the dark olive colours that are typical of Rublev's style, but rather, bright translucent colours.⁸⁴ Rublev's icon was exhibited at the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow.⁸⁵

Stories abound the unusual origin of this icon, such as that it was a part of the iconostasis of the wooden church of the Trinity from the 15th century until archaeologists discovered it in the early 20th century.⁸⁶ Plugin upholds the view that the only written text associating Rublev's *Trinity* with the Monastery of the Holy Trinity was the 17th century *Narrative of the Holy Icon Painters*. This treatise contains praise for the work, although Nikon's *Vita of St Sergius* does

82 G. I. Vzdornov, *The Frescoes of Theophanes the Greek in the Church of the Transfiguration in Novgorod* (Moscow 1976).

83 E.A. Skorobogaseva, *Троице-Сергиева Лавра и Иконография 'Троица Ветхозаветная' в Северных Писъмах XVII*, Троице-Сергиева Лавра в Истории, Культуре и Духовной Жизни России: Материалы IV Международной Конференции 20 Сентября – 1 Октября 2004 Года (Moscow 2007) 228–243.

84 A. Nikitin, 'Кто Написал Троицу Рублева?', *Наука и Религия*, no. 10 (1988) 44–48.

85 Hughes, 'Inventing Andrei'.

86 Nikitin, 'Кто Написал Троицу Рублева?', 46.

not have such references.⁸⁷ While it is difficult to establish the exact date of production, it is certain Rublev painted his *Trinity* during the despoilation of Russia by Tartar and Mongol invaders.⁸⁸

Description



Figure 51. *The Trinity*, 15th century, tempera on wood, 142 x 114 cm, painter Andrei Rublev, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (Russia), inv. no. 12924

⁸⁷ V.A. Plugin, О Происхождении Троицы Рублева, *История СССР*, vol. 2 (Moscow 1987) 68.

⁸⁸ L. Hughes, 'Inventing Andrei', 88.

On the light (originally gold) background, three angels sit around a table on which a bowl is placed. The middle angel stands above the rest; behind his back is a tree, a mountain is depicted behind the angel on the right and behind the left angel is a building. The heads of all three angels incline in silent conversation. Their facial expressions are calm, and their facial types correspond to each other, as though they are three versions of the same face. A system of concentric circles envelopes the composition. The haloes, the contours of the wings and the angels's hand movements create circles which converge at the chalice in the epicentre of the icon. The shape of a lamb's head is inside the chalice, or, if the chalice is turned clockwise, this is the visage of the dead Christ.⁸⁹ The lamb symbolises the sacrificial offering of the Old Testament, and it is also a metaphor for Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God (cf. 1 Peter 1:9; John 1:29). The middle angel blesses the chalice; the angel sitting at his right hand accepts the blessing, and the angel to the left offers the chalice to the observer.

The meaning of Rublev's icon is transparent — in the heart of the *Trinity* icon, a council for the redemption of humanity is in proceeding. The Eucharistic meal is served — the section of the New Covenant and the blood of Christ (cf. Luke 22:20). Salvation comes, however, universally. The three angels discuss the restoration of the lost likeness (to God) of those redeemed and recreated by Christ (Genesis 1:27).⁹⁰ Thus, through love and the sacraments, and especially through Baptism and the Eucharist, the faithful unite with Christ and through him with God (John 4:15; 3:5; 6: 32; 17:1).

On the front of the table, a small rectangle alludes to the cosmos. As God is greater than all creation, and the cosmos is in the will of God and, what is more important, is the plan of salvation of everything created, the true subject of the icon is the eternal plan of God for redemption of humanity.

Behind the middle angel, the oak of Mamre takes the form of a tree with leaves arranged in a spiralling fashion, ascending to the right or to the left. The use of a spiral motif goes back to the ancient tradition and refers to the rising aspects of the soul's journey to the divine.⁹¹ It also points to the symbolism of a ladder, wonderfully depicted in the composition of the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. The oak itself is a metaphor of the 'tree of knowledge of good and evil' (Genesis 2:17), by which both sin and death were introduced into the world. The oak also symbolises the tree of the Crucifixion by standing right behind the central angelic figure.⁹²

89 In the Roman ritual of the Mass, the priest uses the same sentence to invite worshippers to communion: 'behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'; P. Turner & K. Coffey, *Understanding the Revised Mass Texts* (Chicago 2010) 59.

90 K. Barth, 'The Christian Life', *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids 1982) 28.

91 D. Mackenzie, *Migration of Symbols* (Whitefish 2003) 175.

92 Dionysius the Areopagite, On the Divine Names, 5, 5–8 and 11, 2, in J.D. Jones (trans), *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* (Wisconsin 1980).

The mount above the angel on the right has several meanings; one of them being the emblem of the rock that Moses struck to extract water for his people in the desert during the Exodus (Exodus 17:8). It is also reminiscent of Old Testament passages (the Psalms in particular) referring to God as the 'rock and the fortress'; that is, the unshakable, unchangeable and eternal creator (Psalm 70:3). The rock is also the cave of Bethlehem, in which the Virgin Mary gave birth to Christ. Moreover, it represents the tomb of the Resurrection from which Jesus rose (Matthew 27:60). Most importantly, the rock refers to the mountain of spiritual ascent, the point of the revelation of the Triune God.⁹³ The left angel sits before a building, which may be the home of Abraham, father of the people of Israel. It is also an allusion to the dwelling place of the Godhead. On the other hand, the presence of the colour green, which runs from the church's temple to the green outer garment of the right-hand angel, and through the dark greenish-blue outer garment of the central angel, points to the renewal of creation. Overall, however, the icon reflects the Greek idea of *hesychia* that affirmed the unity of the One, instead of the multiplicity of many.⁹⁴

What does Rublev's *Trinity* portray if production of images of the Father and the Holy Spirit was considered to be a breach of the second commandment? To answer this question, one has to refer to the doctrine of metaphysical antinomy of the absolute who is, at the same time, both visible and invisible (essence–energies distinction).⁹⁵ The Cappadocian fathers explored the esoteric nature of this antinomy in an attempt to defend the paradoxical nature of the Christian God. Dionysius the Areopagite, however, also spoke about this dogma when identifying 'unions' and 'distinctions' in the Godhead. Unions represent the hidden essence of God, and distinctions are manifestations and powers, making God known to humanity.⁹⁶ In a similar fashion, Maximus affirmed the doctrine of essence–energies, claiming God is knowable in what he imparts to us, but he is not knowable in the incommunicability of his essence.⁹⁷

During the hesychast controversy Gregory Palamas advanced the difference between the divine nature (essence) and the divine energies. Palamists understood the divine nature of God as forever inaccessible (like the centre of the Sun) while the divine energies penetrate the universe (like the sunlight).⁹⁸

93 P. Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon in Cultural Context', in V. Tsurikov (ed.), *The Trinity-Sergius Lavr in Russian History and Culture: Readings in Russian Religious Culture*, vol. 3, (Jordanville 2006) 118; Plugin, 'Мастер Святой Троицы', *Труды и Дни Андрея Рублева* (Moscow 2001) 295.

94 D. Balfour, *St Gregory the Sinaite, Discourse on the Transfiguration* (St Bernardino 1986) 8, 29–30.

95 Gregory of Nyssa, 'De Beatitudinibus', *Patrologia Graeca* 44, 1269A; also Otis, Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian Conception of Time, *Studia Patristica*, 117 (1976) 339–241.

96 Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus*, 2, 24; *Patrologia Graeca* 3, 640.

97 F. Lauritzen, 'Pagan Energies in Maximus the Confessor: The Influence of Proclus on the Ad Thomam 5, *Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2 (2012), <http://grbs.library.duke.edu/article/view/13971/277> (accessed 20/10/2013).

98 P. Evdokimov, *The Art of Icon: A Theology of Beauty* (Crestwood 1992) 207.

The essence of God is beyond knowledge, contemplation, or participation.⁹⁹ The divine energies, on the other hand, could be obtained and participated in as ineffable, supersensible light — God's glory.¹⁰⁰ The divine energies act through the deified subject, 'energies to energies', making it, by adoption, all that God is by nature.¹⁰¹ The divine energies radiate to the created order 'from the Father as a source, through the Son as a form or definition, and in the Spirit as activator and perfecter'.¹⁰² The work is dependant on the relation each hypostasis 'inheres in the other two hypostases' (*perichoresis* or *communicatio idiomatum*).¹⁰³ The relationship between the three hypostasis is determined by the origins of the Son and the procession of the Spirit from the unoriginate Father.¹⁰⁴ Because the divine essence is not a subject of knowledge that is, 'uncreated, indivisible, incomprehensible and uncircumscribable', the difference between the generation of the Son, and procession of the Spirit cannot be understood in any other way except by using negations.¹⁰⁵

The implication of the doctrine of unknowability of the Trinity, which also concerns the portrayal of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, becomes clearer in relation to Dionysius's teaching on the role of symbols adopted by Palamists. Dionysius believed that visible symbols fill the earthly hierarchy, which being dissimilar to God, are superior forms of representation of his essence.¹⁰⁶ Symbols, signs and images have an important role in the hierarchical system of the spiritual ascent or 'uplifting' of man to God, according to Dionysius. The visual elements are furthermore valuable

in the graded system of descent or *kataphasis*, or transmission of mystical knowledge from God to man through the terrestrial and celestial realms. This is the process of 'illuminations' or advanced 'light-giving' *photodosia* received through the faculty of sight.¹⁰⁷ Certainly, Dionysius did not concern himself with pieces of art, such as icons, but rather with the fundamental question of knowledge of God.¹⁰⁸

99 A. Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London 1989) 90.

100 Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, *Patrologia Graeca* 151, 723C, in Meyendorff (ed.), *Gregory Palamas: The Triad*, 160–162.

101 *ibid.*, 3, 1, 33.

102 C. Tsirpanlis, 'Epistemology, Theognosis, the Trinity and Grace in St Gregory Palamas', *Patristic and Byzantine Review*, vol. 13, no. 1 (1994) 5–27.

103 Theodore the Studite, Refutation III, 7CD, in 'Antirrhethici Tres Adversus Iconomachos', *Patrologia Graeca* 99, 327–436; 432.

104 Gregory the Theologian, Oratio 31, 41, *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 149A, in Gregory the Theologian, 'Orationes' 27–45, *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 9–623.

105 Germanos I of Constantinople, 'Letter to Thomas of Claudiopolis', *Patrologia Graeca* 98, 147–222; 192B.

106 Dionysius, 'De Caelesti Hierarchia', 140D, in C. Luibheid & P. Rorem (trans.), *Dionysius the Areopagite: The Complete Works*, Classics of Western Spirituality Series (New York 1987) 149.

107 Louth, *Denys the Areopagite*, 38–40.

108 B. Teitelbaum, 'The Knowledge of God', *Eirenikon*, vol. 3, 1 (Fall 1982) 40–47.

Maximus upheld the 'theandric' understanding of reality based on the notion of unity (by grace) between humanity and God.¹⁰⁹ This ontological statement is influenced by the assumption that the created order is an expression of the Logos, who, by becoming man, introduced a new relationship between creator and creatures. In this context, the assumption of early Christians regarding the so-called *logoi* of creation should not be overlooked, mainly within the framework of natural knowledge of God (*phisiki* theory). This concept refers to the mystical contemplation of the *logoi* of creation, leading to knowledge of the Logos and ultimately the Holy Trinity.¹¹⁰ The importance of this doctrinal assumption is the fact that human beings, on account of their 'logical constitutions', are able, through contemplation of things in their *logoi*, to keep the created universe together and to refer it to its primary cause.¹¹¹ Hence, according to Maximus, the revelations of God given to the saints, as well as the Old Testament visions of him, are perceivable signs of his divine presence, yet never revealing his essence. Maximus thought that the true contemplatives, like Abraham, are able to perceive the three angelic forms as a symbolic representation of the Trinity.¹¹² In the same way, the iconographers who attempt to portray the Trinity seek to accentuate God's transcendence and, at the same time, show their ability to perceive him according to their level of perfection.¹¹³ Rublev followed the same principle in his icon of the Trinity. The three angels are identified by their attitudes and meaningful gestures as the three hypostases (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit); they are dissimilar while being almost identical.¹¹⁴

Although many contemporary scholars agree that Rublev's icon does not represent the narrative of Genesis 18 in historical terms, but instead shows the divine council of the Trinity, there is a discrepancy in their views over the designation of the three angels. Ouspensky¹¹⁵ and Lazarev¹¹⁶ understood the middle angel to be Christ and the left angel to be God the Father. Golubstov,¹¹⁷

109 J. Pelikan, 'Council of Father or Scripture: The Concept of Authority in the Theology of St Maximus the Confessor', in D. Neiman & M. Schatkin (eds), *The Heritage of the Early Church*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 195 (Roma 1973) 227–288.

110 This doctrine was introduced by Origen and developed by Evagrius Ponticus, Pseudo-Dionysius, and later, Maximus; see L. Thundberg, 'The Human Person as an Image of God', *Christian Spirituality*, vol. 16 (1985) 303; see also Maximus the Confessor, 'Ambiguorum Liber 7', in *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1031–1418; 1081BC.

111 J. Rossum, 'The Logoi of Creation and the Divine Energies in Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas', *Studia Patristica*, vol. 27 (1993) 212–217.

112 Maximus the Confessor, 'Epistula 2', *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 400CD, in L. Thundberg, *Microcosm and Mediator*, 137–139.

113 L.M. Evseeva, 'Две Символические Композиции в Росписи XIV века Монастыря Зарзма', *Византийский Временник*, vol. 43 (1982) 134–140.

114 N.A. Demina, *Троица Андрея Рублева* (Moscow 1963) 52, 105.

115 L. Voronov, 'Андрей Рублев-Великий Художник Древней Руси', *Богословские труды*, no. 14 (1975) 83–86.

116 Lazarev, *Андрей Рублев и его Школа* (Moscow 1966) 61–62.

117 Golubstov, 'Воплощение Богословских Идей в Творчестве Преподобного Андрея Рублева', *Богословские Труды*, no. 22 (1983) 3–67.

Demina and Vetelev were in favour of taking the middle angel to be God the Father while Christ was the angel on the left. Ainalov believed the middle angel represented God the Father, the left one was Christ, and the right one was the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁸ Lebedev offered three options for reading the Old Testament Trinity of Rublev.¹¹⁹ First, the three angels represent the three hypostases of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Secondly, Genesis 18 was a vision of Jesus Christ as God accompanied by two angels. Finally, the three angels represent the 'image and likeness' of the Holy Trinity. This interpretation was based on the inscription found in the so-called Zyrian 'Trinity' (Fig. 54) from Vologda's Cathedral (1395), commonly credited to Stephen of Perm, a disciple of Sergius of Radonezh. This model is often used to help with identifying each of three angels in Rublev's icon of the Trinity. Although researchers claim Stephen of Perm provided an inscription on each of the three angels in the Zyrian Trinity, a closer examination reveals the inscription, located in the centre of the composition, refers to the Trinity at large.

The issue regarding the designation of the three angels was resolved during the Council of Stoglav in 1551. The canons of this council state that the hypostasis of the Father is on the left, and the house behind him symbolises the house of creation. His hand points to the chalice, calling the Son to take upon himself the work of salvation. Christ is the central angel, and the tree behind him represents the cross and the redemptive work of God the Son. His head is bowed gently to the Father, indicating total and faithful obedience. To see God the Father is impossible (John 1:18), 'because people cannot see Him and live' (Exodus 33:20). Only the Son gives this opportunity: 'No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit is on the right side. He is the comforter, the Paraclete, witnessing the holy act of divine self-dedication.

Whether any of these hypotheses can be taken as valid is difficult to ascertain; however, the various definitions reflect the failure of the Eastern and Western church to resolve their diverging views on Trinitarian theology during the hesychast controversy. Palamists condemned the *filioque* clause and affirmed the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone.¹²⁰ Palamists believed *filioquism* invalidated the appropriate antinomy between Monad and Triad. Moreover, it stripped the three hypostases of their concrete properties and turned God into abstract essence. The Western church underscored the consubstantiality of God, leading to a neglect of inter-hypostatic differences. The followers of hesychasm,

118 A. Glebova et al., 'Древнерусское Искусство в Собрании Вологодского Музея-Заповедника: Путеводитель по Экспозиции', *Северный Паломник*, vol. 11 (2004) 20–22; Uliyanov, *О Месте Иконы Живоначальной Троицы в Праздничном Ряду Русского Иконостаса Троицкие Чтения 2003–2004 гг. Большие Вяземы* (Moscow 2004) 44–47.

119 L.L. Lebedev, 'Кто Изображен на Иконе "Троица" Андрея Рублева?', *Наука и Религия*, vol. 10 (Moscow 1988) 60–64.

120 Gregory Palamas, *Dialogue between an Orthodox and a Barlaamite* (Oxford 1999) 3.

on the other hand, accentuated the differences between the three hypostases of the Trinity. The Chalcedonian and post-Chalcedonian Christological doctrine grounded on the doctrine of the hypostatic union of two natures in Christ served as a conceptual basis for the hesychast refutation of the Western concept of the Trinity.¹²¹ In turn, the dogma of hypostatic union of divine and human natures in Christ, as well as the patristic doctrine of *hoomousios* gave support to hesychast teaching, implying that the divine life is accessible only through deification of the body of Christ and participation in the sacraments. To support their claim, the hesychasts referred to Gregory the Theologian and John of Damascus,¹²² both of whom defended the conceptual difference between the three hypostases in the Trinity.¹²³ The hesychastic focus on the hypostatic difference of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit informed the iconography of the Old Testament's Trinity as clearly indicated in Rublev's icon.¹²⁴

Guided by a conviction of the need for and benefit of love, Rublev emphasised the unity of the Godhead and reaffirmed the hypostatic difference of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He adorns the three angels with iconographic characteristics to point their different functions within the Trinity.¹²⁵

The first angel, shown at the left, is vested in a blue undergarment. His light-purple outer garment attests to his unfathomable nature and royal dignity and his demeanour reflects this fatherly authority. The expression on his face and the position of his head and hands, his gaze aimed at the two other angels and the way he is sitting, point to the hypostasis of the Father.

The eyes of the two other angels are turned attentively toward the first angel, as though conversing with him about the salvation of humanity. The central angel wears blue outer robes signifying his divinity and celestial nature. His dark-crimson undergarment symbolises the incarnation.¹²⁶ The second angel is Christ, the Son of God.¹²⁷ The light blue undergarment and the smoky-green outer garment, representing heaven and earth, suggest the angel on the right is the Holy Spirit. By him, every soul that lives ascends in purity. The mountain above the third angel indicates this advancement, assisted by the power of the divine grace.

121 Dulsis, 'Hesychast Ideas'.

122 John of Damascus, 'Homily of the Transfiguration', in H. Weatherby (trans.), *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 32 (1987) 10.

123 Palamas, *The Triads* iii, I, 22, in J. Meyendorff (ed. & trans.), 2nd edn (Louvain 1973) 596–569.

124 Gregory the Theologian, 'Oratio 29', 16, in *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 9–623; 96.

125 N. Malitskii, 'К Истолкованию Композиции Троицы,' *Seminarium Kondakovianum* (Moscow 1928) 30.

126 Saltykov, 'Иконография Троицы Андрея Рублева', 77–85.

127 J. Reimer, 'The Spirituality of Andrei Rublev's Icon of the Holy Trinity', *Acta Theologica Supplementum*, vol. 11 (2008) 167–169.

Apart from Rublev having adorned his three angels with individual characteristics¹²⁸ he also placed them in a circle to allude to the doctrine of the mutual relations of the three hypostases in the Trinity.¹²⁹

Both the models of Rublev's Trinity and the conversational relationship of the three angels express the notion of unity and divine oneness of the Trinity.¹³⁰ As a qualitative category, the unity of the Trinity is expressed in various ways. For example, Rublev eliminates the concept of time from this icon, showing the essence of time—eternity. The differentiation between the images of the three angels affirms the notion of Trinitarian unity.¹³¹ The three angels differ in postures and gestures, but a circular rotation embraces their bodies in a dance, which if sped up will blur the distinctions between them. Finally, the placement of Christ at the centre of the icon also creates the sense of unity and allows the observer to meditate on the nature of the Trinity. Without the participation of the Father and the Holy Spirit, Christ would have been unable to fulfil his salvific act of humanity.

Formal qualities of Rublev's icon of the *Trinity*

The movement in Rublev's *Trinity* is described with attention to the icon's properties of quietness, gentleness, anxiety, and sorrow; or the mood permeating the icon, which is often described as detached, meditative, contemplative, intimate, gentle and direct. The image of the middle angel, however, from whom all movement proceeds is invested with a note of sovereignty, independence and strength. Thus, Rublev's *Trinity* produces a lyrical aura of harmony and quietness while simultaneously it conveys the rhythmic movement of an unstoppable power.¹³²

The figures of the three angels are almost symmetrical, and seem frozen in deep spiritual peace, a holy calm assuming an inward movement.¹³³ The mirror symmetry on the opposing sides of the icon reflects stability and equilibrium.¹³⁴ The outlines on the back of the left and right angels coincide exactly, although

128 Gregory the Theologian, *Oratio* 29, 16; *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 96.

129 Nikephoros, 'Logos' 18, 19, in *Patrologia Graeca* 100, 584–790; 580–581; Nikephoros, 'Epistula ad Leonem III Papam', in *Patrologia Graeca* 100, 170–206; 181–184.

130 C. Chaillot, 'Contemplating Rublev's Icon: The Authority of the Trinity and the Community of Man and Women in the Church', *The Ecumenical Review*, vol. 60, no. 1–2 (Jan.–Apr. 2008) 137–144.

131 Evdokimov, 'The Icon of the Holy Trinity', *Lutheran World*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1976) 166–170.

132 L. Teholiz, 'Religious Mysticism and Socialist Realism: The Soviet Union Pays Homage to the Icon Painter', *Art Journal*, vol. 21, no. 2 (Winter 1961–1962) 72–78.

133 A. Titz, 'Some General Features of the Compositions of the Icons of Rublyov and His School', *Ancient Russian Art of the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries* (Moscow 1963) 22–53.

134 A.V. Voloshinov, 'The Old Testament Trinity of Andrey Rublyov: Geometry and Philosophy', *Leonardo*, vol. 32, no. 2, (1999) 103–112.

their faces and haloes are shifted slightly. The mountain and the building are also symmetrically positioned. Parallel lines emerge, vanishing and re-emerging at different points, but in the same direction, drawing all elements of the icon, including buildings, the three angels and the rock into the flow of forms.¹³⁵

Against the symmetry and equilibrium of the group, a movement starts from the Father, with two counter movements bringing the second and the third person back to the first. A movement proceeds from the back of the Father's shoulders, which is directed towards the middle angel and the angel on the left. This motion is strengthened by the location of the emblematic house. A counter movement starts from the foot of the Father and gains momentum as it passes through the posterior of the Spirit, lingers over the hands of the central angel and the angel on the right and finally comes to rest in the Father.¹³⁶ The Son and the Holy Spirit carry within them, by implication, the entire creation, including the onlooker, in return to the Father. Hence, though Rublev concentrated on the inverted perspective and expressed eternity by excluding earthly movement, the three figures create the perfect movement of love.¹³⁷

While the Father places one of his hands atop the other, the hands of the Son and the Holy Spirit are apart. It confirms the traditional viewpoint that the Son and the Holy Spirit represent the two modes of operation of the Father. The Son responds to the Fathers' calling by consenting to perform the assigned act of incarnation, so the action of his movement expresses love and obedience.¹³⁸ He bows his head to the right, in the direction of the first angel. Alpatov noted the elevation of the left knee of the middle angel, whereas his right knee remains in place. Clearly, the middle angel gets up and follows the guidance of the first angel.¹³⁹ Moreover, the rising stance of this angel portrays his descent into the world and his commitment to the redemptive work of sacrifice. The act of salvation of humanity commences from the Father, it is followed by the Son, continues in the Holy Spirit before returning to the Father. The circular movement reaches a degree of climax in the middle angel. The two angels conceal signs of firmness under the all-pervading beauty of the image, and the icon reflects their free will and consistent and full implementation of their decisions. The fact the three angels epitomise one other alludes to the hesychast theology of *synergia*, as well the doctrinal concept of *perichoresis* (mutual indwelling of each person of the Trinity within the Godhead).¹⁴⁰

135 D. Snyman, 'In the Gaze of God: Aspects of the Spiritual Significance of Rublev's Holy Trinity', MA thesis, Rhodes University (2001) 68–84.

136 N. Nikeforov, 'Икона Святой Троицы Преподобного Андрея Рублева', *Источник: Православная Жизнь*, vol. 51, no. 5 (1955) 616.

137 Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus* II, 7.

138 Opie, 'The Trinity in Andrei Rublev's Icon', 202.

139 Alpatov, 'La Valeur Classique de Rublev', *Commentari*, vol. 1 (1958) 25–37.

140 Perichoresis is a Greek term used to describe the Triune relationship between each person of the Godhead. It can be defined as co-indwelling, co-inhering, and mutual interpenetration; Golubstov, 'Пресвятая Троица и Домостроительство', *Журнал Московской Патриархии*, vol. 7 (1960) 37.

The first angel sits more front-on than the rest. In addition to the gesture of his blessing, the rod of the first angel is pushed forward, while the rods of the second and the third angel are bent.¹⁴¹ His hands are also close to each other, which reflects self-discipline and focus. The image of God the Father is powerful, not just relative to the Son, but also in regards to the Holy Spirit. The Father aims his gesture of blessing at the second, and the third angel. The posture of the third angel on the right reflects the greatest peace and concentration, even a certain looseness and softness. His rod rests on his shoulder, and its lower part rests against the outside of his right thigh, not between the knees. This position conveys thoughtful, leisurely reflection.¹⁴²

In contrast to the general peace coming from the third angel, the position of his wings is dynamic. If the wings of the first and the second angel are smooth, the wings of the third angel suggest movement in varying degrees. The rise of the left wing transfers the viewer's eye to the mountain to express a spiritual uplift that complements the symbolism of spiritual rest.¹⁴³ The states of motion and rest in the third angel show predominantly through symbols. On the contrary, the motion in the central angel is expressed by discrete forms, such as the form of his wings which are almost flattened in opposition.¹⁴⁴ The Father's wings overlap those of the Son and the wings of the Spirit and the Son touch each other without overlapping. Thus, the Father generates the Son and causes the Spirit to proceed while the Spirit reposes in the Son but proceeds from the Father alone.

The three viewpoints of the icon are represented by the left angel to the right, the right angel to the left and the middle to the front. The two angels on the side present opposite points of view, which leads to an inverted perspective of the communion table. Since the size of this table is inadequate to the space, Rublev placed its sides behind the knees of angels.¹⁴⁵ The background is larger than the foreground, and the chalice pushes to the outer end of the trapezoid table, a feature that is repeated in the podium. The trapezoid form is the result of the unfolding of the surfaces of a regular square form, of which only the rear parts are lost in the representation. The process of unfolding is visible in the chairs and further denotes recession. The use of the reverse perspective takes the observer inside the icon, allowing him to experience a vision of the Trinity outside historical parameters. The icon provides the viewer with a visual representation of the otherwise hidden Holy Secret.¹⁴⁶

141 Opie, 'The Trinity in Andrei Rublev's Icon', 202–209.

142 Demina, Андрей Рублев и Художники его Круга (Moscow 1963) 48.

143 Titz, 'Some General Features'.

144 Observations on geometry are based on Voloshinov, 'The Old Testament Trinity'.

145 A. Uspenskii, *Semiotics of the Russian Icon* (Philadelphia 1976) 64–65.

146 C. Antonova, *Space, Time, and Presence in the Icon: Seeing the World With the Eyes of God* (Ashgate 2010) 162.

The composition of the Trinity also contains two centres of gravity, one above the middle angel and the other above the left angel. In the two-dimensional perspective, positioning the second angel represents the natural centre, in respect of the assured symmetry of the first and third angels. Following the laws of three-dimensional perspective, however, the fact that the image of the middle angel is higher on the pictorial plane corresponds to the equal position of angels in real space.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Rublev shifts the centre of gravity close to the angel on the left by turning the head of the middle angel in the direction of the left angel.

The diagonals of the icon are, at the same time, diagonals of the arc. As a result, there is no difference if the proportions of the composition of the figurative scene are calculated on the inner outline (the outline of the arc) or on the outer, that is, the contour of the whole icon. There is an unlimited scale of golden proportions relative to the centre of Rublev's icon.¹⁴⁸ For any point inside the circle, a parallel point on the opposite side is found, that is to say, in golden proportion to the given point.¹⁴⁹ The icon has a harmonious proportion, expressed in the silhouettes of the three figures on the surface of the board.¹⁵⁰ This ideal ratio of angels can be likened to the equality of angles in a triangle.¹⁵¹

Rublev's placement of the three angels onto an implicit circle is a key innovation, as is the placement of the chalice at the centre of the composition.¹⁵² The aesthetic of the circle, with a higher degree of perfection, led Pythagoras to develop the hypothesis of the circular trajectory of planetary orbits. Different cultures have used the circle as a symbol for the sky and everything lofty, eternal and close to God. The cycle was always viewed as an expression of eternity and everlasting love, as noted by Dionysius.¹⁵³ The circular movement signifies that God remains identical with himself and that he envelops (creation) in synthesis and recalls to himself all that has gone forth from him.¹⁵⁴ The hesychast meditation technique is also circular: God flows out to humanity and gives knowledge of him, and humanity responds, through the mind and body, to his call.¹⁵⁵

147 P. Florensky, 'Reverse Perspective', in N. Misler (ed.), W. Salmond (trans.), *Beyond Vision: Essays on the Perception of Art* (London 2002) 201.

148 V. Petrov & N. Pryanishnicov, 'The Formulas of Beautiful Proportions', *Number and Thought*, vol. 2 (Moscow 1979) 72–92.

149 C. Ungureanu, 'Dialogue between Sphere and Cube: The Secrete Geometry of Byzantine Icons', *Cultura: International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, vol. 6 (2006) 88.

150 B. Ioganson, 'Великий Русский Художник', *Правда* (14 Sept. 1960) 6.

151 O. Boonpitak et al., 'Aspects of Symmetry', 15–18; www.uic.edu/honors/learning/hc_aspects_4.pdf (accessed 02/02/2011).

152 Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon', 3.

153 E. Wilberding, 'A Defense of Dionysius the Areopagite by Rubens', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 52, no. 1 (Jan.–Mar., 1991) 19–34.

154 G.M. Prokhorov, *Dionisii Aeropagit* (St Petersburg 1995) 291.

155 Meyendorff, 'Le Theme du Retour en Soi dans le Doctrine Palamite du XIV siecle', *Byzantine Hesychasm: Historical, Theological and Social Problems* (London 1972) 204–206.

Rublev's icon is inscribed in three circles: the circle of the faces, the arms and wings of the angels on the side, and the arms of the angel in the middle and the central chalice.¹⁵⁶ Interestingly, not one but three manifestations of a chalice emerge. The first chalice is the sacrificial faith offering of Abraham to the three angels who visited his house. The second is God's sacrifice in Christ for humanity (the Eucharist). The third is the chalice of the Trinity, in which the whole Trinity participates in the salvation of humanity.¹⁵⁷

Most art historians locate circles at the centre of the icon using the golden rectangle. These circles form concentric rings connecting the face of the left angel with the hand of right one, and the face of the angel in the middle with the chalice. When looking at the middle angel within the circle, it becomes clear that he neither suppresses nor dominates the other angels, although he appears to be placed higher than they are. Ungureanu's description of the composition's three circles is different.¹⁵⁸ He interprets the circle inscribed in the rectangle that corresponds to the painted surface of the Holy Trinity icon as the circle of the Son. The green circle, inscribed between the horizontals obtained by connecting the small sides of the square, is the circle of the Holy Spirit. When the circle of the Holy Spirit doubles with the light of his radius, the circle of the Father is obtained. The chord obtained from the intercession of the circles is the side of an equilateral triangle inscribed in the circle of the Holy Spirit. The circle in this triangle is the circle of the Father. The grace circle that inscribes the square within the icon is the one which gives form and dimension to the representation of the Holy Trinity.¹⁵⁹ The position of the sceptres in the hands of the three angels, however, determines the problem of geometrical space.¹⁶⁰

The circular movement alludes to the doctrine of *perichoresis*. It is precisely because the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit unite in the Trinity¹⁶¹ that Rublev gives the same characteristics to each of them, distinguishing them by postures, the colours of their robes and spatial positions. A dynamic pattern of rotational symmetry connects the three angels.¹⁶² Their round dance is charmingly depicted in Rublev's icon where the dogma of *perichoresis* involves 'making room', at the centre of the Hospitality. The artist has created a space that enfolds, yet permits discernment. Hence, this icon makes a room for the observer, and offers hospitality to him as a fourth guest. The Trinity is like the centre of the cosmos, and the centre of the Trinity is the chalice featured in the centre of the table.

156 Snyman, 'In the Gaze of God', 35–57, 20–22.

157 Alpatov, 'La Valeur Classique de Rublev', 30–37.

158 Ungureanu, 'Dialogue between Sphere and Cube', 83–90.

159 Voloshinov, 'The Old Testament Trinity'.

160 D. Pedoe, *Geometry and the Liberal Arts* (Harmondsworth 1976).

161 K. Ware, 'The Human Person as an Icon of the Trinity', *Sobornost*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1986) 18.

162 E.P. Bushevitch, 'The Limits of Hesychasm: Some Notes on the Monastic Spirituality in Russia 1350–1500', *Forsch sur Osteurop Gesc*, vol. 38 (1986) 97–109.

Rublev's use of blue also manifests the Trinitarian ontological power, that is, the outpouring of divine energies and the angels' relation with one another (*perichoresis*).¹⁶³ The blue outer garment of the central angel faces us and flows downward over his left shoulder, as his tunic flows down over the chalice. This feature alludes to the sacrificial act of God in history. The inside of the second angel's garment is blue on the shoulder and reappears under the table, at the third angel's feet.¹⁶⁴ This alludes to the Spirit continuing the work of Christ. The blue of the third angel is visible at his centre and shines through within, as whitish and bluish highlights, and also suffuses his other garments. Used in this manner, azure and blue summarise the outer and inner action of two other angels, giving the icon a serene, shimmering and unearthly beauty.¹⁶⁵ It also signifies Christ's historical manifestation of the uncreated light that he shares with the Father.¹⁶⁶ This corresponds to the ontological position of the three hypostases of the Trinity, which are *hoomousios* (of the same substance) with each other.¹⁶⁷ The chalice is also a symbol of providence, by which God realises all in all and embodies his essential self-sameness and immovability.¹⁶⁸

Just like the circles, three octagons emerge when a circumference touches the horizontal sides of the arc of the icon. The smallest octagon includes the focal point of the composition, that is, the chalice and the arms stretching towards it. The middle octagon involves the central elements of the scene — the angels and the sacrificial chalice and finally, the largest octagon embraces all elements of the figurative scene with mathematical precision. It mirrors the slopes of the angels' thrones and pedestals, the axonometric axis of the left building, and even the tangent of the right mountain.¹⁶⁹ The octagon reflects a hesychast concept of the eighth day or Parousia as affirmed by the 12th-century mystic, Symeon the New Theologian. He held the cosmic week of seven millennia culminates in the age of Christ. He has already, in time, mystically inaugurated the eighth day of the new creation beyond time. According to Symeon, the coming of the Lord has already taken place, and the revelation of divinity became, in fact, a judgment for those to whom it is revealed.¹⁷⁰

The abundant use of gold, golden-yellow and golden-greenish for the background and fields, for the angel's wings, low seats and foot rests, for the walls and ceiling and the chalice, imparts to the icon a serene, shimmering, unearthly

163 Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon: Problems of Meaning, Intertextuality, and Transmission', *A Journal of Russian (Religious) Thought*, vol. 7–12 (2002–2007) 15–46.

164 Ungureanu, 'Dialogue between Sphere and Cube', 82–96.

165 Alpatov, 'On the Global Significance of Andrey Rublyov's Art', *Khudozhnik*, vol. 12 (1980) 48–57.

166 V.G. Briusova, *Бриусова Андрея Рублева и Московской Школы Иконописи* (Moscow 1998) 351.

167 Strezova, 'Knowledge and Vision of God in Cappadocian Fathers', online paper, http://www.oodegr.com/english/filosofia/gnws_i_8ewria_kappadokes.htm (accessed 10/09/2011).

168 Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon', 112.

169 Voloshinov, 'The Old Testament Trinity', 106–108.

170 E.S. Smirnova, *Litseye Rukopisi Velikogo Novgorod a XV vek* (Moscow 1994) 189–190.

beauty of the 'age to come'. Rublev also used the technique of scumbling; that is softening the outlines or colour by applying thin coats of opaque colour. The result is the three heavenly visitors are transfigured like a luminous cloud. Rublev's contemporaries called it *dymon pisano*; e.g., transparent like smoke.¹⁷¹ The clothing of the left angel reveals Rublev's mastery of the scumbling technique; shining through the delicate pink-purplish tone of the himation, the reflection of light on the edges on the folds enlightens the blue of his tunic.¹⁷²

Rublev offered other puzzles in the form of recessed colour, light and shadows. The two most intense areas in the image are the black doorways of the house above the angel on the left. These are much darker than the cloak of the central figure or the chalice, which is the focal point of the composition.¹⁷³ The two optical mysteries match one another in the foreground: the absence of shadow in the recess made in the table below the chalice.¹⁷⁴ As the shadows change according to position, to be in all positions at once is to see no shadow. 'The lack of the contrast of shadow and light in the depiction of icon figures refers to individuals who are psychologically fully integrated'.¹⁷⁵ As many other 14th- and 15th-century Russian painters did before him, Rublev made the rare appearance of shadows an expression of the uncreated light, the light that does not come from a particular place but rather comes from the Godhead who resides in all places at once. The light of celestial objects, such as the sun or other stars, is subject to variation, whereas the uncreated light of God has no variations.¹⁷⁶ This feature represents the uncreated light manifested to the apostles at the Transfiguration on Mt Tabor. The saints perceive this light during prayer. The iconographers represented it in the shape of a halo or mandorla in art. The light seen at the Transfiguration is also the 'light of the *Parousia*'.¹⁷⁷

Rublev's icon of the *Trinity* in the context of 15th- and 16th-century art

Rublev's *Trinity* is amongst the greatest achievements of Russian art. Crowning the extensive artistic career of a master, it was also the epitome of the ingenious thought of numerous authors.¹⁷⁸ Like any other medieval artist, Rublev

171 Golunstov, 'Икона Живоначальной Троицы'.

172 Chaillot, 'Contemplating Rublev's Icon'.

173 S. Brooks (ed.), *Byzantium: Faith and Power 1261–1557 Perspectives of Late Byzantine Art and Culture* (New York 2007) 188.

174 D. Mouriki, 'Αφρηγματική Σκηνή ή Εικονιστική Παράσταση', *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Athens 1962–1963) 87–114.

175 D. Milivojevic, 'Semiotics of Russian and Serbian Icons' <http://nesusvet.narod.ru/ico/books/mlvjvch/> (accessed 10/03/2012).

176 M. Casey, *The Trinity of Rublev* (London 1981) 93.

177 Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, I, 3, 43, in K. Ware, 'God Hidden and Revealed: The Apophatic Way and the Essence–Energies Distinction', *Eastern Churches Review*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1975) 132–145.

178 Lazarev, 'Андрей Рублев и его Школа, 37–40; М.А. Пли, *Искусство Московской Руси Эпохи Феофана Грека и Андрея Рублева: Проблемы, Хипотезы, Исследования* (Moscow 1976) 51–54.

esteemed tradition and collective effort. A method of theoretical generalisation, outwardly abstract, but with a remarkably tangible content, an aptitude to affirm through symbolic images the domestic character, as well as the creative expertise attaining to the zenith of world art combined in Rublev's icon. So pronounced was Rublev's reputation that the 1551 Church council, held in Moscow,¹⁷⁹ recommended that all icon painters must follow Rublev's canon of painting, and use ancient images painted by Greek iconographers and Rublev as models.¹⁸⁰

Rublev abandoned many features that made explicit reference to the text of Genesis 18: Abraham and Sarah are missing, and there are no utensils on the table. In Rublev's innovative reinterpretation of the Biblical text, there is no praise of Abraham's hospitality; rather, the purpose of the icon is to express the psychological idea of unity as well as the undivided nature of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.¹⁸¹

Such dogmatical issues were often explored by Rublev's spiritual teacher Sergius, who brought the tradition of the hesychast-style of contemplation to Russia. He took the veneration of the Trinity as a sign of the unity of celestial and terrestrial realms, and the unity of heavenly and earthly hierarchy and of the Church. The unity of the Trinity was a symbol of the unity of both Testaments, enshrined in the Russian national consciousness.

Sergius adhered to the mystical tradition of hesychasm.¹⁸² He received visions of the Trinity, of the divine light and of the Theotokos and these revelations inspired works praising the cult of the Trinity. An important composition is the *Apparition of the Virgin to Sergius of Radonezh* (Fig. 55) which depicts the vision of the mother of God, accompanied by the apostles Peter and John, promising to watch over the monastery. An extant example, from the Trinity Lavra of St Sergius, is kept at the Museum of Art at the University of Oregon.¹⁸³ That Sergius's vision matches Abraham's vision of the three angels in the Old Testament is important for three reasons: the artwork affirms the special affinity that the saint had with the Trinity, it asserts the importance of the Virgin Mary in the economy of salvation,¹⁸⁴ and it attests to the iconographer's preoccupation with the uncreated light of God.¹⁸⁵

179 E.B. Emchenko, *Словарь: Исследование и Текст* (Moscow 2000) 304.

180 C. Lock, 'The Space of Hospitality'; After Rublev's death his icon was copied by Nichephorus Grablenij. The prototype became a trademark of Trinity Sergius Lavra monastery. Rublev's *Trinity* also influenced narrative cycles in the history of Abraham, such as the Novgorod Bible of 1477 (Moscow Museum of History).

181 Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon: Problems of Meaning, Intertextuality, and Transmission', 38.

182 *ibid.*, 105.

183 P. Buschkevich, 'The Limits of Hesychasm'.

184 Alpatov, *Russian Impact on Art* (Moscow 1950) 41.

185 Plugin, 'Сергий Радонежский', Дмитрий Донской, Андрей Рублев', *История СССР* (Moscow 1989) 71–88.

In the later versions of this icon, the image of the Hospitality of Abraham is placed above the figure of the Virgin (Genesis 18). This feature is evidence of the connection between this image and Rublev's icon. In turn, the likenesses between Rublev's *Trinity* and the *Apparition of the Virgin* point to the influence of Sergius's spiritual teaching on Rublev. Clearly, there are iconographic differences in both models that are reflected in the positions assumed by the righteous welcoming their celestial visitors in the icon of the *Apparition*,¹⁸⁶ as well as the number of chalices depicted. Instead of one chalice, as found in Rublev's *Trinity*, three chalices are placed on the table. The three chalices evoke God's transcendence as a self-identity, which paradoxically exceeds its limits in interaction with another being. As a result, one knows its ontological nature, its inner being in God.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, the combination of stillness and motion communicates the essential oneness of the Trinity, the centre of the hesychast response to Barlaam's definition: that God's transcendence is unknowable by definition.¹⁸⁸ The shape of the circle represents a communion of angels united in *hesychia*, the ideal monastic community which Sergius wished to establish.

A new icon of the *Trinity* from the Trinity Sergius's Lavra (Fig. 56), created about the same time as Rublev's *Trinity*, affirms the doctrines of Sergius, paralleling Palamas's teachings on the Uncreated Light¹⁸⁹ as well as with Iosif Volotsky's tradition of безмолвие.¹⁹⁰ As this icon belongs to Sergiev's Posad, it is possible its creator and Rublev were in the same monastic community, working together on the decoration of the stone church of the Trinity.¹⁹¹ Providing a vision of the Old Testament Trinity, both icons are almost identical. Rublev, however, overcome the inherent difficulties artists faced when depicting the consubstantial and indivisible nature of the Trinity.¹⁹² The unknown painter of the *Trinity* icon from the Trinity Sergius's Lavra, on the other hand, reflects a patristic-liturgical interpretation of Genesis 18, which perceives all Old Testament theophanies as manifestations of the Word.¹⁹³ In the earlier depiction of the Trinity, the central angel has a note of sovereignty, independence and strength, whereas the ontological distinction between other two hypostases of the Trinity is not clearly affirmed. The left and the right angel are distinguished with features such as drapery and the colour of the clothes. Subtle changes undercut the

186 While Abraham and Sarah are not represented in Rublev, they assume an almost liturgical function in the icon of the apparition.

187 Plugin, 'Мастер Святой Троицы', 325.

188 Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon', 103.

189 D.M. Goldfrank, *The Monastic Rule of Iosif Volotsky* (Kalamazoo 2000).

190 L. Muller, 'Epiphanius, Die Legenden des Heiligen Sergij von Radonez', *Slavische Propylaen*, vol. 17 (Munich 1967) 40–49.

191 M.N. Tikhomirov, *Андрей Рублев и его Эпоха* (Moscow 1967) 3–15.

192 E.I. Ostashenko, 'Троица Ветхозаветная', *Сергиево-Посадского Музея-Заповедника и Проблема Стиля Живописи Первой Трети* (St Petersburg 2002) 324.

193 Louth, 'The Oak of Mamre, the Fathers and St Andrei Rublev: Patristic Interpretation of the Hospitality of Abraham and Rublev's Icon of the Trinity', *The Trinity Sergius Lavra in Russian History and Culture*, ed. V. Tsurikov (London 2005) 3, 91–96.

rhythm and link Christ to the messengers, such as the angles shared by the central the angel and right-hand angel, which are not symmetrical with one another and do not express a shared relationship with the left-hand angel, as is the case in Rublev's icon. The landscape features in the icon of the *Trinity* from the Monastery of Sergius of Radonezh are large and define the structure of the piece on the high–low axis.

The peripheral mountain and the church form the point of two spirals, beginning with the side angels and continuing with the cross shared between the central angel and the bowl (on the central axis) in the foreground, and the tree in the background.¹⁹⁴ The spirals point to the profound and beautiful interconnection between creator and creatures. The form of a spiral symbolises the process of moving outward and remaining still, thus yielding a curve so that 'created nature may return to God once again' (916D, 119).¹⁹⁵ The spiral on the left moves through the red colour of the middle angel's garment continuing to Sarah and finishes on the tilted axis formed by the central angel's head. The other spiral starts with the blue garments of the angel on the right continues to Abraham and then goes back around the church (with blue balustrades and a blue roof). The interlocking peaks of the spirals make the path of the cross join the chalice with Christ.¹⁹⁶ Instead of an inward movement towards greater fullness and inclusion, which symbolises the Trinitarian unity, the upward-facing bowls delineate the ascetic path.¹⁹⁷ The crossing paths of two spirals also create a circle that frames the torso of the Christ–angel and mirrors the circle of the central bowl. A larger circle enclosing the five figures mirrors the smaller circle and embodies a broader revolution of the same spiral.¹⁹⁸ To reveal the power of the Eucharist, the circles are taken upwards, which is evidence of the Resurrection.¹⁹⁹ This unique expression of God fully captures the imagination of the worshipper, in bringing the mind into a deeper sense of God. It is in this way that the minds of the worshippers, of the many, are brought back towards the understanding of the 'one', as suggested in Neoplatonic philosophy. The sign of the number seven in two sets of filigree circles as well as in the placement of seven fluted partitions in the cupola symbolises the divine energies and the Trinity revealing the Monad in the Triad.²⁰⁰ Through the interaction of the Spirit with the other two persons,

194 I am indebted to P. Hunt who, in pointing to the appearance of spirals in this icon, inspired me to look beneath the surface; Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon: Problems of Meaning, Intertextuality, and Transmission', 20–26.

195 T. Velmans, 'Le Rôle de l'Hésychasme dans la Peinture Murale Byzantine du XIVe et XVe Siècles', in P. Armstrong (ed.), *Ritual and Art: Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter* (London 2006) 187–190; D.S. Lixačev, *Некоторые Задачи Изучения Второго Югославянского Влияния в России: Исследования по Славянскому Литературоведению и Фольклористик* (Moscow 1960) 128–139.

196 Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon: Problems of Meaning, Intertextuality, and Transmission', 23.

197 Plugin, 'О Происхождении Троицы Рублева'.

198 D. Balfour, *Gregory the Sinaite, Discourse on the Transfiguration* (Princeton 1986) Section 8, 29–30.

199 Briusova, *Андрей Рублев и Московская Школа Иконописи*, 6–8.

200 R.E. Sinkewicz, *Saint Gregory Palamas: The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* (Toronto 1988) 165, 167.

the Father and the Son, the Trinity exists and dominates Christian theology. It is with the reinterpretation of the Dionysius's neoplatonic triadic manifestations of God, however, that there was a deeper understanding of the Christian Trinity in the early Church.²⁰¹ The three angels having the same proportions, size and the same unmarked halo, proves the interaction of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Their circular interrelation, symbolising an inward attachment and communion reflects the gestures and postures of the three angels. This circular pattern differs from the spiral because it is not placed directly between the worshipper and icon. The circular motion of the soul moves in on itself, then outwards, towards the rest of the members.²⁰²

The mixture of red and gold dominates this icon, making the image a different visual experience for the viewer than Rublev's *Trinity*. The *Trinity* from the Monastery of St Sergius emphasises the symbolism of love, blood and the fire of martyrdom, confirmed by the use of red. The symbolism of the number seven presents the completeness and perfection achieved through participation in the spiritual fire of Christ (Proverbs 6:16–17; 9:1). This, in turn, alludes to the work of the Holy Spirit that began after the Pentecost.²⁰³ The association of this icon with the Pentecost verifies the hesychast stand against *filioquism*: it shows the presence and manifestation of the Holy Spirit within the Church, inspiring unity, worship and service. It also places the feast of the Pentecost in eternal rather than temporal parameters, announcing ontological truths that would be fully accessible in the 'age to come'. This new iconography of the Holy Trinity, which appeared in Byzantium in the 14th century, and was later reflected in Rublev's *Trinity*, became widespread in Russia, where the Church already celebrated the feast of the Trinity.²⁰⁴

Other causes, which were at work simultaneously with the increase of hesychasm on Russian soil, affected the spread of Rublev's model of the Trinity in Russia. The anti-Trinitarian currents, which began to grow and spread in Russia during the 14th and 15th centuries, are worth noting.²⁰⁵ The heretical sects in Russia, notably those of the 14th century, which are a direct continuation Bogomil and Cathar doctrines, rejected Trinitarian and Christological dogma.²⁰⁶ Moreover, the sect of Strigolniki and of the Judaizers, which appeared in Pskov and Novgorod in the 14th century and were indirectly connected to Bogomilism, renounced

201 Luijckheid & Rorem, *Dionysius the Areopagite*, 149.

202 J.K.N Hedrick, 'Visual Constructions in the Reign of Justinian: A Neo-Platonic Influence', *Journal of History and Social Science* (Spring 2010) 5–19.

203 Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon: Problems of Meaning, Intertextuality, and Transmission', 20.

204 *ibid.*, 21.

205 N.A. Kazakova & Ia. S. Lur'e, *Антифеодальные Еретические Движения на Руси XIV-Начала XVI века* (Moscow 1955) 34–71.

206 D.M. Goldfrank, 'Burn, Baby, Burn: Popular Culture and Heresy in Late Medieval Russia', *The Journal of Popular Culture* 31, no. 4 (1998) 17–32.

the Holy Trinity and the divine status of Jesus. Substantiating this point, these heretical sects came, finally, to a denial of the possibility of the image of the Trinity.²⁰⁷ The spread of anti-Trinitarian currents generated a response from visual artists of this period. The increased production of Trinitarian *Paternitas* compositions, as well as images of the Old Testament Trinity (of Rublev's type) in the 14th and 15th centuries, demonstrates this fact. The anti-sectarian sentiment reflected in the spread of the cult of the Trinity in Russia during this period. A church feast was dedicated to the Trinity and was prominent in the provinces of Novgorod and Pskov.²⁰⁸ In the religious and philosophical sense, these images as well as architectural objects aimed to represent the Christian ideal of life on earth, opened the way for the removal of dilemma — national or universal.²⁰⁹

A significant example of the *Trinity* from Rostov is representative of the way in which many artists from this region used Rublev's *Trinity* as a model for their paintings. In comparison to the hesychast type of Trinity exemplified by Rublev's icon, however, the new version of the Trinity emerging in Rostov and Pskov was created as a response to the acute anti-Trinitarian controversies in Russia. The Rostov type of Trinity has its own characteristics and aim, showing the hypostatic equality of the three hypostases of the Trinity and their unity in the single image of the Trinity. Hence, the new version of the Trinity surfaces with three angels seated in one row of a rectangular table; their heads placed strictly on the same level (Fig. 57). The anti-heretical role of the image is further affirmed by the use of two other iconographical features; the gesture of blessing of the three angels is the same and they all have crucifixes on haloes inscribed with a monogram of Christ.²¹⁰ This testifies to the probability that Pskov's school of painting fought against heresy by incorporating the characteristics of the Greek iconographic tradition of the 'Hospitality of Abraham' and combining them with those of the Russian tradition for representation of the Trinity. The use of the horizontal axis of the image of the angels, pillows on the seats, and the representation of rounded vessels points to Greek influence.²¹¹ The model of Pskov incorporates many elements of symmetry from Russian artists. The three angels sit in the same position and the Eucharistic meal on the table forms a strong horizontal line. Simple details, such as the uneven texture and the abundance of gold decorations, suggest the painting is from the start of the 15th century. Other archaic features, such as the rectangular table, point to the iconographic tradition from the last quarter of the 14th century.

207 *ibid.*, 20.

208 N.K. Gavryushin, *Философия Русского Религиозного Искусства XVI–XX вв* (Moscow 1993) 200–201; Malickii, 'К Истории Композиций Ветхозаветной Троицы'.

209 J. Baggeley, *Festival Icons for the Christian Year* (New York 2000) 152.

210 According to J. Shakarabei, in the Old Testament Abraham served God, who was accompanied by two angels; see Ilin, *Искусство Московской Руси Эпохи Феофана Грека и Андрея Рублева*, 50–58; Heimann, 'L'Iconographie de la Trinite: L'Art Chretien'.

211 Lazarev, 'Русская Иконопись от Истоков до Начала XVI века,' *Искусство*, no. 83 (2000) 79–80, 325.

The placement of the angels around the square table repeats the oriental type²¹² of the *Trinity* icon of Novgorod (15th century), which is currently held at the Museum of History of Moscow (Музей истории Москвы) (Fig. 58).²¹³ The wings of the central angel are fully opened to produce movement beyond the composition. Implements on the table, large background features, and the figures of Abraham and Sarah, allude semantically to the historical presence of God. Three chalices are on the elongated table, with no shroud on it. The rhomboid shape of the bowl has no precedent.²¹⁴

The central angel is Christ the Logos (he has a crucifix on his halo), but the main feature of Rublev's *Trinity* is not lost, as neither the Father nor the Spirit bear separate characteristics. Placed within a circle, the three angels refer to the Trinity as a whole, affirming the mutual indwelling of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Colours are restrained and warm and not as bright and transparent as in Rublev's *Trinity*. The composition is closer to the pictorial plane due to the emphatic treatment of the background. In comparison to the mystical meaning of Rublev's icon of the *Trinity*, the Trinitarian image from the Museum of History, Novgorod, affirms the realistic dimension of human salvation.

While the hesychast influence on Russia narrowed after 1504, and outward ritualistic monasticism replaced the teachings of Sergius and Nil Sorsky,²¹⁵ the movement's importance for Russian spirituality should not be underestimated (Figs 59, 60, 61).

The spread of hesychasm and the interchange between the Byzantine and Russian traditions reflected in the art of Mt Athos, resulted in paintings reflecting an intermingling of Russian and Byzantine style. Rublev painted his icon under the direct influence of Byzantine icons from Athos, where the cult of the Trinity existed before the 15th century. The icon of the *Trinity* from the Monastery of Vatopedi on Mt Athos (Fig. 62) and from the Byzantine Museum, Athens, attests to this fact. It is possible that the Vatopedi icon served as a prototype, due to the close associations between the monastic communities of the Trinity Sergeus's, Lavra, and those of Mt Athos, beginning in the time of Sergius and Metropolitan Cyprian.²¹⁶ The icon of the *Trinity* from the Monastery of Vatopedi, painted at the end of the 14th century, also attests to the widespread representation of the new hesychast iconography of the Holy Trinity, which first appeared in the miniature manuscript of *Parisinus Graecus* 1242 from 1375. Moreover, this variant alludes to the divine presence within history. It elaborates the Biblical

212 Malickii, 'Панагия Русского Музея с Изображением Троицы', *Материалы по Русскому Искусству*, vol. 1 (St Petersburg 1928) 34.

213 V.N. Lazarev, *Страницы Истории Новгородской Живописи* (Moscow 1977) 16, 19.

214 Evseeva, *Эсхатология 7000 года и Возникновение Высокого Иконостаса* (Moscow 2000) 411–430.

215 L.V. Betin, 'Митрополит Киприан к Феофан Грек', *Etudes Balkaniques*, vol. 1 (Sofia 1977) 109–115.

216 Florensky, 'Троице-Сергиевой Лавры: Сергиева Монастыря и в России', *Троице-Сергиевой Лавры Сергиева Монастыря* (Moscow 1919) 19–20.

narrative of the Hospitality of Abraham. The table and larger background features allude to Abraham's dwelling, the Oak of Mamre and Abraham and Sarah.²¹⁷ The *Trinity* of Vatopedi also emphasises Christ with his two messengers; which is a good expression of the sacramental mystery of the sacrifice of the Mass, for which Christ's incarnation is a precondition.²¹⁸ Moreover, the icon's exegesis affirms the power of the Eucharist in offering communion in the resurrection and descent of the Spirit. Finally, this icon also alludes to the Pentecost, while observing Christological parameters. The middle angel exhibits the traditional attributes of Christ the Logos. His figure and his wings are larger than the wings of the two other angels, his clothing shines, and he wears a cruciform nimbus. The middle angel is flanked by two other, smaller, angels.²¹⁹ The central angel serves as a centre to the symmetrical background features. While his right arm gestures at a large central bowl, his two messengers on either side of the table gesture towards two smaller bowls. Sarah and Abraham incline in an attitude of reverence and prayer towards the middle angel. They co-participate with the side angels who are blessing their respective bowls.²²⁰ Abraham and Sarah take the priestly role by conversing with the angels (who are inserted between them). In response, the central angel turns to the side; he no longer raises his hand in blessing, but rather indicates with a benedictory gesture the chalice in front of him. The side angels are active participants; while the one on the right reaches out for the piece of bread or the vessel, the one on the left blesses the table. The architectural setting behind the angels is richly decorated. A unique feature is the portrayal of Abraham's tent as a cupola-like structure with seven divisions. This shows possible influence on the Vatopedi icon by the composition *Wisdom has Built her House*.²²¹

The symbolism of the seven pillars of Wisdom's house asserts the energy of the Spirit and the gifts of grace, such as knowledge, prudence, sound judgement, counsel, understanding and power. The Vatopedi icon upholds the symbolism of the number seven as the sign of the completion of God's initial creative act. While Rublev's *Trinity* shows God's manifestation in the Church, the Vatopedi icon offers a cogent *analogia relationis* between the creator and the creatures. The new iconography of the Holy Trinity created during the hesychast controversy was entrenched in the tradition of Athos, preserving the same iconographic qualities after several centuries (Fig. 63). The placement of the feet of the left angel (the Father) are always deployed along the entire edge of the

217 Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon: Problems of Meaning, Intertextuality, and Transmission', 30–37.

218 Louth, 'The Oak of Mamre'.

219 A.A. Karakatsanis, *Treasures of Mount Athos* (Thessaloniki 1997) 2, 17–21; Hunt, 'Andrei Rublev's Old Testament Trinity Icon: Problems of Meaning, Intertextuality, and Transmission', 33–37.

220 Titz, 'Some General Features'.

221 R. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol 14; online version on <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.txt> (accessed 20/02/2012).

throne. The middle angel (the Son) has his hands in a gesture of blessing. On the other hand, the hands of the right angel (the Holy Spirit) are in a sign of action. In his *Trinity*, Rublev embodies many elements of the Vatopedi icon.

The frequent encounters between monks and travellers from Constantinople allowed the ideas and patterns of Byzantine civilization to pour into Russia.²²² The patriarchate of Constantinople used its executive authority in vast territories, but the elitist character of Byzantine humanism precluded any transmission of secular Greek culture to the Slavs.²²³ Therefore, the great mass of translated literature was religious (chiefly hesychastic) and ecclesiastical. It was not uncommon to see Byzantine artists moving to Russian municipalities, especially during times of conflict. When the hesychast controversy raged through the Byzantine state, many Greek painters moved to Russian territories. Theophanes, whose style was tense, expressive and full of mystical contemplation, was one of them.

The fresco of the *Trinity* by Theophanes is on the walls of the small chapel dedicated to the Trinity, which forms a part of the Church of the Transfiguration, Novgorod (Fig. 64). The composition was created in 1378 and reflects the oriental type (Fig. 65) to which Theophanes was exposed during his frequent trips to the East, especially to Capadocia.²²⁴

At the bottom of the mural, Abraham and Sarah prepare the meal. At the top of the fresco, the three angels are gathered around a semi-circular table on which the sacrificial meal is placed. The depiction of angels is unusual, with the figure of the central angel being expressive and higher on the pictorial plane than the other two; he raises his right hand in blessing while holding a scroll in his left. He has large outstretched wings that overshadow and embrace the two other angels, dominating the painted scene. The central angel also bears a cross nimbus and carries a scroll in his left hand; both symbols are commonly used in reference to Christ.²²⁵ The central angel sits closer to the angel on the right than to the one on the left; this was a common feature in the iconographic tradition of the 11th and 12th centuries.²²⁶ The masters of that time made use of a full circle, arranging the other angels around the central angel representing the Son.

222 The Serbian and Bulgarian influence upon cultural, religious, literary and artistic development in Russia was also immense. The transmission of liturgical and disciplinary reforms, pilgrims journeying to Constantinople, and artists, diplomats and ecclesiasts travelling to and from Byzantium, constitute various channels through which ideas and patterns of Byzantine civilization poured into Russia. Meyendorff, *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia: A Study of Byzantino-Russian Relations in the Fourteenth Century* (Crestwood 1989) 120.

223 *ibid.*, 121.

224 Илин, Искусство Московской Руси Эпохи Феодора Грека и Андрея Рублева, 54–58.

225 Уланов, 'В Филоксения Авраама: Библейская Святыня и Догматический Образ', *Богословские Труды*, vol. 35 (1999) 225–229.

226 Malickii, К Истории Композиций Ветхозаветной Троицы, 35–37.

In contrast, Theophanes used the half-circle as a starting point. Accordingly, the haloes of the angels keep equal distance from the line of the frame from top left to right.²²⁷

The overall background of the fresco of the *Trinity*, as well as the outline of the halo, the glare on the wings, the recesses in the hair and shapes of the eyes of the three angels are in monochrome, with bright highlights to create depth and contour.²²⁸ The three angels have no pupils; instead, their retinas are expressed with bright white strokes, which light their eyes like flames of fire. This recalls the account of the Biblical story following the event of the Hospitality of Abraham, that is, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:23).

Rublev was a pupil of Theophanes, from whom he learned the technique of iconography. Rublev, already a mature master, conducted an internal dialogue with his predecessor and teacher. Nevertheless, the personality and the demeanour of the pupil (Rublev) were unlike those of his master (Theophanes) and their artistic interpretation of Genesis 18 reflects. Theophanes painted the Old Testament story and included all the features of the Biblical text. Rublev, on the other hand, embodies the image of the divine Trinity. Theophanes's vision of the Trinity is to be experienced as a poignant revelation. Rublev offered a clear and terse vision of the Trinity belonging to the realm of divine wisdom and contemplation.²²⁹

Theophanes created his works of art by following Byzantine models, even though Epiphanius claimed that Theophanes did not look at any iconographical manuals.²³⁰ As an educated philosopher and iconographer, however, he must have known the works of contemporary theologians and artists from Byzantium and Russia. They must have inspired him to produce brilliant paintings, such as the fresco of the *Trinity*. Of particular importance for understanding the impact of hesychasm on art, and on the development of Rublev's *Trinity*, is the double portrait miniature of John Kantacuzenos as a monk and emperor from the theological works of Kantacuzenos (*Parisinus Graecus* 1242). This complex and captivating image eloquently illustrates the life of Kantacuzenos, as well as his theology.²³¹ The interpretation of this image finds its full theological revelation in the text of Kantacuzenos, namely his *First Apology against Islam*,

227 Popova, 'Medieval Russian Painting and Byzantium', in R. Grierson (ed.), *Gates of Mystery: The Art of Holy Russia* (Fort Worth 1992) 55.

228 N.I. Sokolova, *Selected Works of Russian Art: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Graphic Art: 11th – Early 20th Century* (St Petersburg 1976) 4.

229 K. Ware, *The Inner Kingdom: The Collected Works* (Crestwood 2000) 108–110.

230 *ibid.*, 111.

231 V.J. Djurič, 'Les Miniatures du Manuscrit Parisinus Graecus 1242 et le Hesichasme', *L'Art de Thessaloniques et de Pays Balcaniques et les Courants Spirituels au XIVe Siecle: Recueil des Rapports du IVe Colloque Serbo-Grec* (Belgrade 1987) 89–94; Uliyanov, *Воплощение Тринитарного Догмата в Иконе 'Архангел Михаил с Деяниями'*, *Из Собрания Музеев Московского Кремля, Троицкие Чтения 2003–2004* 22 (Moscow 2004) 141–142.

written somewhere between September 1369 and June 1370. Kantacuzenos was the principal propagator and supporter of hesychasm during the 14th-century controversy, and he visited Mt Athos after the victory of the hesychasts in 1375. In a letter from 1371 to Bishop John on Cyprus, Kantacuzenos refers to Mt Athos as a place where hesychasts reside.²³² The theological works of Kantacuzenos were popular on Mt Athos. The library of the Monastery of Hodegon, Mt Athos, holds the original manuscript. A translation into Serbian existed in the Monastery of Hilandar, Mt Athos.²³³ St Sava distributed this version in Russia and Slavic lands.²³⁴

The miniature accompanying the tract against Islam is peculiar. It contains a double portrait of Kantacuzenos in his imperial garb and in a monastic *schema*. As a monk, Ioasaph Kantacuzenos holds a scroll with an inscription while his raised right hand points to the three angels from the *Philoxenia of Abraham*. This image belongs to Rublev's variant of the *Trinity*.²³⁵

This indicates that Rublev knew this model of the Trinity and borrowed some aspects of it. Hence, the three angels in the *Parisinus Graecus* 1242 match those presented in Rublev's *Trinity*. They sit around a rectangular table covered with a green cloth. Each of the three angels wears a blue himation covered by a blue-grey chiton. The three persons of the Trinity are distinguished from each other by individual characteristics; the central angel has cruciform halo, and the right angel carries in his left hand a red unidentified object.²³⁶ Iconographical novelties are the inclusion of this image of the Trinity above the double portrait of Kantacuzenos, and the inscription found on his scroll, which reads 'this is a picture of the Christian God'. These features engage the image of the Trinity in a visual polemic, providing further métier to the thesis expanded in the dogmatic text accompanying the miniature.²³⁷ In Rublev's *Trinity*, the three angels are equals, in the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature, the middle angel is identified as Christ and the Father at the same time, which has a dual significance. It refers to Kantacuzenos's statement that, although the Father did not appear in human

232 J. Darrouzes, 'Lettre Inédite de Jean Cantacuzène Relative à la Controverse Palamite', *Revue Biblique*, vol. 7 (1959) 7–12, 50.

233 Венская Королевская Библиотека, no. 34; J. Prolovic, 'Списки Рукописи XIII и XIV Века у Бечу и Монастир Хиландар', *Хиландарски Сборник* (Beograd 1986) 213–215.

234 John Kantacuzenos, 'Беседа с Папским Легатом: Против Иудеев и Другие Сочинения', in G.M. Prohorov (ed. & trans), *Издательство Олега Абышко, Серия Библиотека Христианской Мысли Источники* (Moscow 2008), vol. 41. (1988) 331–346; vol. 42 (1989) Cc. 200–227; vol. 43 (1990) Cc. 305–323; vol. 44 (1990) Cc. 226–245; vol. 45 (1992) Cc. 390–398; vol. 46 (1993) Cc. 270–286; vol. 47 (1993) Cc. 164–200; vol. 48 (1993) Cc. 151–186; vol. 49 (1996) Cc. 339–355.

235 H.A. Omont, *Miniatures des Plus Anciens Manuscrits Grecs de la Bibliothèque Nationale du VI^e au XIV^e Siècle* (Paris 1929) 58–59, pl. 126.

236 P. Guran, 'Jean VI Cantacuzène, l'Hésychasme et l'Empire: Les Miniatures du Codex Parisinus Graecus 1242', *L'Empereur Hagiographe, Culte des Saints et Monarchie Byzantine et Post-Byzantine* (Bucarest 2001) 73–121.

237 Djurić, 'Les Miniatures du Manuscrit Parisinus Graecus 1242'.

form, Christ manifested him. Therefore, the halo of the Father bears the cross in the *Parisinus Graecus* miniature.²³⁸ Also, the insistence on the value of this Christological revelation meets another topic addressed by Kantacuzenos in his *Four Words against the Jews*. Through his dual nature (divine and human), Christ simultaneously revealed the hypostases of the Father and of the Holy Spirit.²³⁹ Kantacuzenos stated that Christ deified the flesh and sanctified it by means of the incarnation.²⁴⁰ Hence, the circumscription of God's nature manifested in Christ throughout his *sub specie incarnationis* (his earthly life). This affirmation certainly bears a connection to the hesychast theology of the Trinity, as expressed by Palamas.²⁴¹ The appeal of this miniature lies precisely in its ambiguity. The composition combines elements of the biblical narrative of Genesis 18, the official imperial canon of portraiture, and the semi-private *Double Portrait of Emperor John Kantacuzenos* (Fig. 66). Confronted by the portrayal of the same individual, as it were, in two incarnations and surmounted by the canonical representation of the Holy Trinity, 'the viewer contemplates the paradox of divine and human natures, hypostatically united in one person of Christ'.²⁴²

Hesychastic spirituality transferred to Serbia after 1350 and it transpired through various channels. First, the mystical movement of hesychasm emerged in Serbia under the direction of Gregory of Sinai, as well as the multiplying of translated patristic sources in Slavic languages. Second, the settlement of immigrant monks from Bulgaria as well as the influence exercised by the Chilandar Monastery on Mt Athos affected the spread of hesychasm to monasteries in Serbia.²⁴³ In terms of the production of manuscripts, this monastery superseded Zographou, its Bulgarian counterpart.²⁴⁴ Third, fostered by Athos, St Sava, a Serbian prince, Orthodox monk and the first Archbishop of the Serbian Church, brought the practice of hesychasm to Serbia.²⁴⁵ His two writings *Karyes* and *Chilandar*

238 John Kantakuzenos, 'Contra Secam Mahometicam', *Patrologia Graeca* 154, 371–692.

239 V.J. Djurić, 'Les Miniatures du Manuscrit *Parisinus Graecus* 1242 et le Hésychasme', *L'Art de Essalonique et es Pays Balqaniques et les Courants Spirituelles au XIVe Siecle, Recueil des Rapports du IVe Colloque Serbo-Grec Belgrade 1985* (Belgrade 1987) 90.

240 John Kantacuzenos, *Беседа с Папским Легатом: Диалог с Иудеем и Другие сочинения* (St Petersburg 1997) 145; G. M. Prohorov, 'John Kantacuzenos, Диалог с Иудеем', *Труды Отдела Древнерусской Литературы*, vol. 41 (1988) 331–346; vol. 42 (1989) 200–227; vol. 43 (1990) 305–323; the style seen in the image of John Cantakouzenos in the Paris miniature is similar to the style of frescoes executed in 1371 in the monastery of Vatopedi; this is especially noticeable in assessing the composition of St Gregory Palamas in Vatopedi. This apparent similarity suggests that the manuscript was created in Vatopedi, online paper, <http://drevn2005.narod.ru/ill4StGrogorijPalamaVatoped1371.jpg> (accessed 12/01/2011).

241 Florensky, 'Троице-Сергиева Лавра и Россия', 21.

242 Djurić, 'Les Miniatures du Manuscrit *Parisinus Graecus* 1242', 93–94.

243 V.A. Moshin, 'О Периодизации Русско-Южнославянских Литературных Связей X–XV в.в.', *Труды Отдела Древнерусской Литературы* (St Petersburg 1963) 28–106.

244 *ibid.*, 94.

245 B. Žikić, 'Културни Херој као Морални Трикстер': Свети Сава у Усменом Преда у Срба из БиХ', *Bulletin of the Ethnographical Institute SASA*, vol. 46 (1997) 122–128.

Typikon became a reference for the hesychastic monastic lifestyle.²⁴⁶ Forth, the involvement of Stefan Dušan in Byzantine internal affairs during the period 1341–1354 was crucial to the spread of hesychasm. Finally, Prince Lazar's transfer of the spiritual centre of the state to Moravia, with clusters rising in Ljubostina, Resava, Lazarica, affected the promulgation of the hesychasm in Serbia.²⁴⁷ This style of representing the Trinity also spread to neighbouring countries, such as Macedonia, as reflected in the example from the Church of St Nikita, Banjani, Macedonia (Fig. 67).

Hagiographical literature in Serbia flourished during the Palaeologan period, when in-depth translations of the liturgical texts, as well as development of new works of art, materialised.

The Moravian school of painting was a creative and contemporary example of the changes occurring in Serbian art of this period, reflecting a style informed by hesychasm. The image of the Old Testament Trinity changed, bearing elements of artistic trends of Mt Athos (Fig. 62), Cappadocia (Fig. 65) and Novgorod (Fig. 68).

A mural painting of the Old Testament Trinity from the Monastery of Gračanica (Fig. 69) reflects the style that arose in Byzantium at the beginning of 14th century and testifies to the possible development of new artistic trends informed by hesychasm in Serbia. The painters from Gračanica used new iconographic and stylistic devices, as later Byzantine and Russian iconographers did, but they gave them a different interpretation.²⁴⁸ The prominent feature is the circumscription of the faces of the bema (raised platform); they are modelled in a rough fashion and not anatomical. While the facial structure is strong, the nose, cheeks and, sometimes, the bones of the forehead are bypassed. Details are modelled by the play of light and shadow, and the use of colours of varying intensity, as seen in the early Byzantine churches.²⁴⁹ In addition, the position of the three angels varies from those seen in the earlier iconographic prototypes, and also from the later versions of the Trinity, such as that of Rublev. The forms of angels in the fresco of the *Trinity* at Gračanica are generous and affect the volume of the composition. In contrast to this, in Rublev's *Trinity*, the volume is less apparent and the creases of the garments are rigid (in keeping in with the style of the 12th century).²⁵⁰ At Gračanica, the figures of the angels tilt in three different directions, whereas in Rublev they point to the same direction (the chalice). This affirms their different roles in the economy of salvation, rather than

246 N. Velimirović, *The Life of St Sava* (Platina 1989) 41–49.

247 A. Jevtic, *The Heavenly Kingdom in Serbia's Historic Destiny*, B. Dorich & B.W.R. Jenkins (ed.) (Pec 1992) 63–69.

248 Alpatov, 'La Trinité dans le Art Byzantine et l'Icône de Roublev'.

249 B. Todic, *Serbian Medieval Painting: The Age of King Milutin* (Belgrade 1999) 331.

250 J. Radovanovic, *Ikonografska Istrazivanja Srpskog Slikarstva XIII i XIV Veka* (Belgrade 1988) 89–102.

reflecting the Trinitarian intercommunication that Rublev was eager to affirm.²⁵¹ The peripheral movement of the three angels at Gračanica represents the endpoint of two spirals that begin with the side angels and cross the Christ figure on the central axis. Furthermore, their crossing paths form an oval shape that frames the upper torso of Christ and mirrors the circle of the central bowl. These spirals take the circle associated with the bowl upward and reveal the power of the Eucharist; assuring that the icon's allusion to the Trinity is not merely typological.

Both models of the Trinity (from Gračanica and of Rublev) employ inverted perspective and polycentrism, but Rublev's depth and rhythm of colours contribute to the quality of his *Trinity*. Nevertheless, the main focus of the *Trinity* fresco at Gračanica is the Christological doctrine of the hypostatic union of two natures in Christ. Furthermore, the distinction between the divine essence and energies — the basis of the hesychast controversy, served as a conceptual framework for the *Trinity* in Gračanica. The triadological issue concerning the unjustifiability of the *filioque*, in turn,²⁵² introduced the notion of the wisdom of God as a manifestation of God's energies that are accessible to humans, though the *ousia* of God remains hidden.

The notion of wisdom was central to the hesychast controversy, which motivated the development of symbolic images of Christ as the wisdom of God in the guise of the Angel of Great Council (Isaiah 9:6). He is seated in front of the temple with seven columns, which represent the 'home' of wisdom and convey the inseparable and indivisible union between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.²⁵³

The dual meaning of wisdom as the energy of the divine and Christ, the power and wisdom of God, as argued by patriarch Philotheus, makes a clear connection between the two images.²⁵⁴ If the image emphasised the motif of the Godhead, wisdom was the energy of the divine, and if the angel had a crucifix on the halo, it represented the incarnate word of God. The altar frescoes, the *Hospitality of Abraham* and *Wisdom has Built her House* in the Assumption Church of the Monastery of Gračanica, are placed on the sides of the composition of the *Communion of the Apostles*. Both paintings are likened to each other frontally and symmetrically, in the dominant motif of the Trinity. Rublev also merged these concepts in his *Trinity*.²⁵⁵ His *Trinity* is a place where contemplation and action

251 Vzdornov, 'Новооткрытая Икона 'Троицы' из Троице-Сергиевой Лавры', *Троица Андрея Рублева: Антология* (Moscow 1970) 6.

252 *ibid.*, 28.

253 Meyendorff, 'Spiritual Trends in Byzantium in the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries', in P. Underwood (ed.), *Kariye Dzami* (Princeton 1975) 103–106.

254 Meyendorff, 'L'Iconographie de la Sagesse Divine dans la Tradition Byzantine', *Cahiers Archeologiques*, no. 10 (Paris 1959) 259–277.

255 F. Winkelmann, 'Adrei's Icon of the Old Testament Trinity: Observation on its Interpretation', *Byzantinoslavica*, vol. 50, no. 2 (1989) 197–202.

merge, and the creation and salvation of the world is inseparable.²⁵⁶ The two frescoes at Gračanica single out the central angel as Christ–Wisdom. They share a common hesychast idea about the manifest nature of the divine transcendence through the hypostasis of the Logos. In the fresco of the *Sophia* at Gračanica, however, the middle figure is the Angel of Great Council, officiating behind an altar table, offering Wisdom’s feast of knowledge of the hidden Father through communion in his Eucharistic mystical body. Depicted this way, the middle angel represents Christ, which communicates the transcendence of the Father. On either side of Christ, two servants make the symmetrical arrangement of the three. The numerical symbolism of the three marks the divine completeness or perfection, and it alludes to the triad or the Trinity. The composition reaches fulfilment with the representation of the seven columns on the temple behind Wisdom, which symbolise the seven gifts of the Spirit. It also refers to the New Testament church built on Christ, which stands against ‘the house of the harlot’ (Proverbs 7:8).

In the *Trinity* at Gračanica, conversely, the tent of Abraham is a cupola, like structure with three divisions, which represent the different roles of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The middle column is the largest, which suggests that the middle angel has sovereignty. This in turn, is a figurative transmission of the text of Proverbs 9:1–7 (Wisdom created her house) referring to Christ as the wisdom of God who reveals the Godhead in history.²⁵⁷ While assessing the influence of Rublev’s *Trinity* on the art of the 15th and 16th centuries, it is important to note another work, from Serbia, which shares some of the features commonly found in Rublev’s *Trinity*. The fresco, from the Monastery of Kalenić, depicts the biblical narrative of the Wedding at Cana (Fig. 70).²⁵⁸ The original drawing style of master Radoslav, the mastery of colour and chromatic effects, the bald approach in the composition of the masses and retouching of the old iconographic schemes make this fresco one of the highest Serbian artistic achievements.

Rublev’s *Trinity* and the fresco of the *Wedding of Cana* circumscribe two different subjects, yet they share some common elements. The *Trinity* is predominantly abstract, and it contains only the essential features of the biblical narrative of the Hospitality of Abraham. The *Wedding at Cana* is an elaborate description of the Gospel’s story of the miracle embodied in *realia*.²⁵⁹ While in Rublev’s *Trinity* there is only a select group of participants, chiefly, the three angels sitting around a table on which the chalice is placed, at Kalenić there is a

256 R. Williams, *The Dwelling of the Light: Praying with Icons of Jesus* (Norwich 2003) 57.

257 Meyendorff, ‘L’Iconographie de la Sagesse Divine’, 259–277.

258 O. Upadhyaya, *The Art of Ajanta and Sopoćani: A Comparative Study: An Enquiry in Prāna Aesthetics* (1994) 55–57.

259 S. Radojčić, *The Frescoes at Kalenic* <http://www.monumentaserbica.com/mushushu/story.php?id=26&t=THE%20FRESCOES%20OF%20KALENI%C4%86> (accessed 23/04/2011).

multitude of guests, such as the marriage celebrant, the wedded couple, Christ and Theotokos, an elderly male, and three child-like servants. At the far corner of the table, two elders taste the miraculous wine while the wedding celebrant and his cohorts pay attention to Christ's speech. An unusual feature is the groom pricking his bride's finger to mix her blood with his wine in token of his fidelity (certainly a pagan component). An interesting feature is the guests dining with forks, a practice almost unknown outside Venice during the 15th century. The overall atmosphere in this fresco is of lyrical melancholy, tranquility and joyful celebration.

The strict equilibrium of those seated at the table is presented as in Rublev's example by sums: two, three, and two. The *Wedding at Cana* does not have the same austere numerical symmetry as Rublev's *Trinity*. Vessels in which the water becomes wine are emphasised in composition at Kalenić.²⁶⁰ The table, the water vessels and the uneven masses, which disturb the balance, interlink with the murky exteriors of the robes of the invitees, the Virgin's, Christ's, the husband-to-be, and the two helpers. The central figure of Christ inclines and turns his head slightly to the side.²⁶¹ The ingenious arrangement of dark-clothed figures creates a new symmetry that envelopes the whole composition. The contours of the wings, the movement of the hands of the angels, and the merging of background features converge at the epicentre of the icon, which shows the chalice in which the sign of sacrifice is depicted.²⁶²

Against the obvious stylistic similarities and differences between both pieces, Rublev painted his concept of the Trinity in the sphere of ideas, whereas the painter at Kalenić aimed to represent the incomprehensible mystery of the Eucharist in earthly terms. The artists at Kalenić depicted a wedding of angelic youths. Accordingly, the postures and gestures of the three figures reflect supplication and *apotheosis* of earthly happiness. Rublev's *Trinity*, on the other hand, represented a vision of the Trinity as perceived in the Old Testament. It reveals the heavenly *agape* given by God to humanity and also expresses the hesychast spirituality. Needless to say, a rare icon of the *Wedding at Cana* painted in the Ferapontov Monastery, Russia, at the beginning of 16th century repeats the patterns of the Serbian fresco, and even includes its poetical components.²⁶³ These similar models, made in two different areas and without communication, could have only one common denominator, a Byzantine centre, as the starting point of this diffusion.²⁶⁴ From this survey of several frescoes

260 *ibid.*

261 In the fresco at Kalenic, the middle angel's hand is no longer raised in blessing, and he makes a gesture towards the vessel in front of him. The two angels on the side are making clear gestures in both paintings.

262 Compare the Wedding of Cana with that of the Trinity in the Monastery of Dečani, Kosovo; See fig. 72.

263 G.V. Popov, *Živopis i Minijatjura Moskvi Sredini XV Načala XVI veka* (Moscow 1975) fig. 147.

264 D. Simić-Lazar, 'Observations Sur le Rapport Entre les Décors de Kalenić, de Kahrié Djami et de Curtea de Argeş', *Cahiers Archéologiques*, no. 34 (1986) 143–160; Simić-Lazar, *Kalenić et la Dernière Période de la Peinture Byzantine* (Paris 1995) 151–169.

and icons of the Old Testament Trinity, it is clear that Rublev's *Trinity* is a pure expression of the hesychast experience that he learned under the guidance of Sergius. It also reflects a new style of art informed by hesychasm, which Rublev learned from Theophanes, who combined the Byzantine artistic canon with the Russian mentality.

Conclusion

The analysis of Rublev's Old Testament *Trinity* reveals that specific symbolism associated with hesychasm inspired and informed Rublev's innovative composition. Rublev combined the asceticism which characterised Russian monasticism with the classic harmony of Byzantine iconography, and thus maximised the proximity of the divine and the mortal.²⁶⁵ Among the feuds and hostilities, Tartar raids and savagery of contemporary Russia, Rublev revealed the indivisible, eternal, ineffable peace of the heavenly kingdom.²⁶⁶

Rublev's *Trinity* offers a view into the spiritual state of *hesychia*, tranquillity and stillness. It represents the union of God and man in *theosis*, when all movement ceases.²⁶⁷ Reflecting a subtle hesychast worldview, Rublev's *Trinity* depicts the incarnation of the Son of God. The wondrous icon also affirms the role of the Holy Spirit, and his mysterious, inspiring and spiritual development of humankind. Rublev created a vision that was suitable for divine meditation, allowing the observer to enter the uncreated light of God and experience divine transformation. The icon became a window to the divine light as well materialisation of God's presence.

265 A. Zotov, 'Народность Искусства Андрея Рублева', *Искусство*, vol. 9 (1960) 60, 83.

266 Kopylov, 'Hesychasm and Creative Work of Andrei Rublev', *Patristic and Byzantine Review*, vol. 18–19 (2000).

267 Some researchers praised Rublev's hesychasm as coming from the supposed Russian variety: the wonderful colours of the Trinity icon absorbed the light bluish-green of the young rye, the dark azure of the field cornflower, the lilac-yellows of the mass of the flowery carpet of heart's-ease, and the gold of the autumn forest (N. Kuz'min, Андрея Рублева, *Новый Мир*, vol. 10 (Moscow 1960) 204–210).



Figure 52. *The Hospitality of Abraham*, c. 532–547, mosaic, nave, Church of San Vitale, Ravenna (Italy)



Figure 53. *The Hospitality of Abraham*, c. 432–440, mosaic, sanctuary, Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (Italy)

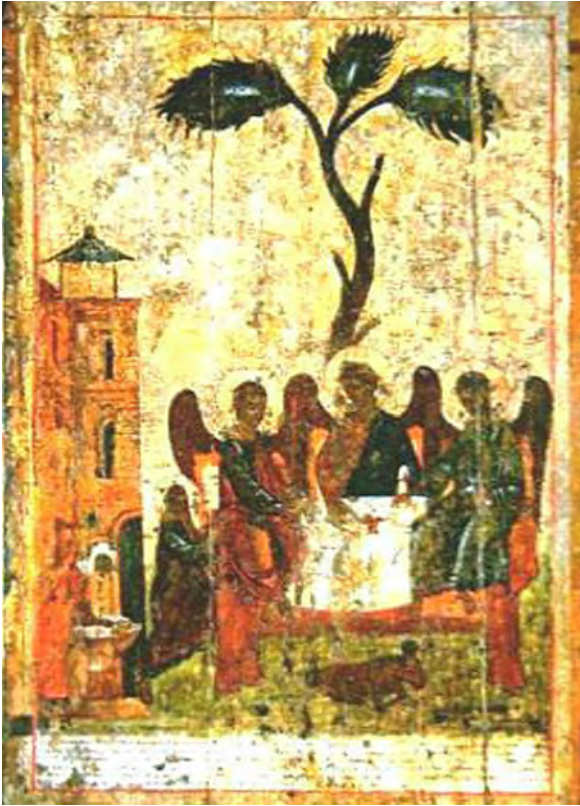


Figure 54. The Zyrian Trinity, 14th century, tempera on wood, 119 x 75 cm, painter Stephan of Perm, Vologda State Historical and Architectural Museum, Vologda (Russia), inv. no. 2780/6466Д



Figure 55. The Apparition of the Virgin to Sergius of Radonezh, late-16th century, tempera on wood, 30 x 25 cm, Trinity Lavra of St Sergius, Novgorod (Russia), currently at Murray Warner Collection of Oriental Art, University of Oregon (USA), inv. no. MWRU 34/15



Figure 56. The Trinity, 15th century, tempera on wood, 161 x 122 cm, Trinity Sergius's Lavra, Sergius's Posad State History and Art Museum–Reserve, Moscow (Russia), inv. no. 2966



Figure 57. The Trinity, late-15th – early 16th century, tempera on wood, 145 x 108 cm, Pskov School, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow (Russia), inv. no. 28597

5. The Icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev



Figure 58. The Trinity, 15th century, tempera on canvas, 23.5 x 17.3 cm, Museum of History of Moscow, Novgorod (Russia), inv. no. 93096



Figure 59. The Trinity, c. 1508, fresco, western wall of the gallery, painter Theodosius, Annunciation Cathedral, Kremlin, Moscow (Russia)



Figure 60. The Trinity, 15th century, tempera on wood, in front of the iconostasis (soleas), lower tier, painter Sidor Osipov or Ivan Borisov, Church of the Deposition of the Robe, Kremlin, Moscow (Russia)



Figure 61. The Trinity, late-14th – early 15th century, tempera on wood, 36 x 54.2 cm, State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg (Russia), inv. no. I–1/Лих.II–165 (1806)

5. The Icon of the Trinity by Andrei Rublev



Figure 62. The Trinity, late-14th century, tempera on wood, 117 x 92 cm, Monastery of Vatopedi, Mt Athos (Greece), exclusive photograph of O.G. Uliyanov, Head of Department of Church Archaeology, Andrei Rublev Museum of Early Russian Culture and Art, Moscow (Russia), 2005



Figure 63. The Trinity, c. 1176–1180, fresco, left wall of the nave, Chapel of the Virgin Mary, Monastery of St John the Theologian, Patmos (Greece)



Figure 64. The Trinity, c. 1378, fresco, eastern wall of the western vestry, painter Theophanes the Greek, Church of the Transfiguration, Novgorod (Russia)



Figure 65. The Trinity, c. 1060s–1070s, fresco, western wall of the narthex, Church of Karanlik Killise, Göreme, Cappadocia (Turkey)



Figure 66. The Double Portrait of Emperor John Kantakouzenos, c. 1375, book illumination, scribe Ioasaph, in J. Kantakouzenos, *Disputatio cum Paulo Patriarcha Latino*, Bibliothèque nationale de France, (Parisinus Graecus 1242), fol. 5V



Figure 67. The Trinity, early 14th century, fresco, left part of the narthex, Church of St Nikita, Banjani (Macedonia)



Figure 68. The Trinity, late-15th – early 16th century, tempera on wood, 23.5 × 17.3 cm, Museum of History and Architecture, Novgorod (Russia), cat. no. 35367



Figure 69. The Trinity, 14th century, fresco, east wall of the sanctuary, Monastery of Gračanica, Gračanica (Kosovo)



Figure 70. The Wedding at Cana, 15th century, fresco, southern apse, painter Radoslav, Monastery of Kalenić (Serbia)



Figure 71. The Trinity, 16th century, tempera on wood, 101 x 61 cm, attached to the iconostasis, Monastery of Dečani

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