

Christ's Visage

“Annahar” newspaper published on June 5th an article entitled: “Is this the real visage of Christ?” (Talking about a form believed to be the closest to Christ’s face). This try was based on an experiment done on a skull of a Jewish man that is believed to represent the best model of people that lived in Palestine in Christ’s time as his skull goes back to the first century.

Of course, skulls don’t come from one model and are not all alike. There is also no definite dating archeologically. And we don’t know if Israeli authorities were interested in this subject and we also don’t know their intentions.

Here, we must say that early Christians didn’t care about the Lord’s physical form. Some of them said that his face was beautiful and others said the opposite. Of course, we find no interest in the Gospel concerning this issue. Studies showed that “Torino’s shroud”, that was believed to be Christ’s shroud, comes from the middle ages. Studies also proved that the text that has a description of Christ and attributed to Pilate is not a fixed text. So we don’t have any signal of the Savior’s physical appearance, and surely it doesn’t matter for us.

There is a statue that portrays the Savior artistically made after several tens of years from his resurrection. However, this is an artistic work and doesn’t have anything to do with reality. We can also find the oldest icon of the Lord preserved in the Louvre museum in Paris, and it is a Coptic icon that goes back to the Fifth century. However, this icon falls into a religious educative art in which the artist doesn’t try to imitate an actual image as he doesn’t have a photographic intention. And because Icon writers – and this is how we call painters – try to follow early models to give a spiritual idea, all their images were very similar. An icon is closer to being a symbol than a physical seen form. It is a theological reading of the person we are drawing.

European art was inspired by icons despite becoming independent in style and making. The important thing when looking at the icon is to spiritually ascend to the person portrayed on it. We don’t have any quest to know about the Lord’s skin or the color of his eyes. Of course, he did resemble the people of this oriental region and this is everything we can say.

Our relationship with the Lord is through the Holy Spirit. We don’t know him physically but spiritually as Paul says. This means that we know him through the heart when filled with grace. We also know him as the disciples of Emmaus did “when breaking the bread” through divine communion and the words that he said. We know him through love if we lived it and through the ecclesiastic bond that unites us with the brothers.

In this case, cinema doesn’t give us anything new about the Lord when an actor plays his character and it also doesn’t strengthen our faith. For us, he is not

simply a human to put on stage. We look at him after resurrection, i.e. we see him a luminous creature related to us through the Holy Spirit and leading us to the Father. We can artistically enjoy the paintings done by great artists in which they drew biblical events including crucifixion. We do not deny the canonicity of these paintings, but they don't make us pray. We meet the Lord through prayer and through icons. We also enjoy classical music that gave the tones for the polyphonic western liturgy. However, we don't pray this way. We pray through the Spirit.

Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon