

SHORT NOTES

Showing one's true colours: Patriarch Methodios on the morally improving effect of sacred images

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This brief article makes the case that Patriarch Methodios developed a distinctive icon theology. He argued that the saints had infused the colours of their faces with their holy essence and that these colours when separated from the bodies and transferred to images could thus lead to the moral improvement of the onlookers.

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When during the Iconoclast period the display and veneration of images of Christ and the saints came under attack, the defenders of this practice began to produce arguments that would justify their position. The literature in which these arguments are set out has long attracted the interest of scholars. Four authors – Patriarch Germanos and John of Damascus in the eighth century, and Patriarch Nikephoros and Theodore of Stoudios in the ninth century – have been studied in depth and their theological views are by now well known. By contrast, another figure, Methodios of Syracuse, does not feature in the scholarly discussion. Although he was one of the leaders of the Iconophile faction during the Second Iconoclasm and as patriarch presided over the council that put an end to the controversy, his thoughts about the topic are virtually unknown. There is a simple reason for this lacuna. We do not have a treatise by Methodios that could be compared with the writings of Germanos, John, Nikephoros and Theodore, and we cannot be sure that one ever existed.¹ Yet this does not mean that Methodios' icon theology is completely lost to us. He was a prolific author of hagiographical texts in which he

1 There exists a *Speech about the Holy Icons*, which in the manuscripts is attributed to Methodios. See J. Pitra, *Juris Ecclesiastici Graecorum historia et monumenta*, II (Rome 1868) 355–61; and Arsenij, 'Μεθοδίου λόγος περὶ τῶν ἁγίων εἰκόνων', *Čtenija v Obšč. Ljub. Dukhovnago Prosvěščeniija* (Moscow 1893), Nov.-Dec. Section. III, 1–23. However, this text is undoubtedly a *pseudepigraphon* because it is not written in Methodios' characteristic style. See M. Hinterberger, 'Wortschöpfung und literarischer Stil bei Methodios I.', in E. Trapp and S. Schönauer (eds.), *Lexicologica Byzantina. Beiträge zum Kolloquium zur byzantinischen Lexikographie*, Bonn, 13.–15. Juli 2007 (Bonn 2008) 119–50.

expressed his views on a whole range of topics, including the veneration of images. This article offers an analysis of some relevant passages and seeks to reconstruct the debate in which Methodios engaged.

One of the accusations that the Iconoclasts hurled against their Iconophile adversaries was that they recommended a useless practice, because gazing at depictions of saints could not lead to moral perfection in the same way as listening to their lives and martyrdoms did. This point was already made at the Council of Hieria in 754 through a collection of quotations from Patristic texts; and it was given even greater prominence at the Council of St Sophia in 815 when this *florilegium* was extended through addition of further proof texts.² The quotation that expresses the position of the Iconoclasts most clearly is taken from a now lost text by the fifth-century bishop Theodotos of Ancyra:

We have not learnt from our forebears to shape the appearances of the saints in images through material colours, but we have been instructed to appropriate their virtues through that which is indicated about them in writings as if they were living images, being in this way roused to a zeal that is similar to theirs. Let those who put up such shapes explain what profit they derive from them, or to what spiritual contemplation they are elevated through the memory of them. But it is evident that such a notion is useless and the invention of devilish trickery.³

This was a potent criticism, which the leaders of the Iconophile faction could not leave unchallenged. One response is found in Ignatios the Deacon's *Life* of Patriarch Tarasios. Discussing Tarasios' pious activities Ignatios singles one out for special praise:

He reverently set up before the eyes of all an available picture and a spontaneous book by depicting their (the martyrs') struggles in holy churches. And he did so in order to open a gateway of compunction to the beholders and

2 For a discussion of the two *florilegia* see P. J. Alexander, 'The Iconoclastic Council of St. Sophia (815) and its definition (*Horos*)', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 7 (1953) 35–66. See also M. V. Anastos, 'The ethical theory of images formulated by the Iconoclasts of 754 and 815', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954) 151–160, who argues that the Iconoclast stance of 815 was not different from that of 754; and J. Gouillard, 'Fragments inédits d'un antirrhétique de Jean le Grammairein', *Revue des études byzantines* 24 (1966) 171–81, esp. 176–77.

3 Nikephoros, *Refutation* 93, ed. J. Featherstone, *Nicephori Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Refutatio et Eversio Definitionis Synodalis Anni 815*, Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca, 33 (Turnhout 1997) 89.4–14: Τὰς τῶν ἁγίων ιδέας οὐκ ἐν εἰκόσιν ἐξ ὑλικῶν χρωμάτων διαμορφοῦν παρελήφραμεν, ἀλλὰ τὰς τούτων ἀρετὰς διὰ τῶν ἐν γραφαῖς περὶ αὐτῶν δηλουμένων οἶόν τινας ἐμψύχους εἰκόνας ἀναμάττεσθαι δεδιδάγμεθα, ἐκ τούτου πρὸς τὸν ὅμοιον αὐτοῖς διεγειρόμενοι ζῆλον. ἐπεὶ εἰπάτωσαν οἱ τὰς τοιάσδε ἀνασθηλοῦντες μορφὰς ποίας ἄρα ἐκ τούτων καταπολαύοιεν ὠφελείας; ἢ ἐν ποίᾳ διὰ τῆς τούτων ἀναμνήσεως ἀνάγωνται πνευματικῇ θεωρίᾳ; ἀλλ' εὐδηλον ὡς ματαῖα ἢ τοιαύτη ἐπινοία καὶ διαβολικῆς μεθοδείας εὕρημα. Cf. Alexander, 'Iconoclastic Council', 61.

establish the fighters (for the faith), who, by their zeal to imitate them, are eager to take up the same blessed struggle, should circumstances call for it.⁴

Here it is claimed that one can draw a spiritual benefit from gazing at scenes of martyrdoms. This is evidently quite a persuasive argument. However, it has one major disadvantage. It is only valid for narrative scenes and not for the portraits of saints, which were the primary objects of veneration. As everybody knew, people usually did not turn to icons because they wished to be spiritually improved but because they hoped to win the support of the saints depicted on them. This meant that saints were seen not so much as models for imitation than as powerful intercessors with God. The difficulty of justifying the veneration of such images is apparent in the *Refutation of the Council of 815* by Patriarch Nikephoros, one of the leaders of the Iconophile faction during the Second Iconoclasm. Commenting on the quotation from Theodotos of Ancyra, Nikephoros declares:

If the virtues of the saints can be reproduced through writings as if they were living images how much more justified is it then that they are painted in their appearances insofar as the body is more necessary and more worthy than the deed, since the former effects whereas the latter is effected, and the former brings about a result whereas the latter is the result that has been brought about, and the former is the cause of and prior to the deeds, which are caused and secondary. If it were not so, a house and a ship and a couch would be more worthy than the builder and joiner who has made them. And the virtues as deeds pertaining to the bodies show their meekness and activity, whereas the appearances show us the bodies themselves, that is the saints themselves, what manner of people they were and how brave and valiant they were.⁵

This argument has the advantage that it is valid for all depictions of saints and not only for narrative scenes. Moreover, it has a philosophical veneer since Nikephoros makes use of Aristotelian terms and concepts. These terms and concepts are clearly meant to

4 Ignatios the Deacon, *Life of Patriarch Tarasios*, 49, ed. S. Efthymiadis, *The Life of Patriarch Tarasios by Ignatios the Deacon* (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs, 4; Aldershot 1998), 135–136: Κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς πάντων ἐτοίμην γραφήν καὶ βιβλὸν αὐτόματον ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς ναοῖς τοὺς ἀγῶνας τούτων ἐγγράψας σεπτῶς ἀνεστηλίωσεν, ὡς ἂν τοῖς ὀρώσι κατανύξῃσιν ἀνοίξῃ προπύλαια καὶ τοὺς ἐναθλοῦντας εἰσοικίσῃ καὶ ζήλῳ τῷ πρὸς αὐτοὺς πυρουμένους τῆς ὁμοίας, εἰ καιρὸς καλοίῃ, ἐπιλαβέσθαι ἀθλήσεως; with translation on p. 149.

5 Nikephoros, *Refutation* 107, ed. Featherstone, 89.20–33: Εἰ γὰρ αἱ ἀρεταὶ τῶν ἁγίων οἰοῦνται εἰκόνας ἔμψυχοι διὰ τῶν γεγραμμένων δείκνυνται, τὰ κατορθοῦντα τὰς ἀρετὰς σώματα πόσῳ δικαιοτέρον κατὰ τὰς ἰδέας αὐτῶν εἰκονίζεσθαι; ὅσῳ καὶ σῶμα πράξεως ἀναγκαιότερόν τε καὶ τιμιώτερον ὡς τὰ μὲν ἐνεργοῦντα τὰ δὲ ἐνεργούμενα, καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀποτελοῦντα τὰ δὲ ἀποτελούμενα, καὶ αἷτια καὶ πρῶτα αἰτιατῶν καὶ δευτέρων τῶν ἔργων ὄντων. εἰ γοῦν μὴ ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχοι, καὶ οἶκος καὶ ναῦς καὶ κλίνη τοῦ κατασκευάσαντος οἰκοδόμου καὶ τέκτονος τιμιώτερα. καὶ αἱ μὲν ἀρεταὶ οἷα πράξεις τυγχάνουσαι περὶ τὰ σώματα τὸ ἐπιεικὲς καὶ πρακτικὸν αὐτῶν παραδηλοῦσιν, αἱ ἰδέαι δὲ αὐτὰ τὰ σώματα ἡγουν αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἁγίους ἥμιν ἐμφανίζουσιν ὅποιοι τε ὄντες ἐτύγχανον καὶ ὅπως εὐανδρίας εἶχον καὶ γενναϊότητος. Cf. Alexander, 'Iconoclastic Council', 56.

convince the reader that the argument is sound.⁶ However, this does not detract from the fact that their application to the topic is highly contrived and that it does little to address the problem.⁷

Thus it is not surprising that other Iconophile authors developed their own theories. One text in which the issue is broached is an *Encomium* of Nicholas of Myra by the monk Michael, archimandrite of the Dalmatos monastery and *synkellos* of Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos.⁸ As one might expect from an author who wrote after 843 Michael approves of the practice of icon worship:

Those who put up his (Nicholas') most sacred likeness with the proper faith and embrace it, having him whom they love as an inseparable housemate, are through his intercessions with God evidently ransomed from the manifold snares and scandals of this tumultuous and wearisome life and are deemed worthy of passing through this life in a quiet and unscathed manner.⁹

This is, however, not all that Michael has to say. In another part of the text he makes the following statement:

Such a one was the holy Nicholas, priestly and angelic in appearance and sending out fragrance full of sanctification, that through the mere sight of him he improved those who encountered him and pushed and moved them towards what is better and conducive to salvation.¹⁰

The meaning of this statement is clear. The saint's sanctity was manifest in his appearance and could therefore have an effect on the morals of the onlookers. Michael only speaks about the living saint but it is evident that what he says has a bearing on the issue of icon worship. If the appearance of living saints has such an impact then it can be argued that the depictions of their appearances on icons have the same effect.

6 On the use of Aristotelian concepts by Nikephoros and other Iconophile authors see most recently Th. Anagnostopoulos, 'Aristotle and Byzantine Iconoclasm', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 53 (2013) 763–90, esp. 781–87. See also Alexander, 'Iconoclastic Council', 49; and L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge 2010) 374–75.

7 See Featherstone, *Refutatio et Eversio*, xx–xxi.

8 On Michael see D. Krausmüller, 'Vitae B, C and A of Theodore the Stoudite: their Interrelation, Dates, Authors and Significance for the History of the Stoudios Monastery in the Tenth Century', *Analecta Bollandiana* 131 (2013) 280–98.

9 Michael, *Encomium of Nicholas* 49, ed. G. Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos I. Der Heilige Nikolaos in der griechischen Kirche. Texte und Untersuchungen*, I, *Die Texte* (Leipzig, Berlin 1913) 113–39, esp. 138.3–8: Οἱ τὴν ἱερωτάτην αὐτοῦ ἐμφέριαν μετὰ τῆς δεούσης πίστεως ἀναστηλοῦντές τε καὶ ἀσπαζόμενοι, ὡς αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνον τὸν στεργόμενον σύνικον ἔχοντες ἀδιάσπαστον, ταῖς αὐτοῦ πρὸς θεὸν μεσιτεῖαις τῶν πολυτρόπων τοῦ ταραχώδους καὶ πολυθλίπτου βίου βρόχων τε καὶ σκανδάλων ἀριδῆλως ἀπολυτροῦνται καὶ ζῶην ἡρεμον καὶ ἀπῆμαντον σταδιεῦειν καταξιοῦνται.

10 Michael, *Encomium of Nicholas* 40, ed. Anrich, 133.19–22: Τοιοῦτος ἦν ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος, ἱεροπρεπῆς καὶ ἀγγελικὸς τῷ εἶδει καὶ ἀγιασμοῦ πλήρης ἀποπέμπων τὰς εὐωδίας, ὡς καὶ ἐκ μόνης ὀράσεως αὐτοῦ τοὺς παρατυγχάνοντας αὐτῷ βελτιοῦν καὶ πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον καὶ σωτηρίας ἐχόμενον ὠθεῖν καὶ μεταφέρειν.

Michael was not a deep thinker, and it must not be thought that his argument is original. A much more elaborate version is found in the literary model for Michael's text, the *Life-cum-Encomium* of Nicholas by Patriarch Methodios, which dates to the period before his patriarchate when Iconoclasm was still the official policy of the state.¹¹ There we read:

The servant of God, Nicholas, the ointment-receiving vessel of the all-holy and life-giving Spirit, the flower and branch and root of the inhabitants of Myra and their ointment, **he who has been whitened like a lily through his presidency and has been adorned like a violet through his conduct, he who is red like a rose through his truthfulness and green like calyxes through his abstention**, he who has been crowned with greyness as regards his head and has been trained to perfection through his toils, he who is relaxed in body and tautened in spirit, he who has been bedewed through chastity and has seethed through eagerness, he who lives in Myra and comes to those who call him, he who lives in celestial places and helps in response to prayers the peoples on earth, the most timely seed who is entombed in a grave and the one who is gathered together as regards his soul in divine attendance, the lamp that is corporeally covered with a slab and **the coal that is colourfully kindled from many panels through divine grace**, the ember that is buried in many hearts and the wick that has been partaken of by even more as regards his name, for all who are called Nicholas after him, are (sc. called thus) because of him for the participation in sanctification.¹²

This passage, which is found at the beginning of the text, presents the saint to the audience. Methodios states what the saint's main characteristics are, where he is at present, and how he relates to his devotees. Two statements are relevant to our topic: they are

11 On Methodios see B. Zielke, 'Methodios I.', in R.-J. Lillie (ed.), *Die Patriarchen der ikonoklastischen Zeit: Germanos I.-Methodios I. (717–847)*, Berliner Byzantinische Studien, 5 (Frankfurt am Main 1999) 183–260. In the title of the text Methodios is referred to not as patriarch but as priest and abbot, see Methodios, *Encomium* of Nicholas tit., ed. Anrich, 140.1–2. For the relationship between the texts of Michael and of Methodios, see D. Krausmüller, 'Patriarch Methodios, the first hagiographer of Theodore of Stoudios', *Symbolae Osloenses* 81 (2007) 144–50.

12 Methodios, *Encomium* of Nicholas 2, ed. Anrich, 141.1–15: 'Ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ θεράπων Νικόλαος, τὸ σκεῦος τὸ μυριδόχον τοῦ παναγίου καὶ ζωοποιοῦ πνεύματος, τὸ ἄνθος καὶ <κλά>δος καὶ ρίζα τῶν Μυρέων καὶ μύρισμα, ὁ κρίνου δίκην λελευκασμένος τῇ προεδρίᾳ καὶ ὡς ἴον ἐστολισμένος τῇ πολιτείᾳ, ὁ ῥόδον οἶα κατερεῦθων τῇ ἀληθείᾳ καὶ κάλυξι πῶς ἐμπρασινίζων τῇ ἐγκρατείᾳ, ὁ πολιτῆ τὴν κάραν κατεστημένος καὶ εἰς ἀκμὴν τοὺς πόνους ἐνησκημένος, ὁ χαλασθεὶς τὸ σῶμα καὶ τονωθεὶς τὸ πνεῦμα, ὁ δροσισθεὶς ἀγνεῖα καὶ προθυμῖα ζέσας, ὁ Μύρα ναίων καὶ τὸν ἐκκαλούμενον φθάνων, ὁ οὐρανίους ἐνδιατώμενος χώροις καὶ ἐπιγειοῖς εὐκταῖα συλλαμβανόμενος δῆμοις, ὁ τάφῳ ἐνσοριαζόμενος ὠρμώτατος σῖτος καὶ θεῖα συναγελιζόμενος τὴν ψυχὴν παραστάσει, ὁ μῆ <πλα>κι σωματικῶς καλυπτόμενος λύχνος καὶ **πολλῶν πινάκων ἐγχρώμῳς τὴν θεῖαν χάριν ἐξαναπτόμενος ἄνθραξ**, τὸ πλείσταις καρδίαις ἐνθεταμμένον ἐμπύρευμα καὶ πλειότεροις κατ' ὄνομα μεταληφθὲν θρυαλλίδιον· ὅσοι γὰρ μετ' ἐκείνον καλοῦνται Νικόλαος, πάντες δι' αὐτὸν εἰς ἀγιασμοῦ μέθεξιν.

highlighted in bold. In the latter of these statements Methodios explains that Nicholas is depicted through brilliant colours that have been applied to panels. This can only refer to the numerous icons of the saint through which he was much more accessible than through his corpse, which was found in only one place and was covered with a marble slab. By likening Nicholas to a burning coal Methodios stresses the effect that the icons have on the onlookers; the colours are literally burned into their retinas.¹³

The former statement is rather more difficult to understand. We are told that the saint has acquired the colours white, black/violet, red and green, which are in turn compared with flowers. It is highly likely that the colours mentioned here refer to the complexion of Nicholas' face. Not only does the immediately following statement refer to the saint's white hair, but Methodios presents in his *Life of Theophanes* a description of this saint's face that makes mention of white skin, red cheeks and black eyes. Moreover, there he compares some of these features with flowers.¹⁴ Comparisons of faces with flowers or meadows are quite common in rhetorical texts.¹⁵ However, Methodios is not content with reproducing old themes. In an unprecedented move, he links each of these colours to a particular aspect of Nicholas' life. The rationale behind these links is not always obvious. Most straightforward is the relation between green and abstention because the faces of fasters are normally sallow.¹⁶ In the case of red and truth one can think of the blood of martyrdom but this interpretation is problematic because Nicholas was not a martyr. Black, the colour of violets, is related to the saint's conduct. Here the comparison may be based on the fact that black symbolises humility.¹⁷ The first element, white and presidency, is even more difficult to understand. Methodios seems to envisage judicial activity but why this should result in a 'whitening' is unclear.¹⁸ The common element may be innocence but this is not more than a guess.

Be that as it may, the basic argument is clear. Nicholas has acquired the colours on his face through the various activities and roles that he performed during

13 On the relationship between light and colour see L. James, 'Color and meaning in Byzantium', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003) 223–233. There James refutes the notion that what counted for Byzantines was not the colours but the drawing of the outlines.

14 Methodios, *Life of Theophanes*, ed. V. V. Latyšev. *Methodii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Vita S. Theophanis Confessoris*, Zapiski rossijkoj akademii nauk, viii. ser. po istoriko-filologičeskomu otdeleniju, 13.4 (Petrograd 1918), chapter 8, p. 6.3–18.

15 Cf. e.g. Libanius, *Progymnasmata*, 12.30.15, ed. R. Foerster, *Libanii opera*, 8 (Leipzig 1915) 126.

16 Cf. e.g. Niketas Stethatos, *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* 124, ed. I. Hausherr, *Un grand mystique byzantin. Vie de Syméon le Nouveau Théologien (949–1022) par Nicéas Stéthatos. Text grec inédit*, *Orientalia Christiana*, 12 (Rome 1928) 176–78.

17 On black as a symbol of humility see e.g. John Chrysostom, *Expositiones in Psalmos*, Migne, PG 55, 280D.

18 There we have the phrase κρίνον δίκην, where the latter word in its more common meaning 'justice' suggests a wordplay based on the similarity between κρίνον and κρίνεiv.

his lifetime. However, it is still baffling because every human being has these colours in his or her face. How can one acquire something that one already has? In order to find an answer we need to consider an aspect that we have so far left aside. Methodios not only speaks about colours but also about the name of the saint. The parallel is evident. As the saint's corpse is hidden in the tomb and his icons can be perceived, so is the name hidden in the minds of the believers but it becomes manifest when it is invoked and more importantly when it is given to individuals. It contains the power of the saint, which is in a way separable from his person because it can sanctify those who bear it.

The importance of this parallel becomes obvious when we turn to a similar passage in Methodios' *Encomium* of Agatha, which equally seems to date to the Second Iconoclasm. There Methodios declares that the saint has reddened her lips and cheeks with the blood of the divine lamb;¹⁹ and then turns his attention to the saint's name:

Agatha, who is good (*agathe*) in name and in reality; Agatha, who manifested the name in reality and showed the reality in the name; Agatha, who persuades everybody to run quickly to her through her name, and who teaches all to run fast (*agan theein*) together with her to the true good (*agathon*), which is God; Agatha, who was marked by that which she was preordained to become, and who became through grace what she was preordained for; Agatha, the subject of her parents' prophecy and the subject of the foreknowledge of God; Agatha, the undeceiving face of those who named her and the attentive appellation of those who call her.²⁰

The parallel with the *Life-cum-Encomium* of Nicholas is obvious. Here, too, Methodios treats face and name in parallel fashion, a point that is highlighted in the last sentence where the two terms appear side by side.²¹ However, this time the function of Agatha's name is explained in much greater detail. Methodios declares that Agatha had lived up to the meaning of her name and that her name had thus become a reflection of her being.

19 Methodios, *Encomium* of Agatha 3, ed. E. Mioni, 'L'encomio di S. Agata di Metodio patriarcha di Costantinopoli,' *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950) 58–93, esp. 78.6–7: Συνειδήσεως στύψει καὶ αἵματος ἀληθινοῦ καὶ θείου ἀμνοῦ, τὰ χεῖλη καὶ παρειὰς καὶ τὴν γλῶτταν ἐξερυθραίνουσα καὶ λαμπρύνουσα.

20 Methodios, *Encomium of Agatha* 4, ed. Mioni, 78.12–26: Ἀγάθη, ἡ ἀγαθὴ τῷ ὀνόματι καὶ τῷ πράγματι, Ἀγάθη, ἡ φαινόμενη ἐν πράγματι ὄνομα καὶ δεικνυμένη ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι πρᾶγμα· Ἀγάθη, ἡ τὸ πρὸς αὐτὴν πάνυ τρέχειν ἐκ τοῦ ὀνόματος πάντας πείθουσα, καὶ τὸ δι' αὐτῆς ἐπὶ τὸ κυρίως ἀγαθόν, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ὁ Θεός, ἄγαν θέειν μεθ' ἑαυτῆς τοὺς ὅλους διδάσκουσα· Ἀγάθη, ἡ σημανθεῖσα ὃ γενέσθαι προῶριστο, καὶ γενομένη ὃ προῶριστο χάριτι· Ἀγάθη, τὸ τῶν γονέων προφήτευμα καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸ προγνώρισμα· Ἀγάθη, τὸ τῶν ὀνομασάντων ἀψευδόρρημον πρόσωπον, καὶ τῶν καλούντων εὐεπάκουστον πρόσρημα.

21 Methodios emphasises the equivalence of word and image also in his *Life of Euthymios of Sardes* 35, ed. J. Gouillard, 'La vie d'Euthyme de Sardes († 831), une oeuvre du patriarche Méthode', *Travaux et Mémoires* 10 (1987) 1–101, esp. 73. There he claims that the Son of God is not only the Word but also the image of the Father. For an interpretation of this passage see G. Dagron, 'L'ombre d'un doute: L'hagiographie en question, VI^e–XI^e siècle', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 46 (1992) 59–68, esp. 67–8.

In a second step he then claims that this had been God's plan all along. Similar statements are often found in Late Antique and Byzantine texts. In the seventh-century *Life* of Theodore of Sykeon, for example, the saint is characterised as 'the one who is truly Theodore, both in name and in reality';²² and in a canon in honour of the martyrs Phile-tairos and his Companions, which most likely dates to the ninth century, we read:

Your appellation was not written into the register of names by human beings but from above by the hand of God who saw before you were in the womb that you possessed the love of companions (*philbetairon*) and prudence both in deed and in counsel, wherefore you led the companions (*betairoi*) to the martyrdom.²³

However, the argument he employs differs radically from the manner in which Nikephoros makes his case. Above all, he focuses on the effect that Agatha's name has on others, an element that is missing from comparable passages. In making this point he is not content with stating that the name Agatha leads those who invoke it to the 'good', but etymologizes *agathon* as *agan thein*, 'running exceedingly fast', so that not only the destination but also the way there is derived from the name.²⁴ The name can fulfil this function because it has been infused with its bearer's essence, rather like a battery that has been charged, and can therefore be detached from the bearer and be used by others. It is evident that this argument is highly contrived. Methodios gives the impression that those who invoke the names of saints were morally improved. Such a scenario bears no relation to actual practice where people called on the saints for quite a different reason: they wanted to be helped in difficult situations.

At this point we need to return to our discussion of the colours of icons. After our analysis of the *Encomium* of Agatha we can see that Methodios has transferred the traditional theme of a saint's 'true name' to the colours of a saint's face. Nicholas had a particular complexion even before he became a saint but it was accidental to him as it is for most human beings and therefore had no impact on others. However, through his saintly activities he then turned the colours of his face into a true manifestation of his

22 George Eleusios, *Life of Theodore of Sykeon* 2, ed. A.-J. Festugière, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéôn*, Subsidia hagiographica 48 (Brussels 1970) 2.15: τὸν ὄντως Θεόδωρον καὶ τῷ ὀνόματι καὶ τῷ πράγματι. Cf. also Methodios, *Life of Theophanes the Confessor* 16, ed. Latyšev, 11.11, 16–17: Γρηγορίῳ ... ὡς γρηγορῶν τὸ ὄμμα τῆς διανοίας καὶ φερωνυμῶν τὴν κλήσιν ταῖς εὐπραγίαις.

23 *Canon XXI*, Ode 9.1, ed. C. Nikas, *Analecta Hymnographica Graeca*, 9: *Canones Maii*, (Rome 1973) 217–18.179–186: οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἢ κλήσις ὀνοματογραφῆθη ἀλλ' ἄνωθεν θεοῦ σοι ἐκ χειρὸς τοῦ πρὸ νηδύος ὀρῶντός σε τὸ φιλέταιρον ἔχειν καὶ φρόνιμον, καὶ πράξει καὶ βουλῇ τῶν ἐταίρων ἠγήσω διὸ πρὸς τὸ μαρτύριον. Theodore of Stoudios, *Letter 7* ed. G. Fatouros, *Theodori Studitae Epistulae*, I, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae. Series Berolinensis, 31 (Berlin 1992), 26.83, calls Empress Irene θεονόματος. Methodios himself makes use of the same motif when he praises Irene in his *Life of Theophanes* 19, ed. Latyšev, 13.27–14.33.

24 See e.g. F. W. Sturz, *Etymologicum Graecae linguae Gudianum* (Leipzig 1818) 611.1: ἀγαθὸν, παρὰ τὸ ἄγαν θέειν ἡμᾶς ἐπ' αὐτό. For another such etymology, see Methodios, *Life of Nicholas* 23, ed. Anrich, 150.16–17: Κάντεῦθεν ἐπαξίως τῆς διαθέσεως συγκληρωθείης τὴν νίκην ἐν μέσῳ τῷ λαῷ σου.

inner being, with the result that they had a morally improving effect on those who saw him. Moreover, being infused with Nicholas' essence the colours can be separated from his actual face and reproduced on icons without losing their potency.

We can conclude that like Patriarch Nikephoros, Methodios offers a proof why gazing at icons is spiritually profitable and thus rebuts Iconoclast criticism that only listening to texts can have such an effect. However, the argument that he employs is of a radically different nature. It is 'ontological' rather than logical, and may therefore well have been regarded as more persuasive by contemporaries.