If we try to define a theological issue in which pagan Neoplatonism and Byzantine Church Fathers are considered to differ unconditionally, irrespective of the degree of Platonic influence they experienced, it would be the issue of the relationship between an image and its prototype. Generally, we can formulate the pagan vision of this relationship as a particular intellectual nature’s mimesis of the deity, which by itself is an intelligible nature. According to this position, the distinctive features of the image (e.g., each material component if we speak of a work of art) become temporal and accidental, and the subject of mimesis loses his entire content: the Intellect appears to be everywhere.¹ This is why in the eleventh century, when the minds of Byzantine intellectuals once again became preoccupied with pagan concepts, the idea of this paradigm gained special significance. Its main trait was the relationship with the mind as a primeval divine substance. If Michael Psellos, when arguing with Maximus the Confessor and John Damascene, simply insisted that the mind was a special dominating substance and not merely part of the soul or its tool, though it is eternally present within the soul,² John Italos taught that the human mind

(1) Cf. e.g. the saying of Plotinus that the soul even in its external appearances produces all its manifestations as through dispersed thoughts when imitating thinking and intellect. Referring to the prototype (ἀρχέτυπον), the soul produces the prototype’s vague likeness (ἁμομοιόμεν εἰκόνα) (Plot. Enn. V.3.7, 25–34; cf. Plot. Enn. V.9.3, 33–37).

(2) According to Maximus the Confessor, the soul has two parts — rational and vital, and the rational one, in turn, is divided into active and contemplative. The contemplative part of the soul is the mind (Max. Myst. 5). John Damascene reproduces this teaching in his Expositio fidei (De fide orthodoxa 26 [II, 12], 48–49). He quotes Galenus’ expression which he learned through Nemesius of Emessa (Nemes. nat. hom. I), that “like an eye in the body the mind is present in the soul.” Disputing this, Psellos says that the mind “is not dynamis of the soul, it is rather a primary and eternal essence, surpassing the soul in power, in beauty and in all other order; it (the Nous) does not belong to the soul but rather fashions in after itself, it does not have its abode” (Mi-
is already divine by its nature, being a participant in the hypostasis of the Intellect, similar to the participation of all individual beings in the hypostasis of the One, and of an individual soul — in the hypostasis of the Soul. Thus Italos following these apparently pagan views, was referring to the Neoplatonic doctrine of ascension from sensual things to the ideal, as he expounded his attitude toward material images.

Although among eleven anathemas of the Synodicon, there is no position which is related to the veneration of icons; the unorthodox character of philosopher John Italos’ ideas concerning sacred icons was detected during his trial — a fact recorded in the materials of the case.

The last point of the Note submitted by Italos for the consideration of the Emperor, contains some statements about icons. This Note is the most important document on this problem, firstly, because it is the

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chaelis Pselli philosophica minora, vol. 2 (Leipzig, 1989) 95). George Karahalios pays special attention to this text and represents it in his brilliant dissertation (G. KARAHALIOS, The Philosophical Trilogy of Michael Psellos: God-Kosmos-Man, diss. (Heidelberg, 1970) 129–130; cf. Γ. ΚΑΡΑΧΑΛΙΟΣ, Η Ανθρωπολογία του ΜΙΧΑΗΛ ΨΕΛΛΟΥ (Andover, 1990) 167–168). However, Karahalios did not notice the polemical element of this saying — indirectly Psellos is disputing with Maximus the Confessor’s anthropology and directly with Symeon the New Theologian’s doctrine of partaking of the light (see e.g. Hymn. 1.29sqq; 12.8–14; 17.66–68; 18.120; 42.201). For the latter author the entire connection to Christ is important, which is contradicted by Psellos’ doctrine of “anthropological emanation,” when the light is received directly only by the mind, while the soul takes it only as a participant in the mind.

(3) See Н. Н. КЕЧАКМАДЗЕ (ред.), ИОАНН ИТАЛ, СОЗИНИЕНИЯ (ТЫЛЫСИ, 1966) 49.

(4) Ibid., 184–185. In the treatise Περί τῆς τριτῆς ὑποστάσεως, Italos mentions certain “οἱ τῶν Ἑλλήνων θεολογῶτατοι” and “οἱ ἔξω σοφοί,” while not accepting and not rejecting their ideas. But in his next work Τρεῖς αἱ ἀνωτάται δοξαὶ περὶ θεοῦ ἀναρχία καὶ πολιορκία καὶ μοναρχία (Ιοάνν Ιταλ, Σοζινενια, 185–188) he exposes the traditional doctrine of emanation as his own. For this reason we are inclined to think that he rather presents his own views than retells those of others in the treatise we referred to as well.
