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**An Introduction into the Popes' Hermeneutics of Art  
The Theology of the Aesthetic Experience of the "Other" in an Image**

This paper aims to show how we must rethink the theological dimension of the image, and reformulate its methodological approach. The paper raises a fundamental, although still neglected, question of how one should formulate the theological, philosophical, anthropological and aesthetic differences between the image in the Western tradition and the "icon", introducing the reader into the writings of the modern popes, in order to show the new vision of a pedagogy of the image as an aesthetic experience. It is hoped that this exercise should clarify the theological dimension of the image, as based on the role of artistic creativity, the subjectivity in the process of the creation, the spiritualization of the aesthetic experience and the dialogical dimension of the image. One last aspect is the heuristic criteria for highlighting the difference between an icon and the occidental image. The dialogical dimension of an image opens up the question of how one should relate to an image, a problem already evident during the Counter Reformation, in which the educational function and the aesthetic experience of the image were discussed. The aesthetic experience of the image is a theological, philosophical and anthropological problem which, in this paper, should be discussed only in the context of the theories of art developed by the modern popes, that leads not only to a new understanding of the image but also announces an hermeneutic approach to art. In particular, Pope Francis' invention of the mystical encounter could be related to the theological and philosophical hermeneutics of art, as an example of the pedagogy of the aesthetic experience of the *alterità* (being different) in an image. This approach reveals three dimensions which belong to one united artistic gesture: the horizontal dimension of the relation and encounter with the other, the interior dimension as an encounter of the other inside of us and the vertical dimension of the encounter with the *other*.<sup>1</sup> The dialogical approach in the relation to the image gives us the possibility to talk about the charity of the image, which is opposed to the descriptive and representative model, in which we give priority to the encounter/relation with the image and so to a hermeneutic approach. At the end, the paper proposes an approach for a new method, which could help one to relate to the image.