

# Jerzy Szymik

---

## "Funkcje sztuki w teologii", Tadeusz Dzidek, Kraków 2013 : [recenzja]

---

Ecumeny and Law 2, 321-326

---

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Tadeusz Dzidek: *Funkcje sztuki w teologii*  
(The Functions of Art in Theology). Wydawnictwo WAM  
Kraków 2013, 170 pp.

What is the place of art in the life of the Church and at the same time in theology? This is a *par excellence* interdisciplinary and — to a large extent — ecumenical question.

How deep does the connection between reason and beauty penetrate into theology, theological epistemology, or into the Christian way of thinking and cognition? And how does it correlate with the Christian *kerygma*? Are the reason and beauty, in fact, dependent on each other, or can they function independently and without any harm to their own and theology's identity? To put it in different words: Are the unbeautiful reasonableness and unreasonable beauty possible in theology and neutral (at least) for the effects of the discipline's cognition. The following is a radical depiction of this matter by Joseph Ratzinger: "A theologian who does not love art, poetry, music and nature can be dangerous. Blindness and deafness toward the beautiful are not incidental: they necessarily are reflected in his theology" (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger with Vittorio Messori: *The Ratzinger Report. An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*. Trans. S. Attanasio, G. Harrison. San Francisco 1985, p. 130).

Theology, which is created with such a stigma (of blindness and deafness to beauty), is — as it follows from the then Cardinal's speech — "barbarian" (*ibid.*) (in the ancient meaning of this term).

\*

Fundamental theology — in many different interdisciplinary configurations — has been for many years the main scientific research line of

Tadeusz Dzidek. It is a leading line of his investigations, readings, lectures and publications. This interdisciplinarity bore fruit in a number of articles, all of which have one aim: to think over and present the Christian doctrine in such a way so as to allow it to bring results in dialogue and evangelization of recipient's present-day reality. Since what is the most interesting thing for the careful reader of Dzidek's publications, for the listener of his symposium speeches, receiver of all kinds of didactic or pastoral activities, is the scientific passion, sensible enthusiasm, curiosity and research bravery which constantly tells him to enter new cognitional areas, especially those where theology and modern times meet, on the verge of which there is the fundamental theology-art relation.

Small in size, this 170-page monograph entitled *Funkcje sztuki w teologii* (The Functions of Art in Theology), published in 2013 in Cracow by WAM, is an example of an exceptional work amongst the Polish contemporary theology achievements. The book consists of 14 chapters and also, valuable in this kind of publications, supplements (bibliography, index of names) and is the 77th number in the "Myśl teologiczna" (Theological Thought) publishing series, which has been published for 20 years now becoming one of the most worthwhile theological serial publications in Poland.

Dzidek, as we find out at the beginning of the book, knows fact-collecting and erudite matters, which are the subject of the work — he discusses them in detail and depth. He writes, tone may say, calmly about matters which are the hottest, ambiguous; his writing is thoroughly dialogical, in the best possible meaning of this word: not avoiding judgment, touching upon difficult subjects, he, however, does not take a stand, nor does he manipulate theology, nor avoid its important, though, arguable matters. He provides the reader with very modern narration by writing in a multifaceted manner, presenting the problem from different perspectives.

We surely need this kind of observation and analysis of theology's struggle with the world and also with art. There is a place for understanding and erudite theology, the one gentle in its deepest trend, supporting the non-theological and artistic search for the Mystery, but also a one perspicacious in the face of all the aberrations of the present world (in the John's meaning of the word). We need theology and art that would know the limits and measures, which are — after all — Truth and Love.

The book, though, is not without flaws. One of them is a kind of uncontrolled randomness and disproportionateness in discussing selected views, presenting books or reviewing authors. For example René Girard's views take approximately 30 pages. Dzidek also devotes excessive attention to Miguel de Unamuno's works. Both works and matters brought up

by the author are unarguably important to the expositions discussed in the book, but Dzidek's report extensiveness in this case shatters the order of his analyses.

My reservations about the crux of the Dzidek's work are awakened by the recognisable, in some places of the dissertation, author's irenic attitude towards the a(nti)theistic and iconoclastic trends in modern art. These are not significant threads of the work, but they influence the theological tone of the book. We are in the year 2013 and — in my opinion — a rough, distinctly put standpoint of orthodox theology, its clearly declared identity in conversation with art, against all appearances, seems dialogically more effective. What are the limits of theological hospitality for art (cf. pp. 52—53)? This is the question that Dzidek bravely brings into the very heart of his contemplation. The obvious answer is love. But love that does not cross the borders protecting it against cheap sentimentalism and approval of second person's sin; love, in its essence, should serve the truth which aims at brotherly wellbeing, not at obtaining the illusion of piece of mind, and does not reach a partial compromise for anyone (at first my neighbour, then me, because our world is common) to be imprisoned by the very thing that destroys.

\*

Therefore, these are the sensitive points: what is common and what is distinct. They all lead to absolutely the most sensitive point: Jesus Christ. For Christianity sees duality in the essence of all religions, philosophies, outlooks, being and lifestyles; harm through the sin, lack of (Christ finally), but also many positives, first and foremost, longing not always consciously for the Christ and some foreknowledge of His mystery and the Event.

Christian way of living in the whole process and in some particular acts of dialogue is, on the one hand, an approval (of truth and good), and on the other, a rebellion and rejection (of idols — their different, sometimes sophisticated forms: protecting oneself from the real God, cultivating harms or devotion to sin). Criticism from the Christian perspective is then an inherent part of honest and deep dialogue, because — as (on 19 April 1999) Cardinal Ratzinger explained to Jarosław Gowin in Cracow (!) — “the dialogue is not a simple acceptance of something different, as it is, but a common intellectual process” (*Dialog jest koniecznością. Kardynał Joseph Ratzinger odpowiada na pytania „Znaku”* [conversations by E. Adamiak, T. Węclawski, K. Tarnowski, G. Chrzanowski, J. Gowin, J. Poniewierski], trans. D. Zańko, „Znak” 51 (1999), nr 11 (534), p. 10); as well as a spiritual one. And very important, from one perspective, neces-

sary in the process of every dialogue, the most important: the unerasable Christo-centrism of Christian position is in no case a contempt for different positions and views. It is, though, a discord for the resignation of looking (common) for truth, an objection to remaining (comfortable?) in “that which has been so far” (J. Ratzinger: *W drodze do Jezusa Chrystusa*. Trans. J. Merecki Kraków 2004, p. 81). It is an appeal to longing for that which is (the) bigger(st), for common truth, for the very God, for this and for that longing inscribed in hearts of all human beings. The beginning of Christianity was no different: from the longing of those Israelites who were not satisfied with tradition as such, but they were looking constantly, looking for something (the) bigger(st) (ibid.).

That is why the dialogue, and the good that comes from it, cannot be replaced or mistaken with the ideology of dialogue. Dialogue is a way of discovering truth, it is the love for your neighbour and the truth: help to your neighbour in uncovering hidden depth of what he/she feels and what he realized in his/her own religious experience, and what things in the meeting with Jesus Christ (that is the definite and full Revelation of God) are subject to be purified, complemented or fulfilled. On the other hand, ideology of dialogue is an understanding and practicing of dialogue in the meaning and shape of being “correct,” the left-liberalism one, drastically different from the one (for example) accepted by the Second Vatican Council. The dialogue is here leveled with relativistic thinking, being subordinate to the ideological principles of the post-Enlightenment egalitarianism, thinking, which puts faith on one and the same level with the conviction of others and consists in exchange of relative, equal ideas and standpoints. The aim here is not the common looking for truth, but only the integration of standpoints and co-operation. The “dialogue” initiated in this manner would be able to replace “mission” and Enlightenment ideology of equality would be able to take the place of reformation: an effort to turn your and your neighbour’s heart to the Truth.

\*

I believe that this kind of apposition to Dzidek’s otherwise excellent book, is necessary. Not to suggest that the author or his work accept the relativistic thinking, but because of the fact that I discuss his work in *Ecumeny and Law* and ecumenical dialogue issues (that include, in my opinion, the shape of science and art’s interdisciplinary dialogue) are fundamental here and it is worth talking about them, also in the context of this good book.

\*

Dzidek's professorial courage calls for admiration: the issue of "function of art in theology" is not obvious at all, for the traditional way of thinking in theology. Conversely, it is innovative in many aspects, among others, in the formal aspect. It is spiritually deep literature. Dzidek writes, for example, about the necessity of crisis on the way of developing faith: "Sometimes it emerges when on our horizon appears someone who becomes more important to us than God" (p. 123). These are theological benefits from reading Unamuno, even though, if the essence of Abrahamic struggle with God is not called here Isaac, but Concha... This kind of remarks and points compels admiration, and there are quite a lot of them. From them I derived the joy of reading.

Dzidek's book is a pioneering one, which is not restricted to Polish-speaking culture. The basic thesis of the dissertation, namely: "Art is an ally of conceptual theology" (p. 156) seems to have been accustomed to theology since the turn of 20th and 21st century. It is obvious that the fault for such a late conceptualization thereof is on the not infrequent "precariousness" of theology, which sometimes mistakes conservatism with humility towards Tradition, but also not without a major fault on contemporary art's side, for which infantile fascination with so-called straightening out tends to be more important than mature service to truth.

The author sees the problems, asks questions, and tries in every case to look into the matter patiently and — as much as it is possible — comprehensively and critically. He presents them, which is characteristic, very succinctly. This is the synthesis, simultaneously hermeneutic, biblical (less) and theological-fundamental (more), allowing for the pastoral point, making the biggest value of the book and proving the correctness of scientific work, which brought Dzidek to writing *Funkcje sztuki w teologii* (The Functions of Art in Theology).

The content of 14 chapters is, as follows: the first chapter is a contemplation on the nature of theology, examined from the perspective of its relations with art, the second one is about the nature of art. In the third one, the author analyses the rules for interpretation of art, in the fourth he discusses the epistemology and symbolical character of art. The chapters are devoted to different forms of art (picture, literature, movie and theatre) and their complex functions cooperating with theology — from taking the reader in the direction of Mystery, to "paradigm crumbling" (*a rebours* theology). The conclusion is pertinent, however — in my opinion — too concise. I would expect here a longer periphrasis or synopsis of theological role of art, in a form of about a ten-page-long article, recapitulating the entirety of exposition.

The book is well edited, editorially clear, friendly, to put it this way, in lecture use. A genuine, friendly and penetrating dialogue with contemporaneity suggested by Dzidek, is a great necessity of the Polish and European theology, not only the fundamental one, and the dissertation should be recognized as a major achievement in this field — big words that in this case I do not hesitate to use.

*Jerzy Szymik*