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Artistic heritage as the "locus theologicus" : a pastoral perspective

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**ARTISTIC HERITAGE AS THE *LOCUS*
THEOLOGICUS – A PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE**

Artistic heritage

The artistic heritage of the Church in Poland is an outcome of past generations' work and reveals the Christian roots of our nation; in a material and spiritual sense, it confirms the identity of a society that cherishes a national and historical ethos. The need to protect and properly use objects of material and non-material culture, both produced and inherited, stems from the need to preserve the unique characteristics of the Polish culture, which is integrally linked to the European and Christian cultural legacy. The artistic heritage of the Church is a distinguishing feature not only of a national culture, but also – and perhaps foremost – a religious culture understood as an expression of spiritual and existential experiences of past and present generations.

This heritage, however, should not remain a past history or a forgotten panopticon – a temple for art connoisseurs only. On the contrary, the artistic heritage faces today, as never before, many tasks to fulfill in the contemporary society. With regard to religious life, the heritage should guarantee a religious development and be a crucial component of a conscious identity and an in-depth Christian formation. This was well understood by the

fathers of the Second Vatican Council, who in the Constitution on the Liturgy pointed out that the history of sacred art should be lectured during theological studies so that students can acquire the skills needed to respect and protect the heritage, which they called “venerable monuments of the Church.”¹

The respect towards artistic heritage has been present in the Church for centuries. It would not be an overstatement to say that thanks to the efforts of the Church many historical objects and works of art (including pre-Christian and non-Christian ones), which would otherwise be destroyed, have survived over the centuries. The concern for heritage has been a subject of numerous papal, conciliar, synodal and episcopal documents. In Poland, the first legal directives concerning the protection of monuments appeared when the resolutions of the Council of Trent were implemented at the Synod of Cracow under the leadership of Bishop Martin Szyszkowski in 1621². The heritage cannot be understood only in terms of historic preservation. The heritage requires conservation, but is not limited to it; the heritage is a dynamic process which requires interaction with contemporary users. The difference between conservation and heritage lies primarily in the kind of social objectives each of them sets to achieve. While the goal of conservation is to preserve artifacts of the past in the best possible condition, the philosophy of heritage focuses on its various contemporary uses. Moreover, if their objectives are defined in this way, heritage resources seem almost limitless and ubiqui-

¹ J. S. Pasierb, *Ochrona zabytków sztuki kościelnej*, Warszawa 2001, s. 9.

² Na synodzie krakowskim 1621 w odniesieniu do malarstwa stwierdzono: „jeśli są jakieś obrazy zniszczone, uszkodzone, zjedzone przez starość, pokryte brudem czy pleśnią winni (proboszczowie) zatroszczyć się o ich odświeżenie, naprawienie, odnowienie kolorów i przywrócenie do pierwotnego stanu i świątliwości”. Tamże, s. 17.

tous (e.g. thanks to the Internet) as opposed to conservation, which is clearly based on specific and limited resources³. As we can see, in this perspective, the artistic heritage can and should become part of the social self-consciousness, and thus, as the *locus theologicus*, enter the domain of pastoral activities and tasks undertaken by pastoral theology.

Unfortunately, priests do not always realize the importance of pastoral instruments they have at hand when they meet with the faithful in a sacred place, especially one which contains monuments of art. Frankly speaking, the importance of these tools is often not appreciated until unauthorized persons do it. Consider all kinds of crimes that are committed on church monuments⁴. The statistics show that art theft is the third criminal offence in terms of profitability in contemporary Poland (after arms and drugs trade)⁵.

We should look at historical and artistic resources available to the Church not only from the negative, but primarily from the positive side as a unique and compelling potential that

³ G. J. Ashworth, *Sfragmentaryzowane dziedzictwo: sfragmentaryzowany instrument sfragmentaryzowanej polityki*, w: *Dziedzictwo kulturowe w XXI wieku. Szanse i wyzwania*, M. A. Murzyn, J. Purchla (red.), Kraków 2007, s. 33.

⁴ Zabytki najbardziej są narażone na kradzieże, akty wandalizmu, niewłaściwe przechowywanie i zabezpieczenie zabytku, zniszczenia na skutek pożarów i powodzi. W celu zapobieżenia tego typu zdarzeniom Policja w Polsce prowadzi szeroką współpracę z instytucjami odpowiedzialnymi za ochronę dziedzictwa narodowego, w tym z podmiotami kościelnymi oraz uczestniczy w kampaniach informacyjnych poświęconych m.in. zasadom właściwego zabezpieczania, przechowywania i rejestracji zabytków. Zob. <http://www.policja.pl/pol/chron-dziedzictwo-naro/16635,Chron-Dziedzictwo-Narodowe.html>; dostęp 13.03.2014.

⁵ <http://www.gazetaprawna.pl/forum/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=49477&-start=0>; dostęp 13.03.2014.

awaits its proper and full realization. The current 2014 year is marked by two important events from the pastoral point of view: the canonization of blessed John Paul II and the 30th anniversary of blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko's martyrdom. It is worth looking at these events not only as strictly liturgical celebrations, but also as opportunities to meet with these great witnesses of God in places that were, and still are, marked by their presence. They are the places associated with important moments in their lives, but also institutions that cultivate the memory of them and are often the places where they lived, worked or served (such as the museum of blessed Pope John Paul II in Wadowice, which is the place where the pope was born and raised, or the museum of blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko in Żoliborz in Warsaw, which is the place where the martyr worked and where his relics were later deposited). At this point, we should also mention the centuries-old tradition of making pilgrimages to the tombs of saints and other holy sites; after all, pilgrimages were characteristic of the medieval Europe. Today, this type of pastoral ministry seems especially accessible thanks to incomparably easier and more convenient means of transport and possibilities to reach places of pilgrimage.

These sites are not only places of worship but also – as already indicated – museums as well as other institutions and places of commemoration (e.g. halls of memory, monuments and plaques). Achievements of civilization not only make it easier to get to these sites and institutions, but also rapidly increase their attractiveness as tourist and pilgrimage destinations. Therefore, it is necessary to definitely break the negative stereotypes of museums and other institutions protecting the heritage as unattractive, boring and rarely visited places. Fortunately, today's museums often no longer resemble old, ordinary and boring institutions, the image of which is often still

present in our memory; on the contrary, they are now equipped with modern exhibition and technical solutions, including electronic and audio – visual media.

The artistic heritage of the Church should not be viewed only in historical and aesthetic terms, but above all with respect to the experience of faith. If this heritage is perceived in purely aesthetic terms, its image becomes falsified. The experience of faith is of fundamental importance to the artistic heritage of the Church and is a place of epiphany, i.e. *locus theologicus*. We contemplate art just as we contemplate God - through experience. Benedict XVI explains the relationship of art and faith in the following way: “From their beginnings, art and religious worship have been closely connected; worshipping God in a human way and, at the same time, preserving God’s dignity was the boldest challenge to the human imagination, arousing the strongest emotions; this challenge became the inspiration for all those immortal works that we call today “monuments”, and that, what is worth noting, stand in front of the soul in order to awaken the dormant memory of our hearts”⁶.

Naturally, works of worship acquire the characteristics of antiquity over time and become relics – artistic and cultural assets stored in collections⁷. In this way, apart from their basic meaning which stems from faith and worship, they acquire

⁶ Benedykt XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), *Przesłanie z okazji konferencji Ochrona zabytków a Kościół*, Monachium 1993, cyt. za: *Dziedzictwo kulturowe w XXI wieku. Szanse i wyzwania*, red. nauk. M. A. Murzyn, J. Purchla, Kraków 2007, s. 158

⁷ Według Krzysztofa Pomiana kolekcją – we współczesnym rozumieniu – jest „każdy zespół przedmiotów naturalnych lub wytworów działalności ludzkiej, utrzymywanych czasowo lub trwale poza obszarem czynności gospodarczych, poddanych szczególnej opiece w miejscu zamkniętym, przystosowanym do tego celu”. Zob. K. Pomian, *Zbieracze i osobliwości. Paryż–Wenecja XVI–XVIII wiek*, przeł. A. Pieńkos, Warszawa 1997, s. 18.

a secondary meaning: historical, aesthetic, emotional, etc., which is expressed, among others things, through the processes of sacralization and musealization⁸.

Contemporary theology gives more and more attention to issues from the field of cultural studies, trying to start a theoretical reflection on faith and culture. This interest seems to be reciprocated, as indicated by joint research initiatives undertaken by cultural theorists and theologians, as well as independent research projects in the field of humanities, which enter the domain of theology.

Building the heritage

Collecting works of art and other valuable objects, and passing them on to next generations, fulfills human religious, cognitive or aesthetic needs⁹. Works of art that were simultaneously works of worship were protected by religious sanction. Since ancient times, stealing items deposited in a temple has been considered a sacrilege because of their unique and sacred character.

As a custodian of the rich artistic heritage, the Church came to realize the importance and value of the goods which she inherited from the pagan world, and started to create, order, use and preserve works of art on her own. Since ancient times, the Christian temple has been a privileged place of artistic heritage as works of art were stored and exhibited there (sometimes a temple itself became a work of art and a monument of history). Sculptures, paintings, stained glass windows, reliquaries,

⁸ Por. „Bollettino Ufficiale Ministero Pubblica Istruzione” 1972, nr 17.

⁹ K. Pomian, *Muzeum wobec sztuki swego czasu*, w: *Fermentum massae mundi. Jackowi Woźniakowskiemu w siedemdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin*, red. N. Cieślińska, P. Rudziński, Warszawa 1990, s. 373.

banners, etc. decorated churches and chapels, and were sometimes exposed to public view; some of them were carried in processions¹⁰. However, since many of them were too valuable to use every day, treasuries were built at churches to deposit expensive items of equipment and worship¹¹. As a result of various turmoils, natural disasters, barbarian invasions and iconoclasms, which stripped thousands of temples of the most valuable works, the Church not only took care of valuable objects collected in museums¹², archives¹³ and libraries¹⁴ built for that

¹⁰ M. Borusiewicz, *Nauka czy rozrywka? Nowa muzeologia w europejskich definicjach muzeum*, Kraków 2012, s. 14.

¹¹ Od początków średniowiecza główny trzon zbiorów skarbców kościelnych stanowiły paramenty liturgiczne, relikwiarze (fundacja świątyni wymagała nie tylko uposażenia materialnego, ale również kultowego: przede wszystkim relikwii, ponieważ relikwie uświęcają miejsce, gdzie się znajdują, i ludzi, którzy sprawują kult) oraz liczne precjoza. Zob. Sacra Congregazione del Concilio, *Disposizioni per la custodia e la conservazione degli oggetti di storia ed arte sacra in Italia*, s. 352–355; Legge 22.9.1969, n. 1080, „Gazzetta Ufficiale” 12.10.1969, nr 250.

¹² Por. Sacra Congregazione per il Clero, Lettera circolare: *La cura del patrimonio storico-artistico della Chiesa ai presidenti delle conferenze episcopali*, 11.04.1971. s. 358–361; Costituzione apostolica *Pastor bonus*, nr 100–102; *Immagine del museo diocesano*, Atti del convegno, a cura di G. Fallani, Roma 27–29 aprile 1981, Molfetta, Messina 1982; Pontificia Commissione per l’Arte Sacra in Italia, *Lettera ai vescovi d’Italia*, 20.11.1989, nr 118/87/42,3; Legge 22.09.1960, nr 1080, *Norme concernenti i musei non statali*.

¹³ Por. *Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego*, kan. 486–491; kan. 535 par. 4; Pontificia Commissione per la Conservazione del Patrimonio Artistico e Storico della Chiesa, *Lettera ai vescovi d’Italia*, 13 giugno 1990, nr 98/30/3; Accordi concordatari 18 febbraio 1984, art. 12 nr 1, 3; *Guida degli archivi diocesani d’Italia*, a cura di V. Monachino, E. Boaga, L. Osbat, S. Palese, vol. I, *Archivia Ecclesiae*, anni 32–33 (1989–1990).

¹⁴ Por. *Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego*, kan. 535 par. 5; Conferenza Episcopale Italiana, *Norme per la tutela e Conservazione del Patrimonio Stori-*

purpose, but also elaborated the doctrine for the protection of sacred images¹⁵. Iconoclasm, for example, resulted in firm doctrinal and jurisdictional decisions leading to anathemas¹⁶.

The conservation of the heritage on a broader scale started already at the end of antiquity due to the need to prevent the destruction of pagan objects. As it turned out, the simplest and most effective method was to give them a new purpose, to use the pagan architecture so that it would comply with the Christian religion¹⁷. Numerous Roman monuments (such as the

co-Artistico della Chiesa in Italia (14 giugno 1974), s. 51–64; *Annuario delle Biblioteche Ecclesiastiche Italiane*, 1990, a cura di A. Ornella, S. Bigaton, P. Figini, Milano 1990; *Accordo di revisione concordataria*, 18.02.1984, art. 12, nr 1, 3.

¹⁵ Trzeba w tym miejscu przypomnieć podstawową rację obecności dzieł sztuki w przestrzeni kultowej, odwołując się do definicji świętego obrazu, jaką pozostawił II sobór nicejski (787): „Im częściej bowiem (wierni) spoglądają na ich obrazowe przedstawienie, tym bardziej także zachęcają do wspominania i umiłowania pierwowzorów, do oddawania im czci i pokłonu, nie do prawdziwej adoracji według naszej wiary, która należy się tylko Bożej Naturze, a w który to sposób wizerunkowi drogiego i ożywającego Krzyża, świętym Ewangeliom i pozostałym poświęconym Bogu świętym przedmiotom przynosi się na ich cześć kadzidło i światła, jak to było pobożnym zwyczajem przodków: „Cześć bowiem obrazu przechodzi na pierwowzór” (Bazyli Wielki, *O Duchu Świętym*, 18, 45: *Patrologiagracea* 32, 149 C), „a kto czci obraz, czci w nim hipostazę przedstawionego”. Zob. II sobór nicejski, 787, Definicja o świętych obrazach, w: *Breviarium Fidei*, dz. cyt., nr 207, s. 118–119.

¹⁶ „Jeśli ktoś nie dopuszcza objaśnień Ewangelii z pomocą obrazów, ten niech będzie obłożony anatamą. Jeśli ktoś nie pozdrawia tych obrazów, które odnoszą się do imienia Pana i jego świętych, ten niech będzie obłożony anatamą”. Zob. II sobór nicejski, 787, Definicja o świętych obrazach, w: *Breviarium Fidei. Wybór doktrynalnych wypowiedzi Kościoła*, red. I. Bokwa, Poznań 2007, nr 209, s. 120.

¹⁷ W roku 609 uratowano rzymski Panteon, adaptując go na kościół Matki Boskiej Królowej Męczenników; z kolei budynek kurii w tym sa-

Colosseum, the Pantheon) survived because they were adapted to serve Christian purposes, especially by receiving a sacred function¹⁸. In this way, the Church became the precursor of a principle that is very important from the point of view of heritage protection (conservation theories of Riegel and Frodl), namely the principle of protecting monuments by assigning a utility function to them¹⁹.

Since the ancient civilization crisis, the Church has assumed the role of a patron and conservator of the most important works of culture - works of faith and art (paintings, sculptures, architecture, literature, etc.) - which satisfied her religious and cultural needs, and which now make up the priceless heritage of past centuries²⁰. These works have never been something external to faith and worship; on the contrary, they constituted their essential part. Religious art and church cultural goods are the fruit of faith and culture, a result of the way and form in which a society functions, they are a testimony of man's material and spiritual heritage understood as a legacy that is accumulated, preserved, and passed on from generation to genera-

mym wieku został zamieniony na kościół św. Andrzeja, a świątynia Fortuna Virilis – na kościół św. Marii Egipcjanki.

¹⁸ J. S. Pasierb, *Ochrona...*, dz. cyt., s. 13.

¹⁹ W roku 1903 Alois Riegl, profesor historii sztuki i generalny konserwator zabytków Austrii opublikował książkę *Der moderne Denkmalkultus, sein Wesen, seine Entstehung*, w której rozróżnił zabytki sztuki i zabytki historii. Tworząc teorię zabytku, oparł ją na klasyfikacji wartości i wyróżnił wartość historyczną, artystyczną i dawności (*Alterswert*). Zmodyfikowaną wersję „systemu Riegla” stworzył inny przedstawiciel szkoły wiedeńskiej, Walter Frodl. Według Frodla należy wyróżnić trzy podstawowe wartości zabytku: historyczną, artystyczną i użytkową.

²⁰ J. Pasierb, *Dominus Conservator Ecclesiae. Zagadnienie konserwacji dzieł sztuki w historii Kościoła*, w: *Ars sacra et restauratio*, red. J. Kowalczyk, Warszawa 1992, s. 9-15.

tion. Thus, works of art become part of the heritage along with other ways and outcomes of human life: customs, worship, social institutions, principles of social coexistence, education, charity, code of conduct, criteria of aesthetic and moral judgments which determine the norms of acceptable behaviour within a community. The heritage is a result of an interaction between faith and culture, and it needs to be protected in order to accumulate culture and strengthen faith; the heritage is a result of man's work, it serves him and builds his consciousness and identity in relation to God. With respect to man himself - as blessed John Paul II writes – the heritage is “an act by which man reaches his critical self-awareness”²¹.

With the increase in public awareness and improvement of broadly understood education allowing to appreciate the unique character of the heritage, in addition to the primary religious sanction, the church and state legislation on the conservation of monuments began to appear, and specialized institutions for their protection were created. Currently, these issues are regulated by the Code of Canon Law, guidelines of some of the congregations of the Apostolic See and regulations of episcopal conferences²². In light of the civilization changes taking place nowadays, the quickly expanding theories of conservation, historic sites and museums, and above all, rapid advances in technology and techniques to protect the heritage have, unfortunately, greatly outdistanced the reflection on this subject undertaken by the Church in Poland. In a few years'

²¹ Jan Paweł II, *Wiara i kultura. Dokumenty, przemówienia, homilie*, wybór tekstów i oprac. red. M. Radwan, S. Wylęzek, T. Gorzkula, Rzym-Lublin 1988, dz. cyt., s. 317.

²² Por. E. Przekop, *Kościelna ochrona zabytków i dóbr kultury według Kodeksu Prawa Kanonicznego Jana Pawła II*, „Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne” 1987, t. 54, s. 30-40.

time, the instruction of the Polish Episcopate on the protection of historic sites and directions of development of sacred art will have been in use for fifty years (1966)²³. Not much younger is the instruction of the Episcopal Commission for Ecclesiastical Art devoted to the preservation and protection of sacred art (1970)²⁴. In practice, the protection of the heritage does not seem any better as church pastors are insufficiently aware of the importance of the cultural heritage at their disposal and they have scant knowledge of legal and financial tools necessary to perform complex restoration.

Accepting the artistic heritage

It seems that the Church, as a patron of art and creator of Europe's oldest museum collections in the 20th century, has lost enthusiasm and motivation for collecting, creating and preserving art; the Church herself does not fully believe in the value of the heritage that she possesses and that she used effectively in evangelization and pastoral activity for centuries. This is often the case at the basic level of the Church's hierarchy - at the level of the parish – especially in Western Europe, where churches stopped to manifest popular religiosity traditionally associated with iconic images, feretories, banners, reliquaries, etc. Just as historic reliquaries are considered part of the artistic heritage, and not objects of worship, so the artistic heritage is treated not as a tool in the development and transfer of the kerygma of faith, but as an obstacle and a symbol of “anachro-

²³ <http://www.kkbids.episkopat.pl/?id=176#id=188>. (dostęp: 1.10.2013); dostęp 13.03.2014.

²⁴ <http://www.kkbids.episkopat.pl/?id=176#id=189>; dostęp 13.03.2014.

nistic historical and cultural domination”. If suitable buyers appeared, many of the “modern” pastors would probably get rid of the part of the heritage ... In this way, the renewing Church, unable to enjoy the artistic heritage, would become just as bitter and desolate as the reformed Protestant churches that during the 16th century Reformation deprived themselves of most of the heritage.

The problem with the acceptance of the heritage lies heavily in the fact that churches are no longer aware for whom works of art were brought into being and whom they are to serve. Undoubtedly, works of worship and other works found in temples were created for man but first and foremost for God. If one does not understand it, it’s only one step away to McDonaldization and desecration of the heritage. Jean Clair, a former director of the Picasso Museum in Paris, makes the following conclusion: “Christians who are searching for their roots, trying to return to their origins – even if they are no longer believers or religious people - find only a devastated land, shaky dogma, homilies which fearfully avoid words such as ‘mystery’ or ‘sacred’, shy clergy, shreds of liturgy, moralizing community, prayers uttered in a pitiful language, hackneyed Gregorian chants and finally images that have lost their value and importance in museums. The term ‘secularism’ will be a small consolation to them”²⁵. In recent decades, the Catholic liturgy has undergone a shift in the worship dimension: from *ad Deum* to *ad populum*, and consequently the vertical dimension has been devalued or even negated, while the horizontal dimension has taken its place. Today, many Christian communities seek to ensure that temples to a larger extent serve the faithful;

²⁵ J. Clair, *Kryzys muzeów. Globalizacja kultury*, przeł. J. M. Kłoczowski, Gdańsk 2009, s. 17.

in other words, that they can amaze, delight, or entertain them, sometimes requiring no commitment on the part of the faithful. In fact, such an attitude diminishes the role of temples to purely utilitarian purposes. Searching and forming her own identity without historical continuity and in isolation from the chief goal, which is to serve God, makes the identity of the Church empty and distorted, and the artistic heritage unnecessary. Although the temple becomes a comfortable and friendly community house and a house of prayer in consequence of such an approach, is it still the holy house of God?

The category of *locus theologicus*

Searching for the *locus theologicus* in the artistic heritage of the Church is a touchstone of a new approach to methods and tasks of theology, including pastoral theology. Today, theology encompasses a lot of heterogeneous activities and scientific reflections; contemporary theology opens its doors to researchers from various fields of humanities and social sciences.

Naturally, when trying to develop theology through art and artistic heritage, it is essential to take into account a given hermeneutics, as a proper interpretation of works of art from a theological perspective must remain a central issue of this way of practising theology²⁶.

It should be noted that since the early 60s of the 20th century the key principles of modernism, such as the belief in progress,

²⁶ D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, London, 1981, s. 67-68; M. P. Gallagher, *Post-Modernity: Friend or Foe?*, w: *Faith and Culture in the Irish Context*, red. E. G. Cassidy, Dublin, 1996, s. 74-75.

the power of reason, the confidence in meta-narrative based on the attitudes rooted in the Enlightenment, i.e. rationalism, liberalism and the already mentioned idea of progress, are more and more often called into question when it comes to the modernist affirmation of alienated, meaningless, atomized and divided material of human existence²⁷. A complete, Christian understanding of theology involves both the systematic work on the sources of revelation, intellectual reflection on the revealed mystery of God and the doctrines derived from it, as well as other forms of expression of this mystery²⁸.

Church architecture and religious painting are naturally connected with faith and with the art of faith. The Eastern theology has always claimed that prayer – especially liturgical prayer – plays an important role in the interpretation of Christian faith, according to the axiom *Lex orandi – Lex credendi* (literally, “the law of praying is the law of believing”). If we accept this rule, we must immediately add *Lex pingendi - Lex orandi*: the law of painting is the law of praying, and if so, the law of believing itself. The sacred picture teaches us faith and is a testimony of faith.

Why is there such a big distance today between sceptical citizens of the Western world and the Eastern worshipers of icons, recognizing images of saints as an essential part of their Christian identity? The differences between the art of the Eastern and Western Church began to increase during the

²⁷ M. P. Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith-and-Culture*, London, 1997, s. 88-90.

²⁸ T. Węclawski, *Metodologia teologii*, „Nauka” (2004) nr 3, s. 102. Sam Kościół to uwzględnia w swojej oficjalnej doktrynie, gdy do grona doktorów Kościoła, a więc osobistości, które ze świętością życia połączyły mądrość intelektualną, zalicza na przykład św. Teresę z Lisieux, czy nawet św. Katarzynę ze Sieny, które nigdy profesjonalnie nie zajmowały się teologią.

Gothic period and Renaissance, especially in terms of visual arts and architecture. The tendency to anthropomorphize God's image, increasing roughly since the 12th century, was accompanied by a growing literalism of depictions (drama, naturalism). The Western fictionalized biography of Jesus began to replace the Eastern inspired vision of the inhabitants of heaven – the citizens of the Church Triumphant. By gradually losing its epiphanic power, the art in the West started to become a story of the incarnation of the Word of God and the lives of saints; in other words, it began to turn into a painted “illustration of religiosity”.

Discussing the *locus theologicus* in the artistic heritage of the Church, we must go back to the times of the undivided Church and the theological reflection on art, for instance the theology of icons, developed centuries ago in the Christian East. An extensive explanation of the theology of icons can be found in the works of P. Evdokimov, W. Łoski and L. Uspieński²⁹, among others. According to these theologians, the tradition binding faith and art in an existential diptych has come full circle, starting with the writings of Dionysius the Pseudo – Areopagite, who first developed the theory of image and symbol and gave the image the status of an intermediary in the contemplation of the invisible and uncreated³⁰. God creates and acts with the help of his uncreated energies that permeate everything that exists and keep everything in existence³¹. The foundations of the theology of icons laid by Dionysius include the key category of beauty: every human being bears the re-

²⁹ L. Uspieński, *Teologia ikony*, przeł. M. Żurowska, Poznań 1993.

³⁰ *Patrologia Graeca (Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca)* red. Jacques Paul Migne, 585 B.

³¹ W. Łoski, *Teologia mistyczna Kościoła Wschodniego*, przeł. M. Sczaniecka, Warszawa 1989, s. 64-65.

flection of God's beauty but this beauty is not like the beauty of God (apophatic theology). Still, this beauty can be a sufficient tool for man to get to know God³². The beauty of God, which is invisible, becomes visible due to the psycho-emotional character of the human nature. Teodor Studyta argued that although the material image of God (a picture) is not identical with its transcendental primary image, it is identical with its hypostasis and name³³. According to the theology of icons, iconic images are epistemological; they do not merely reflect, but present the truth with the help of appropriate images, signs and symbols³⁴. In this perspective, it is worth noting that the Second Council of Nicaea, which was crucial to the theology of icons, was the first council to have raised pastoral problems on such a scale while dealing with other dogmatic issues to a lesser extent, which did not happen before or after the council³⁵. The experience of faith, which is similar to an aesthetic experience, is an important component of true faith, but also an equally important element of the methodology of Catholic theology, and should therefore be considered as a proper form of theological cognition, i.e. *locus theologicus*.

Although the Eastern doctrine of icons has never been fully accepted in the Catholic tradition, it has never been rejected in pastoral practice as well. According to this tradition, the holy

³² Por. W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia estetyki*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, 1962, t. 2, 39, 43.

³³ P. Evdokimov, *Sztuka ikony. Teologia piękna*, przeł. M. Żurowska, Warszawa 1999, s. 178.

³⁴ W. W. Byczkow, *Iz istorii wizantijskoj estietiki*, „Wizantijskij Wriemiennik” 1976, t. 37, s. 173.

³⁵ M.-F. Auzépy, *Manifestations de la propaganda en faveur de l'orthodoxe*, w: *Byzantium in the Ninth Century: Dead or Alive. Papers from the Thirtieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Birmingham 1996, s. 87

picture leads to an encounter between man and God incarnate, who penetrates the believer and fills him with grace. The holy picture is neither a simple illustration nor decoration: it is a symbol and representation of the mystery of Incarnation that reveals to the human eye the spiritual message emerging from the Word addressed to the ears and heart of man. The picture as a medium of a certain form and meaning belongs to the symbolic culture and has specific properties and functions. In addition to its aesthetic function, it can perform other roles, which are important from a pastoral perspective, e.g. educational, cognitive, utilitarian or worship roles³⁶. The picture (not only a religious one) may have a cathartic character, the power to purify through individual experience sublimated to the level of higher values, to the transcendentals: beauty, goodness and truth. In religious terminology, it means moving the values of the *profane* to the domain of the *sacred*³⁷.

Paul Evdokimov discussed the relation of art and the experience of faith by referring to the so-called “theology of presence”. He wrote that every purely aesthetic piece of art is opened by emotions and feelings, like a medieval triptych, whose wings are the artist and the recipient. According to the Russian thinker, the whole experience is contained in a triangle of aesthetic immanentism. However, as he noted, there are works filled with transcendental elements that break this closed triangle, that trigger not only an aesthetic sense and emotions, but also a mystical sense – *mysterium tremendum* – and thus they

³⁶ Por. D. Jankowski, *Podmiotowe uczestnictwo w sztuce a kreowanie tożsamości osobowej jednostki*, w: *Sztuka i wychowanie. Współczesne problemy edukacji estetycznej*, Warszawa 2010, s. 149.

³⁷ T. Boruta, *Figur Racje*, Kielce 2009, s. 52.

become unique theological places³⁸. A contemporary Western theologian, Johann Baptist Metz, a student of Karl Rahner, stresses that the most important achievements in theology and the history of the Church derive from such a theology in which the biography, fantasy, accumulated experience, conversions, visions and prayers are inseparably linked with the theological system³⁹. The theology of presence in a way stands in agreement with the metaphysics of presence, which was proposed by Jacques Derrida, Peter Eisenman and Daniel Libeskind, and which became the main subject of deconstructivist philosophy in architecture theory. Its main thesis is the view that architecture can be a language able to communicate meaning and able to be a subject of analysis in linguistic philosophy⁴⁰. The dialectic of presence and absence, or solid and void, appears in many of Eisenman's projects. Both Derrida and Eisenman argued that a *sui generis locus*, a place of presence, is architecture, and the same dialectic of presence and absence is found in constructivism and deconstructivism.

Folk religiosity based on a zealous faith authenticates religious paintings from a theological point of view and assigns a pastoral role to them, especially the religiosity that so often makes use of sacred images. In contemporary theology and the official teaching of the Catholic Church, there are more and more references to experiencing faith consciously and genuinely, as a kind of existential experience. A German theologian, professor of fundamental theology, Johann Baptist Metz,

³⁸ P. Evdokimov, *Sztuka ikony. Teologia piękna*, przeł. M. Żurowska, Warszawa 2003, s. 157.

³⁹ J. B. Metz, *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft: studien zu einer praktischen Fundamentaltheologie*, wyd. 4 red. (Mainz 1984), s. 196-197.

⁴⁰ J. S. Curl, *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture*, Oxford 2006, s. 880.

notices the lack of reflection on this kind of experience in contemporary theology; he states that Catholic theology to a large extent is characterized by “the division between the theological system and religious experience”⁴¹. This is a common problem of theology, which often escapes from the basic experience of faith in religious life when building more or less complex syntheses. On the eve of the new millennium, blessed John Paul II wrote that a true Christian religion is the religion of “dwelling in the inmost life of God” because “the Holy Spirit, who searches the depths of God, leads us, all mankind, into these depths by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ”⁴². The Christian life is not something abstract, detached from the world and its problems; on the contrary, it is grounded in reality and experience. In the introduction to the last, fourth part of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (after the discussion of the doctrinal content of the Christian Creed and then the principles of the Church’s liturgy and the basis of morality), we can read that the mystery of the Christian faith “requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God”⁴³. The experience of faith involves worship and spiritual expressions on an individual or community level. These expressions can take various forms of piety, but their common feature is a “thirst for God” and “an acute awareness of profound attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence”⁴⁴.

⁴¹ J. B. Metz, *Glaube...*, dz. cyt., s. 196-197.

⁴² Jan Paweł II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, nr 8.

⁴³ *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, Poznań (*Pallotinum*) 1994, nr 2558.

⁴⁴ Por. Congregazione per il Culto Divino e la Disciplina dei Sacramenti (Kongregacja ds. Kultu Bożego i Dyscypliny Sakramentów), *Direttorio*

Outlooks

Searching for meaning and truth in theology based on and referring to artistic culture and symbolic meanings does not seem to be fruitless, even in the perspective of the contemporary culture and pastoral practice, as long as this culture focuses on the experience of faith and the existential experience of man. Church architecture, sculptures, religious paintings, handicraft and other components of the heritage played, and continue to play, an important spiritual role in Christian life and worship. Hans Sedlmayr notes: “If it is true that there are sudden conversions, the reasons for which a man decided to rise above the finite though it was the last thing he was thinking about, (...) then nothing else can help this miracle come about than a view of great works of art”⁴⁵. And then he adds: “the whole faith in God is religious as long as it is an awareness of God’s infinity”⁴⁶. Wonderful paintings and sculptures that are objects of worship and votive offerings hung as an expression of gratitude for received graces are the proof of how much the experience of faith is connected with the artistic heritage. David Freedberg accurately described the apotropaic role of saints’ images⁴⁷, and Hans Belting, in an anthropological perspective, united the creation of images with the drama of dying, and with man’s denial of

su pietà popolare e liturgia: Principi e orientamenti, Vaticano 2002, nr 9. Tekst Kongregacji przytacza słowa Pawła VI z *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 48.

⁴⁵ H. Sedlmayr, *Muzeum*, w: *Muzeum sztuki*, dz. cyt., s. 48.

⁴⁶ Tamże.

⁴⁷ D. Freedberg, *Potęga wizerunków: studia z historii i teorii oddziaływania*, przeł. E. Klekot, Kraków 2005. Autor dowodzi między innymi, że z gruntu błędne jest mówienie o wizerunkach i – szerzej – całej sztuce bez kontekstu antropologicznego, zwłaszcza bez odniesienia do siły i różnorodności reakcji człowieka na obrazy, reakcji, jakie wymuszają na ludziach wizerunki.

death⁴⁸. Belting's thesis circles around the idea of linking the image with the body and medium, which allows to position visibility in the system of meaningful relations. The image belongs simultaneously to culture (which allows to create meanings and refers to an anthropological dimension) and to the material world. Freedberg, in turn, describes the important role *effigies* played in most of the crucial moments in people's lives, how they were part of the rites of passage and how they accompanied the dying man and executions (in the Middle Ages convicts were given *tavoletta* to kiss at the time of their execution, i.e. images depicting the Passion of Christ); *immagini infamanti* – "images of shame" – were also known, i.e. substitutes of people sentenced to death, who could not be killed. In either case, the image was the representation of a particular person. Bodies depicted on images retained, in a sense, the power of living bodies.

Objects collected in museums and galleries (e.g. votive offerings, trophies, gifts, relics) have a common function: they mediate between us and previous generations, between the visible and the invisible. It seems that François Dagognet was right by claiming that the great world of the artistic heritage often tells us more about the Spirit than the Spirit itself⁴⁹. Collections and museums are there to make invisible ideas and concepts visible.

The boundaries between the visible and invisible should certainly not be ignored by theology and pastoral practice, which, after all, discovered their true meaning throughout centuries. The artistic heritage is entitled to be part of the culture which appreciates human values that are centered on God the

⁴⁸ H. Belting, *Antropologia obrazu*, przeł. M. Bryl, Kraków 2007.

⁴⁹ J. Clair, *Kryzys...*, dz. cyt., s. 43.

Creator and that are dignified in Christ⁵⁰. From the perspective of modern theology (e.g. theological anthropology), the artistic heritage can, and should, be discussed in terms of values and content rooted in the history of salvation; through these values, man, who was created in God's image and likeness, reveals the richness of his personality and sets ground for its development⁵¹. From this point of view, it seems important that various theological disciplines (such as the history of sacred art, church history, the theology of culture, the theology of image, philosophical anthropology and personalism) analyze works of art as products of human hands (the result of artistic creation) and testimonies that God put man at the center of the created world and gave him the keys to guard his heritage⁵². Works of art inspired by the sacred history – regardless of whether they are found in a temple or museum – can be interpreted correctly only if they are understood as a reflection of the unfathomable mystery which engulfs and inhabits the world⁵³. A brilliant intuition of St. Augustine is worth noting at this point; in his writings, he associated culture with worship, the artistic heritage with the tradition of the Church, the feeling of Divinity with beauty: “I replied to all these things which stand around the door of my flesh: ‘You have told me about my God, that you are not he. Tell me something about him.’ And with a loud voice they all cried out, ‘He made us.’ My question had come from my observation of them, and their reply came from their beauty of order”⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Por. Jan Paweł II, *Wiara i kultura...*, dz. cyt., s. 15–16.

⁵¹ Por. Sobór Watykański II, Konstytucja *Gaudium et spes*, nr 12.

⁵² „Wprowadziłeś ich i osadziłeś na górze swego dziedzictwa” (Wj 15, 17).

⁵³ Tamże.

⁵⁴ Św. Augustyn, *Wyznania*, ks. X, r. 6, przeł. Z. Kubiak, Kraków 1996, s. 266.

St. Augustine's words prove that Christian artistic heritage should always be considered from two points of view united in pastoral theology: faith, which gives rise to various forms of worship, and culture, which gives faith a specific earthly character. To the Christian, faith is a light which enlightens his work and responsibilities, as well as defines his horizons of life⁵⁵. Faith affects man and works he creates, which, in turn, constitute his culture by shaping a "general way in which people live"⁵⁶. The light that comes from the Christian faith enlightens people's lives by giving them a sense of truth and enduring hope - as the Pope writes in the encyclical *Lumen fidei*. With the help of genius artists, the rich artistic heritage of the Church turns into "stained glass", i.e., paintings, sculptures, architecture, music, poetry, which, in the language of art, express the deepest mystery of "the Word that made flesh"⁵⁷.

Summary

The article discusses the artistic heritage of the Church as the *locus theologicus* in the context of current pastoral events. The artistic heritage needs conservation, but is not limited to it. As demonstrated by experiences of many countries, the heritage can play attractive cognitive, educational and utilitarian roles. Having that in mind, a new programme of pastoral action should be created that will not limit the artistic heritage to its worship function, as it is the case now, but will recognize its

⁵⁵ Jan Paweł II, *Wiara i kultura...*, dz. cyt., s. 20.

⁵⁶ R. Williams, *Keywords. A vocabulary of culture and society*, Oxford 1983, s. 87.

⁵⁷ Sobór Watykański II, Konstytucja *Gaudium et spes*, nr 5.

pastoral, and even evangelistic function as well. The artistic heritage of the Church “humbly” waits to be properly and efficiently used in pastoral activity, as it contains a great potential which has not yet been fully appreciated and used in the right way.