

BEAUTY OF VISUAL ART AS A PATHWAY TOWARDS GOD

Abstract

Beauty and art are supposed to help a human being to open his/her deeper sight and to interpret the world and his life by pointing to the depth of his/her existence. Consequently, looking for the sense of life, and slowly responding to this sense one becomes able to find something beyond visible signs. The author of this article seeks to answer the questions: Can beauty be helpful to discover God and fulfil the aims and tasks of Religious Educations? Do the symbols and images call for a new reception? Is Beauty the gate or pathway for spiritual experience for a human being living in 21st Century in the postmodern context? What is the relationship between faith (understood as an existential experience, cultural fact, personal experience and the point of reference for a community) and beauty? What type of pedagogy, language and ways do we need to use to present God to contemporary human beings?

Key words: *Theology of beauty, visual art, meaning of life, Religious Education.*

Introduction

In his *Letter to Artists* Pope John Paul II describes the dynamic nature of beauty starting with the quote of Polish poet: “Cyprian Norwid, wrote that *beauty is to enthuse us for work, and work is to raise us up*. The theme of beauty is decisive for a discourse on art. It was already present when I stressed God’s delighted gaze upon creation. In perceiving that all he had created was good, God saw that it was beautiful as well. The link between good and beautiful stirs fruitful reflection. In a certain sense, beauty is the visible form of the good, just as the good is the metaphysical condition of beauty. This was well understood by the Greeks who, by fusing the two concepts, coined a term which embraces both: *kalokagathía*, or beauty-goodness. On this point Plato writes: *The power of the Good has taken refuge in the nature of the Beautiful*. It is in living and acting that man establishes his relationship with being, with the truth and with the good. The artist has a special relationship to beauty. In a very true sense

it can be said that beauty is the vocation bestowed on him by the Creator in the gift of “artistic talent”. And, certainly, this too is a talent which ought to be made to bear fruit, in keeping with the sense of the Gospel parable of the talents (cf. Mt 25:14-30)” (*Letter to Artists*, 3). This sentence written by Norwid, very well known in Poland, is a good starting point to reflect on beauty and faith. If someone is able to see beauty he is probably able to see more, to see Someone, who is behind the beauty. This is the essential point that we touch upon: that art is supposed to help a human being to open his/her deeper sight and to interpret the world and his life by pointing to the depth of his/her existence. Thanks to art, every person is encouraged to search for hope, love and the sense of life. Consequently, looking for the sense of life, and slowly responding to this sense one becomes able to find the invisible God. A human being needs not only the word, but also visible signs and symbols¹. John Paul II understood very well that in today’s rapidly changing society a person needs a new epiphany and new ways to the mystery of God.

This seems especially important in the 21st Century in the European and North American context, where we experience extensive secularization and a disconnection of many people from their religious tradition (except Islam). Many people still call themselves Christian, but they remain rather nominal Christians, or they believe without belonging to any Christian denomination². This raises many questions: how can a child, growing up in the secularised, consumer, postmodern reality, fascinated with contemporary culture, communication technology and a multitude of choices discover the invisible God? In what way can a youngster be able to see and follow Someone who is so strongly eliminated from the mainstream media? How an adult can see the value of being acquainted with God? What is the relationship between faith (understood as an existential experience, cultural fact, personal experience and the point of reference for a community) and beauty? What type of pedagogy, language and ways do we need to use to present God to contemporary human beings? All these questions need us to respond with in-depth answers.

We also have to remember that various kinds of Religious education, Religion studies, Spiritual or Moral education dimensions in the school curriculum have evolved so much that they are concentrating more on presenting knowledge than supporting faith. They have developed from the notion of educating young people in world religions, cultures, and tra-

¹ Cf. W. Kawecki, *Theology of Beauty. Looking for locus theologicus in contemporary culture*, Poznań, 2013, p. 43.

² Cf. G. Rossiter, *Understanding the changing landscape of contemporary spirituality: A useful starting point for reviewing Catholic school religious education*, *The Person and the Challenges*, 3 (2013) 1, p. 157-179.

ditions with respect to spiritual and moral dimensions to life³. With these developments taken into account, RE has still tended to remain relatively traditional covering the descriptions of religions, even though there have been some approaches that have focused more on personal development⁴.

Through the lens of the visual art, it is possible to interpret the psychological and sociological dynamics of people's engagement with post-modern culture. Christianity has been reflected in art, artefacts, rituals and religious practices. In an interesting way, the approach is educative both with respect to traditional religious spirituality as well as to contemporary, eclectic, individualistic, subjective spirituality⁵.

Taking into consideration the present context we may ask the next questions: can beauty be helpful to discover God and fulfil the aims and tasks of Religious educations? Do the symbols and images, which were painted on walls and ceilings in the Christian catacombs, in the first centuries, call for a new reception? Are they the only decoration of burial chambers, simply images depicting stories from the Bible or from the life of Christians; or do they express the faith of ancient Christians, passing on the message to contemporary Christians? The questions raised above will now be explored through the teaching of the Church, Tradition and human experiences on our journey with God.

Being a lay woman, catechist, teacher trainer, Pastoral Theologian and just a person with a special interest in art and history, I have decided to search for a new pathway towards God, which reflects the actual circumstances and challenges, and which, at the same time, portrays authentic artistic and Christian convention from the first centuries. Authentic art is one of the ways into religious experiences, because when a person faces beauty, he/she is stimulated to open himself/herself to the much broader perspectives, to react in a personal way to the content and form of art, and to ask himself/herself fundamental, existential questions. Beauty and art surpass the simple, aesthetic sense and refer to the transcendence. It is possible to say, that art may be a perfect way of catechising and evangelising children and youngsters within, but also outside the Church.

³ Cf. M. Crawford, G. Rossiter, *Reasons for living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality. A Handbook*, Melbourne, 2006.

⁴ Cf. M. H. Grimmitt, *Religious education and human development: The relationship between studying religions and personal social and moral education*, Great Wakering 1987; M. H. Grimmitt (Ed.), *Pedagogies of religious education*, Great Wakering, 2000; E. Osewska, J. Stala, *Die katholische Schule zu Beginn des XXI. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel Polens und Englands*, Warsaw, 2015; J. Stala, E. Osewska, *Anders erziehen in Polen. Der Erziehungs- und Bildungsbegriff im Kontext eines sich ständig verändernden Europas des XXI. Jahrhunderts*, Tarnów 2009; *Religious Education / Catechesis in the Family. A European Perspective*, ed. E. Osewska, J. Stala, Warsaw, 2010.

⁵ Cf. G. Rossiter, *Understanding the changing landscape of contemporary spirituality* p. 157-179; P. Hughes, *Putting life together: Findings from Australian youth spirituality research*, Fairfield, 2007.

In order to respond to the given questions we need to go back to the Church's history and refer to the history of Christian art, especially to the origin and development in the first centuries. Very quickly, after the death of Jesus, his followers, especially apostles were transmitting Jesus's oral teaching and creating the first Church communities. Slowly the visual elements started to be considered important to express and deepen Christian faith, as well as to identify the followers of Jesus. Christian art was created and developed gradually since the second century in the Mediterranean and originally referred to the Late-antique art. Its development can be divided into two periods: before and after the Edict of Milan in 313, which recognized Christianity as the official religion. Slowly, Early Christian art developed in different provinces of the Roman Empire.

"The art which Christianity encountered in its early days was the ripe fruit of the classical world, articulating its aesthetic canons and embodying its values. Not only in their way of living and thinking, but also in the field of art, faith obliged Christians to a discernment which did not allow an uncritical acceptance of this heritage. Art of Christian inspiration began therefore in a minor key, strictly tied to the need for believers to contrive Scripture-based signs to express both the mysteries of faith and *a symbolic code* by which they could distinguish and identify themselves, especially in the difficult times of persecution. Who does not recall the symbols which marked the first appearance of an art both pictorial and plastic? The fish, the loaves, the shepherd: in evoking the mystery, they became almost imperceptibly the first traces of a new art. When the Edict of Constantine allowed Christians to declare themselves in full freedom, art became a privileged means for the expression of faith. Majestic basilicas began to appear, and in them the architectural canons of the pagan world were reproduced and at the same time modified to meet the demands of the new form of worship" (*Letter to Artists*, 7).

1. Beauty and theology

If we look at Church history we see been fundamental changes in spirituality since the first century and yet a certain similarity. Human beings are the same across history, drawing on culture to help them make sense of the world they live in and of their own experience. They need some sort of meaning or values to serve as a moral compass and to help them articulate their goals and aspirations for life. In the first centuries not only the witnesses of Jesus from Nazareth and His words, but also visual signs made a significant impact on people's understanding of life and their faith. First Christians were mostly illiterate, so they received their faith through the stories about Jesus and very simple visual art.

In the 21st Century visual elements are important for the construction of meaning and purpose in life for both religious and non-religious peo-

ple⁶. Postmodern culture is more and more connected with visual imagery and access to ICT. Today, people living in Europe and North America cannot escape from the presence of so many visual signs, mostly connected with the consumer lifestyle. Contrasting the ways people in these two periods related to the visual aspects of their culture will show up significant differences in the focus, emphasis, beliefs, values and presumptions about life and the spiritual dimension.

So firstly, let us have a look at theology. It seems that one of the possible directions of developing theology is discovering faith through the category of beauty. Theologians should remember that their work expresses the dynamic inscribed into faith itself, and that the real object of his quest is the truth, Living God and His intention of salvation, revealed in Jesus Christ.

“This prime epiphany of *God who is Mystery* is both an encouragement and a challenge to Christians, also at the level of artistic creativity. From it has come a flowering of beauty which has drawn its sap precisely from the mystery of the Incarnation. In becoming man, the Son of God has introduced into human history all the evangelical wealth of the true and the good, and with this he has also unveiled a new dimension of beauty, of which the Gospel message is filled to the brim. Sacred Scripture has thus become a sort of ‘immense vocabulary’ (Paul Claudel) and ‘iconographic atlas’ (Marc Chagall), from which both Christian culture and art have drawn. The Old Testament, read in the light of the New, has provided endless streams of inspiration. From the stories of the Creation and sin, the Flood, the cycle of the Patriarchs, the events of the Exodus to so many other episodes and characters in the history of salvation, the biblical text has fired the imagination of painters, poets, musicians, playwrights and film-makers. A figure like Job, to take but one example, with his searing and ever relevant question of suffering, still arouses an interest which is not just philosophical but literary and artistic as well. And what should we say of the New Testament? From the Nativity to Golgotha, from the Transfiguration to the Resurrection, from the miracles to the teachings of Christ, and on to the events recounted in the Acts of the Apostles or foreseen by the Apocalypse in an eschatological key, on countless occasions the biblical word has become image, music and poetry, evoking the mystery of ‘the Word made flesh’ in the language of art” (*Letter to Artists*, 5). Even living in the postmodern age we can go towards this truth, e.g. via

⁶ Cf. M. Crawford, G. Rossiter, *Reasons for living*. J. Stala, *Die Polen angesichts der Umbrüche im politischen und gesellschaftlichen Bereich. Ein Vierteljahrhundert nach der Unabhängigkeit Polens*. *The Person and the Challenges*, 5 (2015) 1, p. 191-199; J. Stala, *Katechese im Zeitalter der Postmoderne. “Grundsatzprogramm für die Katechese der Kirche in Polen” aus dem Jahr 2010*, *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 74 (2014) 1, p. 107-117.

pulchritudinis – the way of beauty⁷. For many contemporary people visual art in virtual space provide an important means of expressing oneself⁸.

The beauty of God is not only an aesthetic but also an ontological category which reveals God, who allows us to know him through the artistic means of expression in order to be with us. We also remember that in the Western European culture beauty is recognized as one of *transcendentalia*, because it surpasses the boundaries of categories (substance, quality, quantity, relation, etc.). From this perspective, beauty is the one of being and a spiritual category. A human being needs and searches for beauty understood in this way; the evidence for it is the whole spiritual and material culture. In this sense, beauty is God's name. God is the fullness of beauty, in the inseparable ontological and personal sense.

In looking for the faith by means of the beauty, we need to remember the truth that God, being Almighty, possesses all kinds of perfection, including beauty, in the utmost degree. God is beauty and so allows us to take part in His own beauty. It is even possible to say, that without God, beauty does not exist, because beauty is deeply rooted in Him. In the Bible, we find some verses that present the beauty of God (Ps 27:4; Ps 90:17). Theology tries to highlight all the attributes of God including beauty. On the other hand, through the act of creating the universe and human beings, we can see beauty belonging to God's creative act. Every man and woman is reflecting the beauty of God, but His Son Jesus Christ is the only perfect image of the invisible God (Col 1:15). Jesus's incarnation was the most beautiful epiphany of love. Through His incarnation God has become audible and visible. It can be assumed that the *inner interchangeability* of the word and image occurs in Jesus Christ, which is confirmed by Christological Titles: *Logos-Word* and *Eikon-Image*⁹.

Special attention shall be given to the beauty development in the relation to the personal reality of human. Beauty is the reality in relation to a person, building up the reality itself, expressing the essential and existential perfection, building up another world, i.e. the continuation of the creation process. Beauty is not able to exist without the person. Beauty

⁷ Cf. W. Kawecki, *Theology of Beauty. Looking for locus theologicus in contemporary culture*, Poznań, 2013, p. 52-58.

⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*.

⁹ Cf. J. Królikowski, *Widzialne słowo. Teologia w sztuce [Visible Word. Theology in Arts]*, Tarnów, 2009; W. Kawecki, *Teologia wobec kultury wizualnej [Theology vs. Visual Culture]*, in: *Miejsca teologiczne w kulturze wizualnej*, Kraków – Warsaw, 2013, p. 15-29; *Kultura wizualna – teologia wizualna*, ed. W. Kawecki, J.S. Wojciechowski, D. Żukowska-Gardzińska, Warsaw, 2011; J. Stala, *Punina postojanja osebe – civilizacija ljubavi u kontekstu postmoderne*, Crkva u svijetu, 50 (2015) 3, p. 469-477; J. Stala, *Die Polen angesichts*, p. 191-199; J. Stala, *Katechese im Zeitalter der Postmoderne*, p. 107-117.

in God exists in persons, as well. Within the Holy Trinity, the persons are delighted by one another¹⁰.

One of the significant elements given through the theology of beauty, that is gradually deepened, is the understanding that beauty is a fundamental category of theology. Talking about beauty existing in the world means also reference to the Holy Trinity, who is the source of beauty. Through the theology of beauty the Church explains, in today's language, the truth of God. In order to communicate the message entrusted to Church by Jesus Christ, the Church needs visual signs, gestures, symbols and art. Beauty has the capacity to take one or another facet of the message and translate it into forms, figures, colours, shapes.

In addition to portraying knowledge about the mystery of Jesus Christ, Christian art allows the believer entry into the mystery of creation, redemption and sanctification. Thanks to Christian art, the believer is able to get intellectual and aesthetic impulses, but, above all, a chance to recognise God as the eternal beauty and glory. There are so many examples of art presenting Jesus Christ in various ways, but many of the pictures from the first centuries are still having direct or almost direct connection with the living Jesus. So, besides the aesthetic perspective, we also have to remember about the notion of the glory and holiness of God. Some theologians remind that in the biblical language the word 'beauty' means 'glory'. Some Hebrew and Greek terms directly translate the connection between beauty and glory of God.

2. The way of beauty

Looking for new ways to God, the Pontifical Council for Culture suggested the 'way of beauty', as both an effective means of evangelization and also of dialogue with a religious, indifferent and non-believers. Discussing transmitting the faith to various cultures, pointed to the urgent problem of evangelization: "The Church accomplishes her mission of leading people to Christ the Saviour by sharing the Word of God and the gift of the sacraments of Grace. In order to reach people with an apt *pastoral approach to culture*, in the light of Christ contemplated in the mystery of the Incarnation (GS 22), the Church examines the *signs of the times* and draws pointers from them to develop "bridges" which lead to a meeting with the God of Jesus Christ through an itinerary of friendship in a dialogue of truth... Beginning with the simple experience of the marvel-arousing meeting with beauty, the *via pulchritudinis* can open the pathway for the search for God, and disposes the heart and spirit to meet Christ, who is the Beauty of Holiness Incarnate, offered by God to men

¹⁰ Cf. W. Kawecki, *Theology of Beauty*, p. 54-56.

for their salvation” (*The Via Pulchritudinis, Privileged Pathway for Evangelisation and Dialogue II.1.*)

The *via pulchritudinis* is considered as a way, that may touch people’s hearts, a pathway for people who already know beauty, but search for something more beyond beauty and art. Through the beauty of nature and arts, every man and woman is able to admire a direct creator, but can also get to know the First Creator ontologically. Focusing on beauty may lead a person to the moment, in which the act of admiration will become a religious and mystical act¹¹. Beauty is the gate for spiritual experience.

The Pontifical Council for Culture shows three dimensions of the beauty: the beauty of the creation, the beauty of art and the beauty of Jesus Christ. Even in the age of ICT, nature is still regarded as the source of all beauty. Many people see in nature and in the universe just the visible, empty materiality, the source of their needs and pleasures. So to avoid the risks of reducing it to ecological or a pantheistic vision, Religious Education may help the young generation to be more sensitive to the nature and be a better observer of the process going in the surrounding world. The second dimension refers to the beauty of art. If beauty is to speak to the 21st Century generations, especially the young ones, they need to learn the language of emotion, admiration and appreciation. With the language of beauty, works of art may not only transmit the message of the artist, but also the mystery of God. Art makes sense, since it is not confined to aesthetic beauty, but it refers to the transcendent.

But “the absolutely original and singular beauty of Christ, *model of a truly beautiful life*, is reflected in the holiness of a life transformed by Grace. Unfortunately, many people perceive Christianity as a submission to commandments made up of prohibitions and limits applied to personal liberty... The joy of being Christian is beauty, and it is right to believe it.” (*The Via Pulchritudinis III.3.A.*) Therefore, simple signs and symbols of Jesus Christ are depicted in early Christian art. To spread the message of salvation, Christianity created a vivid language of images. This developing trend is called Christo-morphism, because is representing God by means of Jesus Christ: *Who sees me, sees my Father, too* (Jhn 14:9). In the first centuries, Christians treated the catacombs as an environment and space for presenting visual signs, paintings and other items depicting Jesus Christ. The new message emerged through the very simple pictures, drawings or sketches. These simple catacomb paintings of Jesus Christ are still relevant to contemporary Religious Education. The message is highlighted in its purposes, functions and content, especially indicating

¹¹ Cf. J. Królikowski, *Zobaczyć wiarę. Obraz i doświadczenie wiary w Kościele* [To See Faith. The Image and Experience of Faith in the Church], in: *Wierzyć i widzieć*, ed. K. Flander, D. Jaszewska, W. Kawecki, B. Kłoczek di Biasio, E. Mazur, N. Mojżyn, J. S. Wojciechowski, M. Wrześniak, D. Żukowska-Gardzińska, Sandomierz, 2013, p. 127-129.

that the image helps awaken and strengthen Christian faith. Thus, it fulfils the principle of faithfulness to God and man. Through the perception of the content of Christological paintings and symbols in the catacombs, even today's believer is able to recall or discover Jesus Christ's passion, death and resurrection, His acts and preaching, and then form attitudes consistent with the Gospel. "Confirming his words by miracles and by his resurrection from the dead, Christ proclaimed himself to be the Son of God dwelling in intimate union with the Father, and was recognized as such by his disciples. The Church offers mankind the Gospel, that prophetic message which responds to the needs and aspirations of the human heart and always remains *Good News*. The Church cannot fail to proclaim that Jesus came to reveal the face of God and to merit salvation for all humanity by his cross and resurrection" (*Redemptoris Missio* 11). The beauty of life of Jesus Christ is a direct calling to those who search for the meaning of life, for values, for something invisible, but Holy, for the Truth above other truths and Overwhelming Love. If they find this Beauty they also find the power of new life in a distressed world.

3. Beauty and the meaning of life

The works of religious art in early and medieval Church were presenting the religious story via signs and symbols, so they helped followers of Jesus Christ, Christians, to receive their religious cues from them. Art also reminded people of their shared Christian beliefs, Tradition and community. The religious communities reinforced the social, political, cultural and religious stratification of society. Everyone had their place from birth – their station in life; and relatively few could change their position in that network. The visual religious art called on the faithful to reflect on their special place in the divine universe and in the Christian Church. This pointed them towards a deeper meaning to life beyond its surface¹².

While the images to which people are exposed today include much that is informative and educational, here, attention is given only to the imagery concerned with lifestyle. Because it looks towards the potential problems with excessive and naïve responses to meaning-making imagery, this analysis can appear negative and biased. A contemporary human is more surrounded by signs related to the everyday life than a religious one. Today's visual imagery appeals rather to individuals and his/her subjective preferences that are highly prized. But at the same time, 21st century people want to feel connected with the group / elite / celebrities

¹² Cf. G. Rossiter, Decoding the iconography of contemporary lifestyle: Uncovering and evaluating the spirituality in consumerist culture Part 2. Contrasting the mise-en-scène of medieval Christian spirituality with that of contemporary consumerist lifestyle: Sociological and educational implications, in: *Education and Creativity*, ed. E. Osewska, Warszawa, 2014, p. 151-188.

that identify themselves through certain brands they share and present the higher status in society, and cachet that goes with these brands. Very often, young people think that the 'success' of their identity is measured by the labels of what they possess. Consumerism, as reflected in media iconography, conditions them to seek the visual attribute of 'high society'. So the search for 'Transcendence' is often replaced by 'personal exhilaration'¹³.

Every man and woman, even in contemporary society is faced with questions about the meaning of his/her life, the aim of his/her activity, the end of life or possibility of eternal life. The issue of meaning of life, for the individual and also in a social perspective, is the human experience and the driving force of human activity¹⁴. From this perspective, visual imagery and art can have a significant shaping influence on people, even if they act sometimes unconsciously. According to G. Rossiter there are two factors that are highly influential on people's response to the search for meaning of life: the human need to *feel good* and for a *sense of belonging*. In mainstream media, young people see celebrities in branded clothing and so, almost unconsciously want to feel good just by following that new trend. The 'Feel good' factor and the sense of belonging are associated; the first one helps the individual feels comfortable in private situations whilst the second helps in the public sphere. While Christianity provides young people with the response to questions about meaning for life, some still feel, that they need to construct a DIY (Do It Yourself) system of personal meaning¹⁵. Lack of balance in the pursuit of feeling-good and sense of belonging can generate unhappiness which, in turn, fuels the pathology.

The postmodern visual art and ICT imagery often projects possibilities for life. Some people try to evaluate the visual culture, but others are just slavish conformists living in the illusion of personal freedom. In this context, an important purpose of Religious Education is to help young people *stop and pay more attention* to the visual media imagery that are being offered for consumption¹⁶.

In this age of visual art, mostly presented through a computer icons and computerized pictures, it can be a good idea to go back to the everyday sights which, in Christianity, received a new liturgical function connected with the history of salvation. Simple signs, such as water, wine, grapes,

¹³ Cf. Rossiter, *Decoding the iconography of contemporary lifestyle*, in: *Education and Creativity*, ed. E. Osewska, Warszawa, 2014, p. 154-155.

¹⁴ Cf. W. Kawecki, *Theology of Beauty*, p. 92.

¹⁵ Cf. M. Crawford, G. Rossiter, *Reasons for living*, p. 215.

¹⁶ Cf. G. Rossiter, *Decoding the iconography of contemporary lifestyle*, in: *Education and Creativity*, ed. E. Osewska, Warszawa, 2014, p. 187; E. Osewska, *L'educazione oggi in un Europa diversificata*, in: *Europa, scuola, religioni. Monoteismi e confessioni cristiane per una nuova cittadinanza europea*, ed. F. Pajer, Torino, 2005, p. 47-64.

bread, food, light, darkness, the lamb or fish can seldom be viewed as only literal but communicate the deeper, hidden meaning: the truth about salvation in a mystical way. These signs and symbols, found in catacombs, reminded Christians of the history of salvation. Simple sketches and paintings carry their own theological meaning. This approach is very fruitful also for contemporary education, both for the teacher and the pupil. The natural signs may be potentially very influential, but they have to be treated not just as products, but as culturally and socially important processes and mediators, which helps children and youngsters to find meaning in life, in an increasingly secularized, post-modern society.

Focusing on the beauty of the surrounding visual signs may lead a child or youth to the moment, in which the act of admiration will become a spiritual one. The special nature of arts consists in that visual beauty refers to the human ability to see¹⁷. The experience of faith arises from listening to the word, but also from looking at God's work. For a person who lives in a postmodern society, reason is no longer *capax Dei*, so we need to search for new ways.

4. Beauty and virtues

Beauty is the theological object, based on the mystery of God's existence; but it is also connected with the complex human reality: processing sensory inputs, attention, thinking, feelings and imagination. From this perspective, beauty may be associated with the theological virtues of faith, love and hope.

Pope Benedict XVI regarded the present individualism as a sign of loosening not only social ties among its members, but also virtues: "Day by day, man experiences many greater or lesser hopes, different in kind according to the different periods of his life. Sometimes one of these hopes may appear to be totally satisfying without any need for other hopes. Young people can have the hope of a great and fully satisfying love; the hope of a certain position in their profession, or of some success that will prove decisive for the rest of their lives. When these hopes are fulfilled, however, it becomes clear that they were not, in reality, the whole. It becomes evident that man has need of a hope that goes further. It becomes clear that only something infinite will suffice for him, something that will always be more than he can ever attain. In this regard our contemporary age has developed the hope of creating a perfect world that, thanks to scientific knowledge and to scientifically based politics, seemed to be achievable. Thus Biblical hope in the Kingdom of God has been dis-

¹⁷ Cf. J. Królikowski, *Zobaczyć wiarę*, in: *Wierzyć i widzieć*, ed. K. Flander, D. Jaszewska, W. Kawecki, B. Klocek di Biasio, E. Mazur, N. Mojżyn, J. S. Wojciechowski, M. Wrześniak, D. Żukowska-Gardzińska, Sandomierz, 2013, p. 127-129.

placed by hope in the kingdom of man, the hope of a better world which would be the real 'Kingdom of God'. This seemed at last to be the great and realistic hope that man needs. It was capable of galvanizing – for a time – all man's energies. The great objective seemed worthy of full commitment. In the course of time, however, it has become clear that this hope is constantly receding. Above all it has become apparent that this may be a hope for a future generation, but not for me" (*Spe Salvi* 30).

A human being is oriented towards hope, so losing hope means also losing the meaning of life, like in the case of depression when someone hopes for closeness and total acceptance, but in not fulfilling this hope tends to forget about everything and does not know how to live and trust others. The real life of every Christian is the vocation to hope and the hope of eternal life (Tts 1:2). Followers of Jesus Christ hope, because they trust the Master from Nazareth, who offers up Himself as the salvation, resurrection and life. In Jesus Christ, God makes Himself the hope to a human being. Through His suffering, crucifixion, resurrection and the paschal victory of life over death, Jesus Christ brought hope to every man and woman.

In the documents, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council highlighted the value of art and virtues in human life: "This world ... in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. Beauty, like truth, brings joy to the human heart and is that precious fruit which resists the erosion of time, which unites generations and enables them to be one in admiration!" (*Gaudium et Spes* 19). The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* reminds of the relationship of the Church towards art and, referring more specifically to sacred art, the "summit" of religious art, did not hesitate to consider artists as having "a noble ministry" when their works reflect in some way the infinite beauty of God and raise people's minds to him (20).

The Church needs art, so the world of the spirit, of the invisible, of God, can be translated into meaningful terms that are in themselves ineffable. The faith of Christians can be nourished by art, literature, music and architecture. However, even art needs the Church, because artists are people, who search for the hidden meaning of things and Christianity gives artists deep inspiration. Pope John Paul II in his *Letter to Artists* said: "I turn to you, the artists of the world, to assure you of my esteem and to help consolidate a more constructive partnership between art and the Church. Mine is an invitation to rediscover the depth of the spiritual and religious dimension which has been typical of art in its noblest forms in every age. It is with this in mind that I appeal to you, artists of the written and spoken word, of the theatre and music, of the plastic arts and the most recent technologies in the field of communication. I appeal especially to you, Christian artists: I wish to remind each of you that, beyond functional considerations, the close alliance that has always existed between

the Gospel and art means that you are invited to use your creative intuition to enter into the heart of the mystery of the Incarnate God and at the same time into the mystery of man” (*Letter to Artists* 14).

Since Second Vatican Council there has been a renewed emphasis on the relationship between the Church and art, which has been long present in teaching in Catholic schools and an impressive number of books, articles and websites. Ironically, very often, schools kill this relationship mainly by operating from a partial and incomplete understanding of the nature and function of human being, intelligence and education. The educational systems are heavily influenced by Enlightenment thinking and tend to promote a restricted view of knowledge and intelligence that is dominated by deductive reasoning¹⁸. Thus, Catholic schools may have diversified approaches to beauty and art, yet, having the responsibility and task to prepare new generations for the future, must help pupils to discover the invisible God via visible art. Not only sacred art, but real art can be the way to touch children and youngsters awakening initial faith and nourishing it day by day to its fullness.

A systematically developed relationship between beauty and spirituality stimulates and supports human’s functioning. Moreover, it enables one to achieve full maturity. Thanks to art, every person is encouraged to search for hope, love and the sense of life. Consequently, looking for the sense of life and slowly responding to this sense enable us to find the invisible God. So, beauty is a pathway towards God. The author hopes, that education, and religious education, in particular, can help in developing this pathway for young people so that they can better interpret and evaluate the visual sights, learning how it can affect their meaning, identity and values. The author also believes that this article can contribute to further research in approaching beauty as the pathway towards God.

¹⁸ Cf. P. Kieran, *Divine Creativity and the Creative Art of Catechesis*, in: *Education and Creativity*, ed. E. Osewska, Warszawa, 2014, p. 94-98.