
Theology, Beauty and Art

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Nikola Bižaca, Jadranka Garmaz, *Preface* 5–10

Religious experience and aesthetic experience have always more or less successfully permeated. There is no religion in the history of mankind that has not expressed its experiences also through artistic searching for beauty. Beauty, in fact, has always been seen as one of the privileged links between man and the divine. Therefore, the fundamental moments of all religions, such as the sacred texts, prayer and ritual practices, traditions, architecture, doctrines and theology, are open to the aesthetic dimension too.

This of course also applies to Christianity, which from its beginnings pays great attention to the dimension of beauty. Beauty in the scope of Christian church is experienced and understood as a fragmentary intrahistorical reflection of eternal Beauty. Consequently, theology of Christian community has been pondering on the category of “beautiful” since its very beginnings. At it, theologians tie in with theoretical insights about the beauty present in Greek philosophical tradition. Here we primarily refer to Aristotle for whom “order”, “symmetry”, “definiteness/defined” are the supreme forms of beauty that mathematics reflects best.¹ Naturally, Christian theology of beauty has been considerably affected by Plato’s vision of the encounter with beauty as with the space of memories of eternity but also as with the ecstatic egress of man from himself towards the infinite satisfaction of the desire in the other world.²

Classical approaches to beauty develop the assumed ranges of Greek wisdom towards the revealed God’s beauty evidenced by the biblical texts themselves. So Augustine in his

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XIII, 3, 1078, a 32–b4.

² According to J. Pieper, *Goettlicher Wahnsinn, Eine Platon-Interpretation*, Schwabenverlag, Stuttgart, 1989, p. 38.

mystic- speculative perception of beauty equates beauty with love understood as “order” and “harmony of interrelations” of those who love each other. He speaks about *ordo amoris* in God, in Christ, but also in man’s relationship to God.³ Also the metaphysical thoughts of Thomas Aquinas about the qualities of beauty (*proportio, integritas, claritas*) find their recourse in the speech about God’s beauty, i.e. about theophany and salvation-building beauty in Christ.

Normally, these kinds of philosophical and theological thoughts about beauty have accompanied, supported, inspired and interpreted artistic creation in the areas of Christianity for centuries. On the other hand, artistic creation experienced beauty, without major denials, until the nineteenth century, as a fragmentary expression of infinite transcendent beauty of Jesus’ God. So, Church, theology and art had long lived in a very successful symbiosis. Practically as long as to the present day when a remarkable and even dramatic separation of these three centuries-long companions happened. For a large part of the twentieth century art divine beauty is no longer its referential horizon. Art theory does not see beauty as an objective of art. So beauty as the goal of creation in literature has been largely replaced by the expressions such as “reality”, “truth”, and in figurative art by the category of “quality”. Even “ugliness” has become the object of artistic expression. Many might think that the congruence of Beauty, Truth and Goodness, of which the traditional ontology of being has been long and convincingly speaking, is only just eschatological hope but certainly not the art programme in the present.⁴

During the second half of the twentieth century, Christians become aware of the drama of such a dreadful trend. There have been numerous theological reflections and Church Magisterium explanations which are trying to show the soundness of traditional, intimate harmony, the centuries-long, really fruitful, mutual reference of beauty/art on the one

³ *De Trinitate*, VII, 8, 12; VI, 10, 12.

⁴ P. B. Steiner, *Schönheit?, Wahrheit?, Qualität?*, in: *Christ in der Gegenwart*, 14 (2012), p. 140.

hand to theology and spiritual experience of Christian mystery on the other hand.

So for example on the line of the Aquinas' aesthetics, H. U. von Balthasar, by means of the category of "glory" and in the up-to-now most substantial way, restores beauty to the very heart of theological comprehensibility of the entire Christian truth of God's mystery in history. A great moral theologian B. Häring explains that beauty can function as a *leitmotif* of a creative theology. In his "moral of beauty and glory", as he himself calls it, he associates the normativity of value with the beauty of ideal that the value manifests.⁵ Nowadays there is a unique theological venture of A. Stock. This German theologian writes out the whole Catholic dogmatism with the help of poetic sources of Christianity. In his poetic dogmatism (*Poetische Dogmatik* in 7 volumes) he takes into account paintings and literary texts as the authentic "theological places", i.e. as "the equal sources of theological thinking and theological cognition".⁶

When it comes to the Church Magisterium, one should recall the fact that almost all of the recent pontificates contain some significant observations on the relationship between Christianity/Church and artistic creation. They appeal to the restoration of patristic i.e. very successful medieval synthesis of Christian Mystery and artistic creation. So Paul VI in his *Address to Artists* on 7th May 1964 reminds that the deepest and last challenge of aesthetic creation is "to wrest its treasures from the heaven of the spirit and clothe them anew in words, in colour, in form, in accessibility." John Paul II in his *Letter to Artists* (1999), wishing to refresh the two-millennium dialogue between the Church and art, states that beauty is, analogically said, one of the "moments of grace". The human being is able to experience in some way the Absolute who is utterly beyond (cf. n. 15). For this pope beauty is "a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence" (n. 16). The same thinks Pope Benedict

⁵ B. Häring, *Liberi e Fedeli in Cristo. Teologia morale per preti e laici*, vol. II, Edizioni Paoline, Roma, 1980.

⁶ E. Arens (Hg.) *Gegenwart Ästhetik trifft Theologie*, Q.D. Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 2012, p. 9-10.

XVI in his address to 260 artists at the Sistine Chapel on 11th November 2009. He strongly emphasizes the close nearness between the “path of faith” and the “path of beauty”, and thus the artistic creation too, because “art means revealing God in everything that exists”. At it Benedict must be taking into account the earlier published more detailed document of the Pontifical Council for Culture (2006). The document titled *Via pulchritudinis* speaks about beauty and artistic creation as about the “privileged pathway of evangelization” and dialogue with the people of our time.⁷

We are witnessing, therefore, the centuries-long efforts of the Catholic theology and pastors of the church to renew the weakened, and even considerably endangered, correlation between the experience and practice of Christian Mystery on the one hand and beauty and artistic creation on the other, due to a change of cultural paradigms. The 17 International Interdisciplinary Scientific Symposium held from 20th to 21st October 2011 at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Split under the title *Theology, Beauty and Art* also wanted to give its contribution to that truly committed Catholic search for ever more convincing consideration of dialogue between faith and beauty. The programme of the Symposium was to primarily demonstrate, clearly, and necessarily very selectively, how particular segments of theology, and also of history of arts and hermeneutics of historical text, assess the current functioning of the relationship between the Christian experience and its theological contents on the one hand and artistic creation on the other hand. At the same time it was attempted, as much as it was possible, to touch on the situation in our region.

So, in his lecture *Johannes Rauchenberger* is questioning whether it is possible, and in what sense, in the conditions

⁷ On the observations of the Magisterium see: G. Ravasi, *Rimosse le macerie delle incomprensioni la “via pulchritudinis” è ancora aperta*, u: Osservatore Romano, 22. 11. 2009; Benedikt XVI, *Kunst bedeutet Gott in allem was existiert zu entdecken*, 21. 11. 2009 (www.kath.nedt./detail.php?id=24625); Pontificio consilio per la cultura, *La via pulchritudinis, Cammino privilegiato di evangelizzazione e di dialogo* (www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/cultr/documents/rc_pc_cultr_doc_20060327_plenary-assembly_final-document_it.html).

of contemporary separateness of culture from religion, to use artworks as the sources of theological cognition. Analyzing several contemporary video artworks made by the authors from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania, who are only partly dealing with explicitly Christian themes and more with the current problems of people, he comes to the conclusion that such artistic creations can help theology to perceive the real existential questions of modern people that require appropriate answers.

Ive Šimat Banov starts from the distinction between the sacral (applied art) and religious art which he perceives as a permanent constant of religious sentiments. Along the line of that differentiation, he outlines the tension between religious buildings and often academicised routine of their interior design. He also expresses his belief that religious experience is inherent to each authentic piece of art and then he presents some authors whose works are the expressions of religious depth of their feelings.

Assuming structural proximity of beauty and artistic creation with the transcendent, with God's life, *Heinrich Pfeiffer* offers a brief, elementary introduction to the meaning of basic categories relevant for the determination of the relationship between theology and art. So he explains the categories such as: beauty, sacred, creativity, life and truth.

The topic of *Domagoj Runje's* exposure is how the Bible speaks of beauty. He has confined his observations to the Pentateuch. The result of his study is a convincingly presented belief that the content of the concept of beauty, depending on a particular book of the Pentateuch, obtains particular relevant emphases.

In his analytical approach *Ivica Žižić* talked about religion and aesthetics in contemporary context from post-modern condition to liturgical renewal, but, since the text of the lecture has not been received, it is not a part of this Collection of Papers.

The text of *Šimun Bilokapić* is also dealing with the aestheticization of life, but in the light of the relationship between moral theology and aesthetic surgery. On the basis

of historical reconstruction of the Catholic moral-theological evaluation of aesthetic surgery, the author calls into question a careless attitude towards this kind of intervention, which ignores the fact that the overemphasis of a priori values of aesthetic surgery as such often obscures a range of moral-theological issues and dilemmas on some essential human values and their real place on the value scale.

The lecture of *Ana Thea Filipović* is dedicated to the educational-catechetical questioning about the usefulness and usability of aesthetic dimension of Christianity. Answering the question about the possibility of aesthetic learning in the field of catechesis and religious education, the author starts from the analysis of aesthetic dimension of the announced contents of faith. Finally, the author suggests such a conception of performative catechism which would recognize the correlation of faith and the students' life in contemporary culture and by that the post-modern aestheticization of life as well.

The article of *Nade Babić* and *Zrinka Jelaska* is about the relationship between poetry and experience of God. Analyzing the selected texts of Croatian poets, the authors are trying to show how poetic beauty succeeds to testify and reveal the experiences semantically close and sometimes identical to evangelical messages.

At the end of the symposium the poet *Enes Kišević* gave a recital of religious poetry demonstrating how religious poetry can express a premonition of God's beauty. The author's selection from Christian and Islamic poetry is given in the Appendix.

Johannes Rauchenberger, *Ein zeitgenössisches Fragen über Bilder als mögliche Quelle theologischen Denkens ...* 11–32
Review

Zusammenfassung

In der Theologie sind die sogenannten *loci theologici* bekannt, das sind mögliche Quellen für die theologische Erkenntnis. Im Kontext der heutigen Gesellschaft, die durch eine Trennung von Kultur und Religion charakterisiert ist, stellt der Autor die Frage, auf welche Weise die moderne Kunst als solche Quelle dienen kann.

Man kann bemerken, dass moderne Künstler, bewusst oder unbewusst unabhängig von der Religion, Themen problematisieren, welche ihrem Wesen nach ebenfalls der Religion beziehungsweise der Theologie nahe stehen, beispielsweise Grenzerfahrungen wie Tod, Glück, Schmerz oder Schuld, in denen der Mensch mit Sinnfragen konfrontiert wird. Der Autor führt vier Beispiele von Künstlerinnen und Künstlern aus dem Gebiet von Kroatien, Bosnien-Herzegowina und Albanien an. Diese Beispiele sind nicht so sehr eine Quelle für Entwicklung von theologischen Begriffen, sondern eher eine Hilfe für Theologen, Fragen zu finden, welche den Gegenwartsmenschen berühren.

Adrian Paci hat die Videoarbeit *PilgrIMAGE* erstellt, welche zwei Pilgerfahrten zu ein und dem selben heiligen Bild zeigt: die eine ist in Italien, wo es sich real befindet, die zweite hingegen in Albanien ist, wo sich das Bild früher befand, während es nun nur seine Videoprojektion gibt. Die eine Pilgerfahrt findet in einer Wohlstandsgesellschaft statt, die andere in einer Armutsgesellschaft. Doch unabhängig davon beten die Menschen an dem einen und dem anderen Ort gleicherweise für ihre Anliegen. Derselbe Künstler problematisiert in der fotografisch dokumentierten Performance *Home to Go* die Situation von Emigranten, die aus politischen oder wirtschaftlichen Gründen in fremde Länder gegangen sind. Indem Paci in Gestalt eines Leidensmannes ein Dach auf seinem Rücken trägt, alludiert er auf Jesus, den Schmerzensmann, der das Kreuz auf seinem Rücken trägt.

Zlatko Kopljar geht in einer Reihe von Werken unter der Bezeichnung *Konstruktionen* an Orte der Gewalt, Brutalität, politischer oder wirtschaftlicher Übermacht und weckt mit seiner körperlichen Anwesenheit eine innere Stimme des Widerstrebens gegen unmenschliche Vorgänge oder Umstände: beispielsweise als einer der Getöteten in einem Massaker oder kniend vor der New Yorker Börse in der Wall Street.

Maja Bajević spricht in der Videoarbeit *Double Bubble* falsche Beichten von Männern, welche überhaupt keine Reue über ihre begangenen Untaten äußern. So macht sie über ihren eigenen Körper aufmerksam auf den Missbrauch von Sprache im politischen gesellschaftlichen und religiösen Bereich.

Eine ähnliche Linie verfolgt Danica Dakić. Im Bewusstsein des Missbrauchs von Sprache bei religiösen Fundamentalisten oder in Kriegssituationen versucht sie die einende Kraft des Wortes darzustellen, welche religiöse, kulturelle, sprachliche und andere Unterschiede überwindet. Im Video *Surround* sitzen Vertreter verschiedener Kulturen, Völker und Religionen friedlich im Kreis, wobei jeder Abschnitte aus seinen heiligen Texten vorliest.

Ive Šimat Banov, *Between Religious and Sacred Arts* 33–46
Review

Summary

The author is trying to point out the difference between the sacred (applied arts) and religious arts, in which process he attaches to the latter the moment of human constant and of what is the broadest, as well as the deepest religious feelings. The author refers to the historical and contemporary practice of raising new religious buildings and new arts with it, noting that the freedom of the former (architects) does not imply the freedom of the latter (artists), and that there is disharmony between the free projection and solutions of religious buildings and the retarding and academicised routine of sculptural and painting solutions inside the religious buildings. Wondering wherefrom the holiness of the artwork, the author holds that

it also exists beyond the theme (the caption) and beyond the sacral space itself, and that the artwork, using the “martyrdom of invention”, carries the seed of holiness and deep religious feelings. So, according to the author, there is no art without religion. Religiosity is immanent to every art and to every artwork. Pointing out the merits of a number of artists who have deepened the religious sentiment, the author highlights the work of Zlatko Šlentić, Ivo Dulčić, as well as of the self-taught painter Fr. Janez Ambroz Testen (1897-1984) who in his painting crossed the path from accuracy (academism) to gestural and expressionistic weft, i.e. to the deepest sincerity and immediacy. In conclusion, the author believes that religiosity is not in the title, theme or place, but it is connected with human deepest and most hidden experiences and contents.

Heinrich Pfeiffer, *Basic concepts for determining the relationship between theology and arts: beauty, creativity, sacred, life and truth illustrated by the examples from figurative arts of all times* 47–61
Conference paper

Summary

The text presents a brief introduction to the meaning of the basic categories by which it is possible to determine the content of the relationship between theology and arts. The author of the article illustrates these basic categories by the analysis of the pictures that he himself has taken in the countryside and in architecture, as well as through the interpretation of works of art of great painters.

Analyzing the pictures of nature and art architecture, the article primarily shows determinants of two types of *beauty*, natural and artistic, which are able to express transcendence, i.e. some characteristics of God’s life.

Artistic *creativity* and its creation of new allow the artist to experience God’s creativity and to express it.

Sacred is expressed, in any religion including Christianity, among other things in architecture and works of art. The author

thinks that, irrespective of religion, the way of expressing the *sacred* always has the same characteristics like breakthrough of the sacred, uniting with it, an angelic messenger, cessation /breakthrough of the sacred, Incarnation as the fulfilment of hierophany.

Art expresses *life* determined as relationship, as mediation between contrasts, relationship between God and His creation, relationship between God and soul seen as a purifying process.

On the basis of these determinants the author concludes that the disciplines like history of arts and theology can enrich each other and he advocates their dialogue.

Domagoj Runje, *Beauty in the Pentateuch* 63–91
Original scientific paper

Summary

In this presentation the author speaks about beauty as a theme that picturesquely runs through the Pentateuch. The starting point is the first account of the creation in Gn 1,1 – 2,4 in which the sentence “And God saw that it was טוב (tov) is repeated seven times, where the word טוב may be translated as *good*, but also as *beautiful*. So, the first criterion of beauty is watching reality with God’s eyes. Man also possesses that ability, but according to Gn 3 it was disturbed at the moment when man violated God’s command. Expulsion from Paradise vividly indicates a loss of immediate contact with beauty, which is, consequently, realised in other ways in other books of the Pentateuch. In the book of Exodus it is the Tent of Meeting in which God is watching Moses face to face. In the book of Leviticus the concept of beauty is contained in the rituals that actually encompass the entire daily life. In the book of Numbers beauty is reflected in the orderliness of the people as a community gathered around God’s tent, while in Deuteronomy, Moses, as the central figure of the Pentateuch, dies with a view to the Promised Land, and its beauty is shown as something that can be seen before death only from afar.

Šimun Bilokapić, *Anthropology and Ethics*
of *Cosmetic Surgery* 93–118
Original scientific paper

Summary

There is no doubt that external beauty is a true value which is able to affect human relationships, strongly shape the life and behaviour of those who do not consider themselves to be aesthetically endowed, jeopardize their individual and relational well-being thus causing real psychological difficulties. Many, dissatisfied with their appearance, seek the solution in cosmetic surgery which can improve the human form or completely modify it. We are not talking only about the discipline today significantly aimed at rejuvenating and beautifying, but also about the everyday practice in full expansion as a requirement, as a technical possibility, and therefore as an ethical problem.

Ethical evaluation of cosmetic surgery does not only include a well-known conflict between the natural and artificial, in this case the conflict between the natural appearance and artificial possibilities to adjust one's own physicality and appearance to some personal or social ideal of beauty, but it opens – even in case of accepting the artificial in life – a number of other anthropological and ethical issues. What is the value of beauty, health, body and physical appearance? To what extent is it allowed to seek aesthetic improvement of one's own body by cosmetic surgery? Are there limits beyond which cosmetic surgery could be and should be considered immoral? Who defines the canons of beauty? Is cosmetic surgery a medical (therapeutic) discipline or an activity which by skilful manipulating only medicalizes the consumer's inner dissatisfaction, trades with hope and illusory and unrealistic expectations? What are its positive effects?

The author does not have pretensions to answer all these questions by this article, but only to indicate ethical difficulties and conflicts, those already existing and the possible ones as well, within the cosmetic surgery. Therefore, in the first part of his work he defines the basic terms related to plastic surgery

in general and particularly to cosmetic surgery, while in the second part he analyzes the speech of Pope Pius XII addressed to the participants of the 10th National Congress of Italian Society of Plastic Surgery (1958) and the opinion of some moral theologians on permissibility of particular interventions from the field of cosmetic surgery, in order to determine the fundamental ethical criteria in solving the concrete cases. That analysis results in the evident fact that by moral judgement of particular “cases” we actually go back to classical casuistry and its related operational instruments. In the third part, on the basis of conviction that a serious anthropological and moral problem of cosmetic surgery today are by no means individual interventions, but the very discipline of cosmetic surgery as such, the author draws attention to the fact that the mentality and “culture” of cosmetic surgery, i.e. its exaggerated exaltation and sometimes evident manipulation, can endanger, redefine and dislocate the important values like beauty, health, corporeality, doctor patient relationship.

Ana Thea Filipović, *To discover and proclaim
the beauty of the Gospel – Aesthetic learning
in religious education and catechesis* 119–141
Original scientific paper

Summary

The article, on the basis of multidisciplinary knowledge and by original discourse, analyses and elaborates the area of aesthetic learning in religious education and catechesis. The Theme, which in religious pedagogy and catechetical in Croatian-speaking world has still been greatly unexplored and theoretically unlit, is presented in three steps wherein the bases of aesthetic learning in religious education and catechesis are detected and its dimensions, tasks, ways and scopes are presented. The first part presents aesthetic dimension of the contents and forms of Christian faith and also the meaning of the mentioned fact for religious education and catechesis as the education in the faith. The second part outlines the essential dimensions, components and tasks of

aesthetic education and learning in religious education and catechise with special reference to the encounters with art. The third part of the work shows, on the example and trial of the conception of performative religious education, how catechetical mediation of faith accepts the incentives of post-modern tendency of aestheticization of life, along the lines of establishing correlations between faith and the students' life, between faith and contemporary culture.

Nada Babić and Zrinka Jelaska, *Coming closer
to God revealing the language of poetry* 143–182
Review

Summary

In this work the authors analyze eleven selected Croatian poems in order to find in them the messages very close, sometimes identical, to evangelical messages. Not all the poems are directly religious. Thematically they are divided into five groups (language, search for God, God in nature, God in society, God's love). They have been selected by the aesthetic principle. In some of them the authors describe in more detail some linguistic and literary features that poets use in shaping their works of art, and also to show what it is that makes poetry, as a unique art form, so beautiful.