

THE MEANINGS OF CHRISTIAN SACRED IN THE MODERN PAINTING CULTURE

The article will try to cover the issues of the transformation of sacred expressions from the common Christian mystery (with an emphasis on painting material). The specificity of the establishment of the sacred as one of the ideological basis is demonstrated not only in the activity of ecclesiastical and religious institutions, but also in the works of contemporary artists, sometimes not directly related to church corporateness. The researcher points out that currently, sacredness is not only a religious phenomenon. Therefore, the issues that are in one way or another related to the sacred, reflect the key realities of the cultural phenomenon. The author takes into account the fact that the transformation of the key canons of art in Christianity is obvious and historically motivated. It is fuelled by the tendencies of the religious functioning in the secular-post-secular environment, as well as processes of informatization and globalization. The article analyzes the works of the leading artists and architects working in the sphere of Christian art and interprets the meanings of their artistic guidelines. Interdisciplinary coordination of Religious Studies, Philosophy of Religion, Cultural Studies, Aesthetics and Social Psychology is implemented in the research.

Keywords: Christianity, religion, culture, sacredness, art, profane, symbol.

Problem statement and relevance of the research. The sacred is the heart of any cultural tradition (and, of course, in Christianity). The sacred versatility covers both the denominational and non-denominational spheres of a person's worldview. Therefore, it can be considered in the theistic scope and the inspirational aspects can be theologically revealed, but it can also be interpreted as a category of worldview experience and humanitarian knowledge.

In addition, today there is a dual position in the Christianity. On the one hand, for more than a century, it has been influenced by the secularization peculiarities of the organization of society and the value sphere, and on the other hand, Christian culture has not only been in the past but also it remains an influential agent of socio-cultural dynamics.

And often art itself appears as an effective mediator between human religiosity and rhythms and the semantic intonations of modernity. In this article, the author aims to interpret contemporary artistic concepts of Christian art (and art that uses Christian sacral elements), to analyze the key trends in such concepts, as well as their value aspects.

Analysis of the recent research and publications. The investigation is particularly based on the use of the ideological potential of the classic works by E. Durkheim "The elementary forms of religious life", where the author depicts the social nature of the human, and the morality and religiosity as a way of understanding the world [4], as well as the investigation by M. Eliade on the origin of myth and its impact on culture [5]. Some ideas of the following authors have been considered in the research: in particular, those by S. Abramovich, who explores the aesthetics and artistic system of church art, as well as its ideological symbolism [1]; O. Brodetskyi, and his research of the phenomenon of ethical values in religions and their semantic interactions with art [2]; M. Kozlovska's ideas on the semantics of images and symbols in contemporary Ukrainian art (on the examples of compositions by D. Boliakov and B. Nehoda) [6]; the fundamental works by V. Pushkar on biblical themes in painting and their semantic meanings [9]; the monograph by M. Chikarkova, where the current issues related to the genesis and functioning of the fundamental foundations of the modern culture have been deeply considered through the spiritual, ethical, philosophical and aesthetic discourses [3]; the ideas of the dissertation by T. Yaroshovets on the aesthetic functioning of the sacred category in culture [10], and others.

Presenting main material. If we are talking about the Christianity, we must first and foremost distinguish between a Christian culture that has evolved itself within the Church (that is, art involved in worshiping and in ecclesiastical ordinance) and a culture that does not belong directly to church life, but uses the images and meanings of Christianity.

But even such an art is an element of religious culture. T. Yaroshovets rightly emphasizes that “the sacred belongs not only to a religion but also to an art, culture in general, it is always related to the ethical, aesthetic, ideological, political dimension of human being, and becomes a horizon for understanding cultural practices in the age of globalization as one of the interpretive measurements of the vision of human integrity, values of culture on the verge of their disappearance and reincarnation into another” [10, p. 3].

Sometimes, there is a one-sided belief that a contemporary art (even the one that focuses on certain Christian motives) is opposed to the deep spirit of Christianity. Undoubtedly, there is also the art that uses sacred symbols not to strengthen faith, but to profane or ridicule the values that are important to the faith. But such a line in the contemporary art is not common. This is just one of the trends. In both modern aesthetics and postmodern aesthetics, there are many benevolent attitudes toward religion. In addition, as O. Brodetsky emphasizes, “the more the religious traditions encourage the popularization not only of dogmatic things, but also of the art of this religion, the more opportunities there are in this tradition to crystallize and practically actualize the universal moral core of its doctrine, value synergy with a similar resource of other religions” [2, p. 95].

For example, according to the modern era, sacred architecture is also transformed. In general, this kind of aesthetic culture is a manifestation of the numinous, exalted, spiritual means of space, form, light, colour, time, image, word as archetypes of the Absolute.

Y. Kryvoruchko speaks of the preservation of sacredness in architecture, even when in the temples of antiquity “they no longer serve the cult” [7, p. 42], even more so when “we do not even know the cult itself, as in ancient civilizations” [7, p. 42]. Sacred architecture is very diverse, and even in earlier times it had inherent creative freedom and often openness to life search (because every new style in sacral architecture was the result of experiment, creative overcoming of the established).

And nowadays, sacred architecture is even more able to dispense elements of canon with the rise of imagination and creative experimentation. Therefore, the main challenge of the theory and aesthetics of temple-building is the adaptation to the sacred world of changing concepts about the aesthetics of the form and the size of the sense of space and rhythm itself inherent to the relevant epoch.

But the topic of contemporary transformations of sacred architecture is worth discussing in a separate study. Immediately, more attention will be given to the picturesque features of the evolution of Christian themes in art.

The Bible as “a shining example of organic unity in diversity” [9, p. 13] has always inspired artists of all ages to create masterpieces with sacred content. Therefore, in this way, the history of painting is a theological history. The History of Painting is a creative laboratory of theological interaction, overflowing with visual lessons and presentations of ideas that can supplement or deepen faith (or, conversely, attempt to make sense of its absence).

At the same time, artists are keenly aware of the need of something new, and their taste is responsive to the loss of relevance by something already fully understood or exhausted in art. Accordingly, they often take on the function of making appropriate changes in the field of depiction of the sacred. And the Bible does not cease to be a source of inspiration, because the importance of the life questions, discussed in it, is greatly confusing today. Artists of different genres and directions have addressed the Bible. Their attitude to the significance of religion may be different, but biblical motives are equally productive for the creativity of many of them. The resonances of religious pathos directly or indirectly affect some specimens of abstract art. For example, Malevich’s “Black Square” at the exhibition was placed in the corner, where they used to place icons at that time. V. Lychkovach writes that the purpose of contemporary art works, that use sacred subjects, is the opportunity “to experience the aesthetically-playing form of the modern metareligious experience through the mysterious synthesis of artistic and sacred attitude to the holy day” [8, p. 105]. In general, there are three types of the use of biblical subjects in contemporary painting: 1) direct religious art, 2) art that uses religious symbols to understand better what the artist wants to convey, and 3) anti-religious paintings that use the sacred to mock the religion.

Some adaptation of the biblical story to the trends and sensations of the respective eras is also available in the art of the classics. For example, Rembrandt managed to show the inner world of the

Baroque through the lens of biblical subjects. Both his works “The Descent from the Cross” and “Ahasveros and Haman at the Feast of Esther” show the inner integrity and spiritual grandeur and at the same time give the atmosphere not of some distant, legendary, «magic» era, but bring a sense of lively event for the artist’s contemporaries.

P. Bruegel, though deprived of his figures of individuality, has a certain mystery in his work, in this way expresses the existential specificity of experiences and actions. In his paintings, we encounter the Lord and Holy Mary, Christ and John the Baptist (for example, “The Adoration of the Kings”). M. Caravaggio portrayed the sorrows and sufferings of the saints (“Crucifixion of Saint Peter”, “The Entombment (Deposition)”) Also notable names are E. Gill, H. Matisse, J. Epstein, E. Fink, G. Sutherland. They all created for the church in their time. Also worthy of note are S. Spencer’s works “Christ carrying the cross” A. W. Bouguereau (“Innocence”, “Repentance”, “Charity (virtue)”). Also, we can find contemporary metamorphoses of sacral subjects in M. Chagall’s works. He created a series of works combined with biblical themes and lithographs for the Old Testament (“The Angel at the Gates of Paradise”, “Jeremiah”, “Solomon”, “Eve Incurs God’s Displeasure”, etc.). M. Chagall tried to interpret biblical images, holiness, and surrealism. S. Dali also did not neglect the images and biblical subject. “Cristo De San Juan De La Cruz” reflects the embodiment of metaphysical beauty in Jesus. Instead, the “The Sacrament of the Last Supper» embodies both dream and reality, and hope and doubt. Here God is depicted in three characters: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

I. Glazunov’s paintings are another type of work that should be considered. The work “The Return of the Prodigal Son” was created in 1978, which aroused interest and discussion among the public, because against the backdrop of the Soviet art at that time, the picture looked provocative. In this picture the author tried to take the person to a spiritual, religious-oriented primal. “The Raising of Lazarus” is a painting depicting Jesus as a protestor against a high-rise building and a church on fire. This is a clear example of the transformation of sacred art into a new channel - not at all anti-religious, but rather adapted to the needs of a modern man.

O. Roytburd, a Ukrainian artist, also conceived the biblical sacred meanings in his project *Roytburd vs Caravaggio*. The Bible is the main symbol of Caravaggio’s paintings. The artist referred to the paintings of Caravaggio because the archetypes in contemporary art are not enough, they can be found only in ancient art.

Researcher M. Kozlovska notes that the icon painter D. Boliakov, author of a series of images of angels, stated that this theme is eternal and inspiring for many artists. If you touch upon this topic, you feel that it is difficult to exhaust it to the end. “The paintings by B. Nehoda have a spiritual, associative and plastic connection with the creative works of D. Boliakov” [6, c. 549].

The paintings of both artists are a philosophical reflection on Christian history, however, presented through a romantic vision of the issue with elements of one’s imagination and the union of the symbolism of mythology borrowed from different cultural and historical contexts. D. Boliakov wants to create the works of the most desirable fantasy, in the synthesis of sensuality and love, in which a religious, all-powerful experience would be opened and the spirit would rise to the stars, where everything is kindness, to God, to heaven; where imagination can soar with joy to unknown and distant worlds, where everything is mystery and holiness. In paintings with angels, the spiritual problems of the artist find organic and plastic expression” [3, p. 549]. And the works “The Splash of Love in Affection” and “The Angel with the Dove” express the sacredness embodied through the philosophical and metaphorical vision of the innermost values of life.

Of course, in the contemporary art arena, many artists show a spotlight on sacredness in the traditional way and position themselves as Christian artists. In particular, it is F. Bissara-Fréreau, who works mainly with sculptures, as well as in the genre of painting and stained glass (for example, the work “The Legend of the Way”). These also include M. Boniface (“Foot Washing”), P. Koenig (“Good Shepherd Resurrection”), M. Masselter - an abstract artist struck by the murder of seven Trappist monks from the Notre Dame de l’Arilas Tihlas in 1996 by the Islamic terrorists (she included quotes from these monks in paintings (for example, “Pieta”). So is P. Medina: among the biblical stories he has written are: “The Burning Bush”, “The Annunciation”, “Christmas”, “Jesus with His Disciples”, “Crucifixion”

(several times), “Entombment of Jesus”, “Holy Spirit”. N. Rusetska is a Ukrainian painter, icon painter whose style is characterized by small, elongated figures.

There are even whole exhibitions dedicated to the comprehension of the sacred. For example, in the summer of 2008 in Paris, at the Pompidou Art Center, was an exhibition entitled “Traces of the Sacred: Relationships between Western Art and Spirituality of the Twentieth Century”. Among them, there were such names as F. De Goya, B. Nauman, C. Boltanski, C. D.Friedrich, E. Munch, D. Hirst, G. de Chirico, K. Malevich, P. Mondrian, M. Duchamp, A. Crowley, V. Kandinsky, A. Breton, A. Masson, S. Dali, M. Ernst, H. Matisse, A. Warhol and others. According to the organizers, these artists share one metaphysical anxiety - the anxiety of the collapse of the religious picture of the world. The attempt to find the non-material through the material idea of Malevich, the architectural utopia of the Bauhaus school, the love of archaism in Gauguin, and even the blasphemy of G. Bataille - are all imbued with the sacred. That is, this exhibition traces back to God through the traces of art.

Also, since 2013, an exhibition of sacral works in the form of installations, painting, sculpture, video art and performances has taken place in Lviv. In particular, the project carried out the implementation of “Electronic Mass”. And since 2010 there is a gallery of contemporary sacred art “Iconart” in Lviv, where there were works of O. Antoniuk, L. Skop, O. Kravchenko, S. Radkevych, P. Gumeniuk icons on the glass of O. Lozynsky and other artists.

That is, in the art world, on the one hand, we are dealing with a dictatorship of form which imposes by the modern mass taste, and on the other hand, with the autonomy of artistic expression. These two vectors are meticulously encountered in the depiction of sacredness.

Not always is Christian art covered directly. In particular, in 2016, at the Museum of Biblical Art an exhibition was held, where 44 artists were presented. In addition to the traditionally covered subjects, it had quite interesting works. For example, portraits of C. Huck and G. Wingate are about ordinary life things in the divine grace. And the mesh of book pages from pool design books, which were painted in gold, shows baptism in L. Aldrich’s vision. M. Fielding McCleary’s collage “The Allegory of Feelings” depicts a family – a father, a mother, a son and a dog, in the living room of a suburban home. At a distance, it looks like it was created in a realistic style, but close up it is made entirely of small pieces such as string, rope, glitter, foil, sticks, nails, glass and painted toothpicks.

This means that contemporary artists do not always paint icons or canonically reproduce Christian tradition in their works. Instead, they creatively use its elements to show their ideas. But even such paintings are often intended to bring into the experience of the viewer a spiritual force and a contemplative and semantic atmosphere. However, there are also quite debatable works with elements of the sacred. Observing them, we can wonder about the place of the boundary between freedom of creativity and blasphemy. Some contemporary artists dealing with Christian subjects do so in a burlesque or destructive way.

The reason is that any art has some value and purpose. For example, with the contemplation of an icon, everything is obvious, because, as S. Abramovych emphasizes, “it is not only an act of aesthetic admiration, although aesthetic values in Christian culture play an important role. The contemplation of the icon is, first of all, a prayer act in which the understanding of beauty goes into the understanding of the meaning of beauty, and in this process the inner man grows and the outer diminishes” [1, p. 85]. And what emotions do samples of the contemporary art cause? Surely not as described by S. Abramovich. A certain guide in understanding the motivation behind the creators of such art may be M. Eliade’s thought. He argued that, regardless of the historical context in which homo religiosus resides, he or she believes that there is a sacred that not only rises above the world but also manifests in it and makes it real. The main difference from a non-religious person is that he or she denies the sublime and it happens so, that he even doubts the sense of existence. The person considers himself “the sole subject and object of history and denies any return to the Almighty” [5, p.125]. However, it should be understood that not always does a non-religiosity lead to ridicule the religious values of believers. Much depends on the individual preferences of a particular artist, and whether or not a believer is just one of the set of factors that influences the content of his her art.

To summarize, we note the following. As M. Chikarkova reasonably mentions, “culture always develops between two poles, they are – sacralization and secularization, therefore they will both be present forever in any era and in any society” [3, p. 52]. The modern society is pluralistic, and various worldviews coexist in it. Moreover, even one and the same worldview is often pluralised in the forms of expression, depending on the way particular individuals and communities who choose these forms see the world and themselves in it. This concerns the art in its entirety, in particular, religious subjects. Therefore, the interpretation of the sacred Christian meanings by the artists of today is not always aimed at demonstrating and supporting Christian canonicity in its traditional forms. Nevertheless, such art still raises the cultural and communication potential of Christianity today. Owing to the individuality of an author’s fantasy, it brings into the aesthetic space of the present an attention to religious topics, and therefore, for religious studies such art is the subject of analysis and covers a religious topic to the interesting sphere of anthropology and social psychology.

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