
**ARGUMENTS FOR A COURSE ON ECCLESIASTICAL
CULTURAL PATRIMONY CONSERVATION
(PRESERVATION) IN THE
FACULTIES OF THEOLOGY**

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Abstract

The impressive list of worship objects but also of cultural patrimony objects produced by the church during the time gave birth to a distinct discipline of art, namely, the sacred art, also named religious art, ecclesiastical art or church art. The tradition of keeping the ecclesiastical cultural properties does never stopped. Its continuity is proved by both very numerous factual proofs and the community mentality. It is a glad and full of hope fact that the tradition of keeping the ecclesiastical cultural properties is protected and continued by both the cleric and the lay Christian believers. As a result, this patrimony continues to exist and enrich. Any measures of good management of this patrimony – like the keeping, protection, use, restoration, embellishment, works for increasing the comfort in the inner space of the church as well as the measure for the protection of the mobile cultural properties of the church – are carried out under the priest coordinating and especially under the parish clerks control who have the main management responsibilities of a parish. This is the reason that the author dares to believe that besides the specific programs of education existing for sacred art specialty it would be useful also the including in the pastoral education plan of a course entitled ‘Conservation (Preservation) management of the ecclesiastical cultural properties’.

Keywords: ecclesiastical cultural properties conservation, ecclesiastical cultural properties management, pastoral education plan, sacred art

1. Introduction

The ecclesiastical cultural properties – both the ones being in service and the inherited ones from the past – are rich and varied. In addition, this patrimony has an impressive material and spiritual beauty.

As a professional in the field of cultural property conservation and restoration and as a professor of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology ‘Patriarch

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Justinian' in Bucharest, the author has had many occasions to admire the richness, diversity, material and spiritual beauty of the ecclesiastical objects than he has seen.

The impressive list of worship objects but also of cultural patrimony objects produced by the church during the time becomes, at least partially, conspicuous in the dictionaries of religious kind [1]. Such a treasure gave birth to a distinct discipline of art, namely, the sacred art, also named religious art, ecclesiastical art or church art, in the frame of which there are wonderful creations from the most various fields of human activities: architecture, sculpture, painting, writing and print, music, metalwork, embroidery and fabric, etc. All these creations are visible in monuments, sites and mobile cultural patrimony collections the beauty of which one speaks in many art studies [2, 3].

The monuments of ecclesiastical art includes, as a rule, the churches that have been present, since the very beginning of the time, in the middle of the human communities: wooden churches or stone churches and churches made of other building materials. Beside the churches, there are also other kinds of religious monuments. Just on the common roads of our country, in the crossroads were settled a lot of memorial crosses of wood, stone or metal, beautifully worked, sculptured, carved or painted.

The sites include monumental groups of buildings such as the monasteries, Christian archaeological areas and historical cemeteries where the funeral works are created, in many cases, with a remarkable artistic craftsmanship.

The mobile cultural patrimony include worship objects that are the most numerous ones: icons, liturgical and Christian education books, sacred coverings and garments, crucifixes, church flags, liturgical vessels, votive lights, candlesticks and chandeliers, bells, church furniture, etc.

The Christian believers keep also in their homes a lot of other objects of ecclesiastical cultural patrimony: icons, books, candlesticks and votive lights. It is enough to mention, by its large area of existence, that exceptional form of creation, which is represented by the art of glass icons [4].

The tradition of keeping the ecclesiastical cultural properties does never stopped. Its continuity is proved by both very numerous factual proofs and the community mentality. The factual proofs are the best illustrated by the numberless and splendid objects that comes from the past centuries. On the other hand, the community mentality regarding the respect to the saint dwelling and the church sacred objects is so intensive that the Romanian people try a deep feeling of real ceremony when they go into a church.

It is a glad and full of hope fact that the tradition of keeping the ecclesiastical cultural properties is protected and continued by both the cleric and the lay Christian believers. As a result, this patrimony continues to exist and enrich. New churches are built in many places of our cities and villages and their architecture and endowment are rigorously according to religious and artistic needs.

The history caused also some discontinuances and troubles regarding the keeping of ecclesiastical cultural properties. We remember, unfortunately, the communist politics of demolishing the churches, some of them being registered as historical monuments, as it was the case of the Văcărești Monastery in Bucharest [5].

We must recognize that also today there are some monuments, which need repairs and restoration or repainting. On the other hand, some churches, new or old, were injured in an unacceptable manner because of a wrong positioning of light, heating or climate equipments.

There are also a lot of mobile cultural objects that ended their function of current use and passed to the new and important function as historical proofs of the continuity of the Christian faith, the long Christian tradition and the deep artistic feeling of their ancestor producers.

Any measures of good management – like the keeping, protection, use, restoration, embellishment, works for increasing the comfort in the inner space of the church as well as the measure for the protection of the mobile cultural properties of the church – are carried out under the priest coordinating and especially under the parish clerks control who have the main management responsibilities of a parish. The priests are indeed the proper managers of the ecclesiastical cultural properties and on their managerial performance depends the fate of this patrimony. This is the reason that the author dares to believe that besides the specific programs of education existing for sacred art specialty it would be useful also the including in the pastoral education plan of a course entitled **Conservation (Preservation) management of the ecclesiastical cultural properties**. It is important to insist on the management character of the course to exclude any misunderstanding of the proposal. This course would come to use the traditions of specific religious literature, the legal and professional experience in each country and the technical publications of the international independent, non-governmental organizations specialized in the field of cultural properties protection. By transmitting such information to the students in theology it may be useful for a future more efficient control and coordination of the specific protection, conservation and restoration of objects and monuments of major interest for the tradition and for the history of the church.

The characteristic and the size of the course will be in accordance with the real possibilities of the education plan and it would be enough a semester for this purpose. Such a course, oriented exclusively on management and substantiation of this activity, must contain some absolutely necessary themes that we will shortly present.

2. Conservation (Preservation) management of the ecclesiastical cultural properties

2.1. National and international legislation and norms regarding the protection and conservation of religious art

The necessity of such a theme is determined by understanding the legal frame that regulates from the juridical, ethical and professional point of view all the protection activities of the cultural properties.

The national legislation and the decisions of the Romanian Orthodox Church settle the juridical aspects of the responsibility for protection of the cultural properties. For this there is a set of laws that regulates the system of evidence, description, protection and conservation of cultural properties but not affecting anyway the rights of legal owners [6-10].

The international organizations specialized in the field of the cultural patrimony protection solve the aspects of professional and ethical order. The main international organizations specialized in the field of the cultural patrimony protection are: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), International Council of Museums (ICOM), International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), International Council on Archives (ICA), International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS), International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC), International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).

These organizations are prevalingly interested in elaboration, developing and generalization of the principles, methodologies and standards concerning the protection and keeping of the patrimony by specific activities of conservation and restoration. To give only one example, the recent '*ICOMOS Principles for the preservation and conservation/restoration of wall paintings*' (2003) is of the greatest interest for both the artist-restorers of all paintings and for the owners of the monuments to be protected.

Some of these organizations established special sections of religious interest. So it is the case of the International Council on Archives that have a '*Section for Archives of Churches and Religious Denominations*' having religious institutions as members. This Section publishes a bulletin entitled '*Religious Archives: Newsletter of ICA Section of Churches and Religious Denominations*'.

2.2. Aetiology of monument and cultural objects deterioration

The theme is intended to reveal technical aspects and material structure, building or execution systems which could help to a properly understanding of these cultural goods and to list the main factors of risk and the real conjuncture of their appearance and destructive action. By this opportunity it will be revealed the sensibilities to degradation of the structural materials of cultural monuments

and objects and it will specify the common measures and activities to prevent the degradation of the patrimony.

2.3. Modern strategy for preserving the cultural properties: content and implementation

Any program of conservation starts with a rigorous evidence of the patrimony objects. For the most cases such evidences involves a rigorous technical description to undoubtedly establish the object identity [11]. For the monuments and sites is necessary also illustrative documentation and architectural plans. These evidences will help the general management of the problems regarding the keeping and preservation of cultural properties and the scientific substantiation of the restoration work and treatments.

2.4. Organization and function of the eparchy museum

In the frame of this theme it will be concentrated the general knowledge of museology that will assure the competent preservation of the historical collections and the public access to them in the eparchy museums.

2.5. Organization and function of the cabinet for old ecclesiastical cultural books

The theme will include knowledge of library management and preservation for special protection of the old ecclesiastical books that became objects of cultural properties. The Cabinet of old books is conceived as a separate and distinct part inside the existing church libraries.

2.6. Organization and function of the eparchy archive

In respect of keeping the church records and documents is necessary knowledge of archivistics, especially on the document processing, evidence and preservation.

2.7. Protection, saving and recovery of the cultural properties in disaster time

The disaster events are not a novelty for our country. They may be caused by natural or social factors. These events are the earthquakes, floods, land sliding, fires, explosions and social troubles with destructive effects, etc.

Besides the human sufferings, such events affect also the material and cultural properties, including the church patrimony. The action of protection, saving and recovery of the cultural properties before, during of after disaster needs special knowledge of both conservation and cooperation with the state authorities that command the civil protection programs which include also the recovery of the local cultural properties. It will be also taken into consideration

the international norms and recommendations and the experience obtained by the International Committee of the Blue Shield [12]. This international committee has a similar function to the International Red Cross but its competences are limited only on protection of cultural property during the war, violent events and disaster time.

2.8. Ethics of cultural properties restoration

The problems of restoring the cultural properties objects are the subject of a distinct discipline. It is, however, useful that the owners of the objects to know the general principles of this activity because there were many unhappy cases when the restoration did not protected in a proper way the cultural monuments or objects. As a result, the contract for a restoration treatment on a church monument or object must include all the clauses and stipulations that will be referential points for supervising and reception of works. In this respect the restorer has not a full liberty of creation but he is obliged to save the genuine cultural object on which he acts. In this way the restorer, including the art restorer, has many technical and ethical restrictions for the solving of which are necessary time and resources. If the beneficiary of the restoration work has general knowledge on the restoration principles he will understand such a reality and he will watch the process of restoration to prevent any trouble.

3. Conclusions

The Christian church has a very rich and varied cultural patrimony that impresses anyone by material and spiritual beauty. The interest of protecting these important ecclesiastical cultural properties is evident and generally accepted. Such a task is, normally, in charge of the priests. There are, however, little possibilities to manage such a protection program without general knowledge on cultural properties management, especially on conservation management. This is the reason of a distinct course of conservation in the frame of the pastoral education plan. The proposed course would contain: conservation legislation, aetiology of deterioration, modern strategy for protection, eparchy museum management, old book collection management, eparchy old archive management, disaster management, ethics of restoration.

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