
ART AS A MEETING POINT OF THE SECULAR AND THE SACRED

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Abstract

Currently, art and religion, in contrast to Science, are conceptualised as imaginative forms of comprehension of being. Inclination towards aesthetic experience is perceived as an innate property that ensures a person's spiritual existence. There are two views of the definition of art. In accordance with the first one, art means an artistic way of satisfying the individual's needs, his formation and development, corresponding to cultural anthropology and humanism canons. The second view of art is based on religious and spiritual values and meaning. Despite the dual understanding of art: secular, humanistic and spiritual-religious, they are not adverse, since in the first case art expresses the area of a person's initial interests, and in the second - the ultimate interest that determines our existence or non-existence. At the same time, the Divine Spirit can also manifest itself through objects of art that are not related to a religious theme. The purpose of the article is to present Christian art in the context of modern culture.

Keywords: culture, religion, art, aesthetics

1. Aesthetics of art in the context of Christian religion

In our time, art and religion, as opposed to Science, are conceptualised as imaginative forms of comprehension of existence, and the tendency to aesthetic experience - as an innate property that ensures human spiritual existence [1].

At the same time, aesthetics should be understood as the science of non-utilitarian subject-object relations. As a result, in the process of concrete sensory perception of a special class of objects or their creation, the subject achieves a state of absolute personal freedom and fullness of being. This process is accompanied by spiritual pleasure, raising one's Self to complete harmony with the Universe [2]. The essential basis of the aesthetic goes beyond spiritual

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pleasure as a psychological characteristic and is associated with a value attitude towards an object that has an a priori basis [3, 4].

There are two interpretations of the definition of art. One interprets art as an artistic way of satisfying the individual's needs, his formation and development in accordance with the canons of cultural anthropology and humanism. The other is more characteristic to the Russian artistic and philosophical mentality, in which art is based on religious and spiritual values and meaning. In accordance with the latter, art is a universal way of specific sense expression of aesthetic, non-verbalised spiritual experience. Along with religion, it is one of the culture essential components as a creative and productive human spiritual and practical activity. In the 19th and 20th centuries, art went beyond the aesthetic sphere, which is associated with the emergence of photography, cinema, design, television, video clips, advertising, various shows, computer and network art projects, and Internet art. However, it should be considered as one of the central objects of aesthetics as a science. 'Art' continues to constitute a number of main categories of aesthetics, along with 'aesthetic' [5] and 'artistic' [6]. At the same time, 'artistry' as a category should be considered the only art authenticity essential principle and criterion. It will remain so until humanity finally loses the ability for aesthetic experience and aesthetic perception of the world. The artwork artistry includes categories of the beautiful and sublime [7]. Moreover, a work of art can be very multifaceted and have not only artistic, but also political, social-critical, narrative, representative, and religious content. The artistic content of art is fundamentally inexpressible in verbal form, in contrast to non-artistic elements. It is a spiritual, non-rationalised phenomenon of a meeting with the unconditional, in which the recipient perceives an event of indescribable fullness of being, surpassing any given [8]. Despite the dual understanding of art: secular, humanistic and spiritual-religious, they are not adverse, since in the first case art expresses the area of a person's basic interests, and in the second - the ultimate interest that determines our existence or non-existence. At the same time, the Divine Spirit can also manifest itself through objects of art that are not related to a religious theme [9]. The purpose of this work is to present a view of Christian art from the perspective of modern culture.

2. Religious symbolism and the experience of the unconditional

In religious symbolism, the visible world is a symbol of the invisible one, and the Christian city and the temple of God are a symbol of the Kingdom of heaven [10]. Religious symbols are born in the depths of the human psyche, responsible for religious feelings. However, they do not appear by themselves, only upon contact with the outside world from a sense of unconditionality that surpasses everything that exists, and a person receives confidence in their reliability and significance. The symbol becomes a necessity to express the absolute, since in nature everything is conditioned and finite. The absolute is always mysterious, since it exceeds the limits of the ability to imagine any

conceivability. In addition, there is a distinction between believing in the supersensible and experiencing it, between having an idea of the absolute and seeing, hearing and feeling its presence and power. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between a sense of the unconditional and the possession of 'religious concern' or 'ultimate interest' as an abstract expression of the great commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Mark 12.30) [9, p. 19-22]. Phenomena and objects of the world around us can become conductors and then symbols of the absolute, which the human spirit perceives as sacred.

Recognition of the sacred underlies the emergence of religion and the aesthetics of the religious [11]. This is confirmed by the fact that Christianity as a religion appeared precisely when the Apostle Peter recognised God in Jesus, saying "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16.16). In this case, Peter's recognition of Christ would have been impossible if Peter had not such an ability. From this point of view, we should talk about a 'religious a priori', which is the divine objective action in the human spirit and the knowledge of God and through God [12].

This idea is contained in the words of Jesus, when He answers Peter, who recognised Him, "... the flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in Heaven" (Matthew 16.17). The human spirit can perceive the Divine Spirit if the person himself is not in conflict with it. But the criterion of any reliable religious experience within the Church is only the confirmation of the historical fact, which the apostles were the first to recognize: "...Jesus is the Christ, the son of God..." (John 20.31). Otherwise, religion would have remained an exclusively human event, or the revelation received in mystical experience would have lost its finality [9, p. 160-177].

In aesthetics as the science of beauty, a special section of 'theoaesthetics' should be distinguished. The beauty of the sacred is not only the beauty of the sublime and perfect, but also beauty as a call [13]. These statements are confirmed by the words of the Saviour: "Be ye therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5.48). The beauty of the sacred is perceived in a state of human spirit capture by the divine Spirit, that is, in a state of ecstasy. Ecstasy is often called 'inspiration'. To be in a state of inspiration means to have creativity, to be captured by an idea or to achieve an understanding of something through a sudden intuition impulse [9, vol. 3, p. 128-135]. Or as R. Otto describes the experience of the human spirit being captured by the divine Spirit: "This moment's experience...activates the human soul, causes 'zeal', fills it with extraordinary tension and dynamics. It does not matter whether we are talking about asceticism, 'jealousy' against the world and the flesh, or heroic deeds in which agitation bursts outward." [11, p. 23-24] The beauty of the divine has all the qualities of the numinous and accordingly arouses ambivalent feelings. These are *mysterium tremendum* (mystical horror), *majestas* (omnipotence), *energicum* (energy, ecstasy, inspiration), *mysterium* (mystery, completely different), *fascinans* (admiration) and *sanctum* (numinous value) [11, p. 23-24]. Negative emotions of the inexhaustible abyss horror

(mysterium tremendum) are overcome by positive emotions of admiration and inspiration by the beautiful and mysterious (mysterium fascinosum) [9, p. 136-140]. The beauty or aesthetics of the divine can be expressed in various creations of human culture. In the Christian religion, the feeling of beauty is associated with the aesthetic function of consciousness and is perceived as a call, in response to which we become ourselves [13]. Perhaps this is due to the fact that in apostolic times, when the formation of the Christian worldview was taking place, the official language was Greek, and in Greek 'beauty' and 'call' are words of the same root - καλέω ('to call') and τό καλόν ('beauty'). That is, beauty is such a call, in response to which I live my life as real. It is important for a person to hear this call addressed to him. And this always comes through the experience of vulnerability and prayer [13]. Religion and art need each other. Art - to universalise its concepts, expand moral content, and religion - to be expressive, be heard, give pleasure, symbolically represent the truth of Revelation, strengthen imagination and ignite determination (by means of symbols, iconography, sacraments, rituals, music and architecture) through religious experience [14]. Religion and art make their own independent and special contribution to human culture, which does not prevent them from helping or complementing each other [15].

3. Church and Christian art - canon boundaries and possibilities of interaction

Canon, or canonicity in church art, is the correspondence of a particular work of art or architecture to its theological idea, within the framework of the kerygma and the existing Church tradition. Thus, stylistic rules themselves, including iconography, are derived from Theology and are rather associated with tradition, which can change, in contrast to unchanging doctrinal truths [16]. Any culture creates a certain canon or fashion. A similar canon is typical for the Church. In the Church tradition there are regulations on the norms that should be used in Church architecture, fine arts and the art of small forms (dogmatic and canonical) [17]. Thus, the Chalcedon Council determined that in the single Person of Christ the Saviour two natures coexist - Divine and human, 'unmerged and indivisible, immutable and inseverable'. Thus, the Church, whose head is Christ, is itself a consequence of the Incarnation and has a divine-human character. And in Church architecture, sacred images symbolically (from the Greek word 'symbol' - 'connection') express the connection between the divine, heavenly sphere, and the human, earthly one. The Seventh Ecumenical Council's definition indicates that sacred images are evidence of the truth of the Incarnation, comparing them in importance with the Cross and the Gospel. It tells us that properly created in various materials, they can constantly be found in churches, at crossroads, streets and other places representing Christ, the Virgin, angels and saints. Thus, the Church, whose head is Christ, itself testifies that the more often icons become our contemplation object, the more people looking at these icons are ready to remember the prototypes themselves,

acquiring more love, veneration, worship (proskynesis) and receiving more incentives to kiss them. However, true service (latría), according to our faith, befits only the divine nature [18]. The Trullo Council's definitions, which opened on September 1, 691, contain prohibitory rules for images of the sacred, included in the VI Ecumenical Council canons. Thus, rule 73 does not allow the cross image on the floor so that it does not get trampled underfoot. Rule 82 proposes to move away from the Saviour's allegorical image in the form of a Lamb, rule 100 is directed against pagan motifs in art and requires excluding sensuality from images. Icon painting canons prescribe that icons should not be naturalistic, not appeal to the carnal or sensual in man, not cause exaltation and not have illusionistic properties. Church councils draw attention to the fact that icons must be painted without distorting the doctrine and without corrupting the mind. But they do not give any instructions on how exactly this should be done.

The canonical tradition of church art, that includes icon painting, architecture and hymn singing, is represented by Church tradition expressed in these works [19]. The canon is a 'meta-speech' designed to embody the invisible in the visible and formed as a result of the gradual consolidation and reproduction of successful artistic techniques [20]. One part of this symbolic language expresses unshakable dogmatic truths, and the other - a changeable tradition.

The temple is a place of harmonious combination of various types of arts (architecture, sculpture, singing, icon painting, homiletics, common prayer) [21]. In the cultural life of Christians during new and contemporary history, religious non-temple art began to play a significant role, in which the variety of styles and expressions of reality could be wider than in the Church. The basis for its appearance was Church art secularisation. The emergence of religious non-temple art is associated with an attempt to bridge the gap between the world and the Church in the desire to develop a way to comprehend the mystery of Revelation by people of the new era [22], when previous symbols begin to lose their mystical power. Works of such Christian art are not part of the Church art canonical understanding. However, if such art symbolically reveals the heavenly world to our earthly world, in the future it may become canonical, i.e. temple art. This is possible if its symbolism becomes a conductor of Revelation, the word of God for believers, just as the Renaissance and Baroque style, which appeared in a secular environment, gradually took over the church space [20, 23]. Living evidence of this is M. Vrubel's sketches, V. Vasnetsov and M. Nesterov's paintings for the Vladimir Cathedral, in which there was a synthesis of Art Nouveau, the traditions of Old Russian, Byzantine and Renaissance art [24]. On the other hand, intra-temple art, moving into the secular culture area, becoming the civil society property, gives them a transcendental meaning, sanctifying the world [25].

4. The truth of art and the aesthetics of the divine

The concept of art from the modernity perspective seems quite broad. At the same time, artistic creativity is a syncretism of cognitive, value-oriented (aesthetic), imaginative-creative (synergetic), communicative (communication) activity [26]. The arts themselves are classified into fine (for example, painting, sculpture, literature, theatre) and non-fine art (for example, music, architecture) [27]. If each type of art aims to express a certain truth or aesthetic form authenticity [28], then Christian art is called upon to express the authenticity of a personal encounter with God. Christian art is a trace of the Church's presence in the world and one of the forms of its testimony about the truth of the Incarnation, the authenticity of life in Christ of the family of His disciples adopted in Him to God [29]. We can talk about the authenticity of a thing if it agrees with our idea of what it should be. Thus, truth as the authenticity of an artistic creation is determined by its ability to reflect the truth of existence. In it, it acquires its primeval meaning, pointing to the essence of the universal [30].

A work of art, like a ray, illuminates a certain ontological truth that existed before this work appearance, revealing the hidden. Therefore, the ontological interpretation of truth leads to understanding that it is not the truth that precedes the work of art, but the work of art that precedes the truth, revealing it. Truth in art should be considered as a process, not a state, because artistry, with all its other qualities, manifests itself in dynamics, openness, and not in statics. The latter is rather a sign of pseudo-creativity based on the pattern constancy [31]. The truth of art is learned not in establishing a certain amount of knowledge, which is characteristic of the scientific approach, but in moving after the ever-elusive unknown, after the 'hiddenness' in which the truth is revealed. A work of art, being an 'openness' (space, place), makes the 'discovery' (process) of truth possible, which is not so much the discovery of some objective knowledge, but rather the discovery by man of himself as a being. This process is truly mysterious due to its subjectness, subjectivity and unpredictability of choice. It is through the creation of a work of art that a person discovers himself as truth. This, in turn, requires the openness of the person himself as a creator [30, 31].

Symbolisation in art is an aesthetic principle that determines the aesthetic quality of a work of art and its artistry. Symbolisation is understood as a dialogical process of 'creativity - perception - co-creation', the artistic symbol being at its centre. The deep meaning of the symbolised (metaphysical reality) 'shines through', which itself acquires full actualisation only in the artistic symbol. In the act of symbolisation, the world aesthetic authenticity is revealed, its rigidity is overcome, and it appears before the artist, and then the recipient, in pristine beauty and harmony [32]. In P. Florensky's specific hierarchical classification artistic creativity symbols occupy a position between the lower symbols of dreams and the higher symbols of worship, in which various types of arts are synthesised: architecture, decorative and applied arts, literature and music. P. Florensky considers the icon to be the highest form of art, which is

designed to remind people of the 'heavenly prototype'. An icon is a speculation, a schema of the supersensible accessible to the senses - a spiritual reality. A person, contemplating an icon, does not recognise, but remembers the true nature of existence and his spiritual origin [33]. The Christian symbol seems to be the Divine reality embodiment in the earthly world. The symbol, like a sunbeam, permeates all planes of existence and all spheres of consciousness, signifying the highest essences in them [34]. In this regard, religious symbolism underlies the Divine aesthetics, and the symbolic nature of art is a guide to God and points to other higher beings. At the same time, church art contains various Christian symbols adopted by the Fathers of the Church [35]. For example, the dove symbolises the Holy Spirit, the seed - the Word of God, the Sun - God himself, the sky - the kingdom of invisible spiritual realities, the cross - a symbol of Salvation, the tree - a symbol of the Resurrection, the phoenix, the peacock - symbols of Eternal Life [36, 37].

Christian art uses additional symbolism that goes beyond the canonical framework, whose aesthetics can allow the recipient to feel the presence of God. So, for example, in F.M. Dostoevsky's works Christian symbolism became his artistic thinking basis and is uniquely presented. Dostoevsky the artist is focused on the inner world of man in God's presence. And here the Christian symbols' poetics is combined with the one in realism, characteristic of the 19th century. In Dostoevsky's world, place and setting are mystically connected with the characters. This is not a neutral space, but spiritual symbols. Dostoevsky deprives the world of things and the natural world of independence; it is completely humanised and spiritualised. The environment reflected in consciousness is its function. The room where a person lives is a picture of his soul, when the world is perceived as Sophia's (Divine Wisdom) 'objectification of subjective experiences' refracted in a person's thinking [38]. So, in 'Notes from Underground' F.M. Dostoevsky shows a man of dead faith, only consisting of mental conviction. Faith without works is dead, and works are the expression of faith. Entering the circle of interdependent faith and deeds presupposes spiritual work of prayer and repentance. The novella shows that the 'underground man', when spiritual effort is required of him, refuses to make it. Living faith is impossible without selflessness, sacrificial love, but the 'underground man' always seeks his own - pleasure and profit. Faith is the door to God, which gradually opens to those who purify themselves by repentance. The latter is the awareness of one's fall and need for the Redeemer. The main character, after realising his fall, when the time comes to repent, constantly makes excuses: "It turns out that the main thing, no matter how much you rack your brains, is that I am always the first to blame for everything and, what is most insulting, I am guilty without guilt and, so to speak, according to the laws of Nature." [39] "I didn't just say this to justify myself... But no! Lie! I just wanted to justify myself." [39, p. 127] A person of living faith does not live on his own, but as one who borrows the fullness of life from God. At the same time, relying solely on one's own reason gives rise to pride, a desire for primacy, which is what we see in the 'underground man': "I once had a friend. But I was

already a despot at heart; I wanted to have unlimited power over his soul...” [39, p. 140]. Such faith without reliance on God is a form of unbelief. It is no coincidence that the biblical figure ‘forty years’ is repeated many times in the story and acquires a symbolic meaning: “There are forty years of underground here” [39, p. 115]; “he is able to sit silently underground for forty years” [39, p. 121]; “I wish I could put you underground for forty years” [39, p. 121]; “I was there for forty years in a row listening to these words of yours through a crack.” [39, p. 122] From the Bible we know that the forty years of Jews “wandering became a punishment for their unbelief” (Numbers 14.34). Closed contemplation forms a cage from which the protagonist seeks a way out, feeling his painful state of despair [40]. That is why the story begins with the words of the ‘underground man’: “I am a sick man... I am an evil man. I’m not an attractive person. There is something wrong with my liver. However, I don’t understand a damn thing about my illness and I don’t know for sure what hurts ...” [39, p. 99] At the end of the first part, the spiritual thirst motive appears: “I’m lying, because I myself know, like twice two, that it’s not at all the underground that’s better, but something else, something completely different, which I thirst for, but which I can’t find” [39, p. 102]. Accordingly, the leading motive of the second part is the motive of moisture, water, which is reflected in its title ‘About the wet snow’. In the ‘underground man’ and Lisa, in their relationship, the spiritual meaning of the Gospel story of the Samaritan woman is revealed. The Saviour asks the Samaritan woman for water and offers her different water: “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4.13-14). In the brothel, the main character of Dostoevsky’s ‘Notes from Underground’ preaches Christian family life ideals. He says that love is the secret of God, that it is the true meaning, joy and happiness. Lisa believes the sermon, her heart is reborn to new life. Therefore, she comes to the underground man. The scene when he asks Lisa for water is symbolic. She gives it to him, like the Samaritan Photina, and becomes a conductor of the Divine Presence for the ‘underground man’. Thus, the ‘man from the underground’ appeared for Lisa as a conductor of the Spiritual Presence, and Lisa appeared as a conductor of the Divine Presence for the ‘man from the underground.’ They are justified and sanctified by the power of the Divine Light and both take the path of salvation [39, p. 172-178]. In his work F.M. Dostoevsky shows that behind ordinary consciousness there is a mysterious centre of personality, which is accessible only to living faith. This world is often closed from the autonomous mind of modern man and is expressed in it not directly, but symbolically. ‘Notes from Underground’ shows the inner world of a person who knows no support in life other than consciousness or reason. At the same time, they are not something self-sufficient that can give meaning to life. They depend on the life of the heart, in the depths of which, mostly secretly from consciousness, a person enters into communication with God and knows Him, not rationally, but spiritually. The nature of these relationships forms the content inspired by the Divine Spirit,

shown by F.M. Dostoevsky in 'Notes from Underground' [41], enlightened by the fact that there is light in which there is no darkness (1 John 1.5).

5. The role of creativity and art in recovery and salvation

Beingness is the Creator's imaginative act. If everything in existence were pre-eternally given, then the very idea of creativity could not exist. After all, art is creating something new and unprecedented. Such an act does not occur as a result of the creator's power decrease, in accordance with the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, and its transition to another quality, but from nothing. And every imaginative art is making something from nothing, from non-existence. In every creative act there is absolute growth. Since there is a Creator who produced the world and continues to do it, there is also Genesis capable of creativity [42].

Creativeness in the world is associated with God's guiding creativity and salvation. Due to the fact that God directs the processes of all existence forms to their implementation in the Kingdom of God, creative activity, despite its ambiguity, is a necessary condition in building the Kingdom of God on Earth [9, p. 188-189]. "... The Kingdom of God will come from human freedom, from human creative activity." [43] If creatorship means 'bringing something new into existence', then a person is constructive in all aspects - in relation to himself and his world, to being and meaning. But he has this ability only thanks to God. God is creative originally and essentially; man is creative secondarily and existentially [9, p. 295-316]. If any being is capable of self-making, then only a human is capable of reaching the pinnacle of the imaginative art, which is a combination of truth and beauty, which is impossible outside the spiritual sphere [9, vol. 3, p. 66-71]. However, perfect truth and beauty are missing in the world. They are the essence of what belongs to God, and only by grace can man have an idea of them. As Saint Gregory Palamas wrote, "God is excellent Beauty, and our mind, made in the image of the Best, naturally tends toward this Primordial Beauty. It, like a mirror, reflects this beauty, and the result is relationship of true beauty. The mind, made as the image of the Beautiful, can itself be beautiful, but it can also, like a distorting mirror, reflect this beauty crookedly, hideously, and thus produce evil." [44] Man ambiguously perceives manifestations of divine beauty and truth in the world. He, participating in history, also participates in the construction of the Kingdom of God and moves towards self-fulfilment in this kingdom, revealing his potential. Undoubtedly, this would be impossible without the imaginative act and without art as the highest manifestation of creativity. Thus, creative endeavour is aimed at comprehending beauty and truth through unity with God. Moreover, only through unity with God, being-in-God, is it possible to heal both human nature and the world, which must be completed at the end of history. Everything that a human does for unity with God and for His glory is done by God himself. After all, God lacks nothing. In creating the world, God is the sole cause of the glory he desires to provide through His creature. However, on the contrary, through the praise of divine greatness, man

also participates in the Glory of the Lord. That is why the praise of God plays such a decisive role in all forms of temple art [9, p. 316-340]. On that basis, creativity, art and religion become interconnected spheres of the human spirit activity, aimed at unity with God and glorifying the Creator

6. Conclusions

Nowadays, there are two views of the nature of art. According to the first one, art is an artistic way of satisfying the needs, formation and development of personality in accordance with the canons of cultural anthropology and humanism. The second view sees in art religious and spiritual value, meaning and a special way of comprehending the truth. A special place in culture belongs to Christian art, which is impossible in isolation from the transcendental function of human consciousness, which opens the door to the world of the sacred. The sphere of Christian art is inspired and comprehended in contact with the ultimate, which is at the basis of being and expresses it in the New Testament's symbols. Nevertheless, the transcendent, which is the basis of the human spirit religious function, needs adequate expression in order to be perceived by public consciousness. Here, religious and secular art can intersect and even penetrate each other over time: religious symbols can appear in secular masters' works of art, and new styles of art can take over the interior space of the temple. All this testifies to the presence of the Kingdom of God both in the Church and in the world, moving towards salvation when God is in all things (1 Corinthians 15.28). Then art, as a human spirit cultural manifestation, will be united with divine self-manifestation, in which every truth is fulfilled and every aesthetic expression becomes reality. "For there is nothing that has not been made manifest, nor is there anything hidden that has not been made known and revealed." (Luke 8.17)

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