

EXCHANGE OF VALUES IN CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE IN POLAND SYMBOL IN THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

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Summary. Poland is situated in the area of cultural and religious borderland, in the sphere of Latin and Greek-Slavonic influence. The Author reviews the past and present examples of the exchange of values in the Christian Churches, i.e. the Eastern (Orthodox and Uniate) and the Western (Roman Catholic and Protestant). They are portrayed through mutual conversion of temples, incorporation of traditional orthodox iconography in contemporary Roman Catholic churches as well as by adaptation of historic temples for their mutual ecumenical use. The values give testimony to the synthesis of art of both Christian Churches as well as to the return to their ecclesial unity.

Keywords: symbol, religious architecture, temple, value, exchange

“Mute art is able speak”

St. Gregory of Nyssa
(PG. XL VI, 737 D)

Introduction. Crisis of symbols?

Symbol has always been an intrinsic part of a person. The human being – *homo religiosus* – is by nature also a *homo symbolicus*, who thinks and feels symbolically, who lives symbolically.

In the past, this was directly reflected in the architecture and in the art of all religions. Especially in the art of the temple, which itself was a symbol but also included other symbols. Thanks to them, art could manifest itself, could naturally pass from the level of aesthetics to the level of religion. Nowadays we face a kind of crisis of symbol in the sphere of art, certain reluctance towards symbols. The language of symbols seems to be dying out.

It has its repercussions in culture whose present condition is a result of a clear division into introvert traditional cultures (archaic cultures) and extrovert modern cultures (information cultures). The line of division in the Christian Europe goes along the line separating two Churches: Eastern – Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches and Western – Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. We are faced with different degrees of sacral tension, spirituality and mysticism,

different dogmatic attitudes, different theologies and ecclesiologies. There has also been established another approach to art: to its status, meaning and to the purpose it is suppose to serve. This is due to the different ways in which we treat symbols today.

However, examples of modern churches in Poland seem to prove that these separation tendencies of both Christian churches and cultures are now being reversed, which is not only a symptom of mutual dialogue, exchange of ideas, values and different forms of worship, a symptom confirming an authentic will of ecumenical unity in art. It fills us with hope that the crisis of symbols can be stopped. It is the first sign that symbols are returning to the temple.

1. Architecture and art of religious borderland

Poland is located within a cultural, religious and national borderland. In the historical, as well as in the contemporary, finally defined territorial borders, it is situated on a line which runs through from Scandinavia to the Balkans, a line which divides Europe into that of

the Latin culture, Western catholic and the Byzantine Greco-Slavic culture.

The existence of the borderland of two cultures, two kinds of spirituality, is an extremely interesting phenomenon. It stimulates the mind and imagination, provokes to all kinds of philosophic, theological and cultural reflections. It is an inspiring occurrence and is picturesque. But sometimes it also is dangerous, abounding in old conflicts and prejudices. It was so in Poland and in Russia, in Hungary and in Rumania. It is so, even now days, in the Balkans.

In the past, mutual contacts and attempts to exchange values were limited. Both churches, Roman Catholic and Orthodox were structures of a rather closed character. They preserved their dogmatic and doctrinal integrity. They also protected themselves against inflow of spiritual vales, even in the area of cult or on the level of art. Nevertheless, such an inflow occurred,

even though this took place against the will of these Churches. This was a spontaneous experience and no barriers, orders or prohibition would do any good.

This is exemplified by Ruthenian and Byzantine wall paintings in gothic churches during the age of the first Jagellonian Dynasty or the opposite, Gothic influence on the architecture of Lithuanian and Ukraine Orthodox Churches in the XIVth–XVIth centuries. It is the diffusion of Poland's musical culture into Ukraine and later on, all of Ruthenia and finally, there is diffusion of Renaissance and Baroque elements into construction and sacral art.

To justly appreciate the rank of this phenomenon they are worthy remembering, at least the most spectacular ones, taken from architecture and painting.

First are three Rome Catholic churches in Lublin (Fig. 1–3), Wiślica (Fig. 4–5), Sandomierz (Fig. 6–7), and Cracow (Fig. 8–9). Interior walls of those Gothic



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

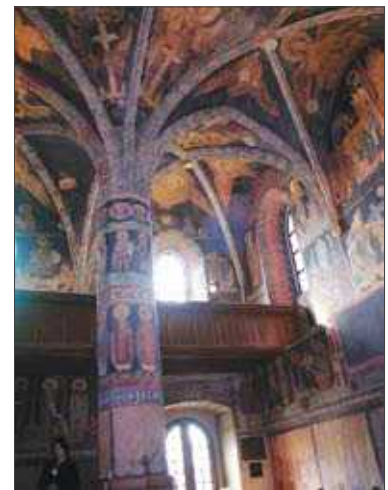


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

Western sanctuaries endowed by King Władysław Jagiello, were covered by Ruthenian painters with extraordinary XVth century wall paintings executed according to the Byzantine canon. There are ones of the most beautiful examples of this kind of paintings to be found in Poland. Its uniqueness and beauty derive from a diffusion of values, from the harmony of a merger of Gothic architecture and the art of icons.

The second ones examples are the Orthodox Churches in Supraśl (Fig. 10–12), Malomorzekow (Murowanka) (Fig. 13–14) and Synkowicze (Fig. 15–16), erected in the XVth–XVIth centuries. There are the phenomena not only in the history of Polish, Lithuania and Belorussia but also European architecture. There are churches in which a three-part liturgical structures characteristic of the Orthodox Churches of Ruthenian-Byzantine origin has been attired, as though, in Gothic costumes. The external shells are the Western Churches and the interiors are classical cross or cross and dome model of Orthodox Churches, a nine field type *quincunks*.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

2. Conversions

Today, throughout the world, especially in the area where Christian religions predominate, and especially in Poland, the situation is somewhat different. Dogmatic and ideological borders have receded into the background. In more culturally and spiritually advanced surroundings, especially in the arts, an authentic and sometimes very intensive exchange of cultural goods is taking place.

Orthodox and Uniate churches, as well as Roman Catholic and Evangelic Churches, are the contemporary examples of such an exchange of values.

One of the first is the Cathedral of the Birth of the Holy Mother of God in Wrocław, formerly the Gothic church of St. Barbara. Initially, it was a Roman Catholic Church, later on an Evangelic church and since 1971, it is an Orthodox shrine.

Jerzy Nowosielski and Adam Stalony-Dobrzański are the artists responsible for the new decor of the Orthodox Church. Eschatology occupies the primary place in the ideological program of the church. This is mainly shown by the introduction, in the interior of the shrine, of the iconostasis with a row of icons showing, as it was in the former main Gothic altar of the church, the history of the life of Christ on Earth (Fig. 17).

The iconostasis fastens together, upwards, the Crucifixion. This cross joins the iconostasis program with the wall paintings on the chancel vault and closes off the entire axis composition. This relates to Italian paintings of the XIIIth century, that is paintings from the time of the separation of the Byzantine and Latin traditions, and at the same time attempts to bring closer and acquaint both traditions with each other. The iconostasis is of an almost open work construction. It is not a barrier but a passage way, a window onto the “celestial world” shown in the sanctuary. It precisely designates the center of the shrine. Very large, suspended low panikadylion – *choros* reinforced its position. In the interior and the central character of the space in this shrine, as if it were to substitute here the traditionally located dome with the Christ Pantokrator. The application form of the icons on the vault and the rhythm and symmetry of the vaults supports this concentricity (Fig. 18). As if to balance the longitudinal linear disposition of the former church.

The adopted from the West and applied here convention of iconic illustrations are the stained glass windows (Fig. 19).

A subsequent, equally interesting and original example is the former church in Jelenia Góra. On the

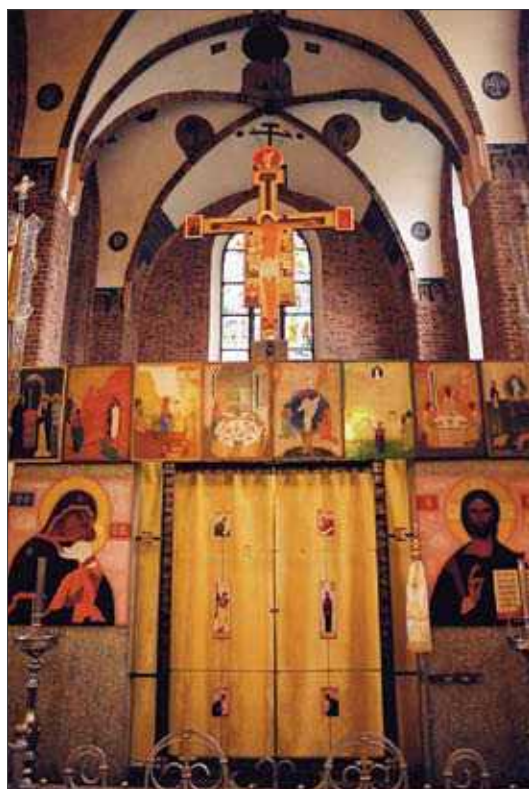


Fig. 17



Fig.18



Fig. 19

outside, it remains a small, typical Baroque church. Inside, it is the Orthodox church of Apostles Peter and Paul. The earlier chapel dedicated to Holiest Virgin Mary, built in 1738 served Roman Catholics till 1925. After the end of the Second World War it was handed over to the Jelenia Góra Orthodox Parish.

The interior of the chancel of today's Orthodox Church has been decorated with beautiful frescos also painted by Adam Stalony-Dobrzański and Jerzy Nowosielski. The frescos, even though directly referring to the Byzantine style, have an original individual character. Their central figure is the Christ Pantokrator. On both his sides are situated saints. The small iconostasis with royal doors and icons gathered in the church were brought from Orthodox churches in the Lublin Region which had been destroyed by the War. They all give testimony to history as well as are a carrier of tradition handed over to the new inhabitants of this land (Fig. 20–21).

The discussed examples of the conversion of shrines may be supplemented by subsequent important sites located in such Polish geographic regions as Lower

Silesia, Western Pomerania and Warmia and Masuria, shrines adopted by the Orthodox and Unite populations displaced from their homeland.

The Silesian Orthodox church in Przemków is a good example of this, where as is typical for post Evangelical churches, a basilica-like interior with a double leveled empors, a magnificent Orthodox iconography had been realized (Fig. 22–23).

Such is also the case with the post-Evangelic, Western Gothic church in Górowo Iławeckie in Warmia and Masuria region (Fig. 24). This time Nowosielski created a unique shrine for the Greco-Catholic population. He achieved it in an unusually delicate manner, cautiously, by means of iconostasis with a huge crowing cross, reminiscent of the ancient Cross of St. Francis or by magnificent icons painted on walls of red gothic bricks. It is worthy reminding that this cross, appearing very often in Catholic and Orthodox churches is an extraordinary unifying force of both traditions (Fig. 25–27). But we will discuss this at the end of our deliberations.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29

3. Incorporations

Perhaps the first example of this diffusion of values in the Roman-Catholic Church is the temple situated in the Jelonki district of Warsaw. The most interesting of the applied solutions are polychromes, painted on red bricks as is in Górowo ̇aweckie (Fig. 28). With quite expressive and even somewhat irritating tectonics of the church's interiors, additionally enriched by semi-stained walls of the side naves and exposed construction of the vaults, these paintings are distinctly soothing and contemplative (Fig. 29–30). They simply decorate the church and are an extra beautifying element of limited significance. They are, above all, transferred from the East, theology of expression. They are theology.

The most beautiful, however not finished, paintings are the polychromes in the church in the Upper Silesian town of Tychy. Its intriguing, modern architecture, designed by the architect Stanisław Niemczyk, com-



Fig.30

prises something from an archaic desert tent, perhaps even based on the Old Testament's Tent of Meeting. It also has in it something an old traditional village church with a spread out wide roof as the Maforion of Caretaker Mother of God (Fig. 31).

This vision was accessed by Nowosielski. He designed his own program, in accordance with the summons of the church of the Holy Ghost, defined in the form of icons. This kind of creation is to be found in the entire iconographic structure of the wood paneled ceiling, in the figures of saints and flickering red flames above their heads. It is visible in the blue ribbon of the flame accenting the main axis, as if cutting through the line of the horizon, from the Holy Spirits' doing, here symbolically recalled in the form of a Turtle Dove (Fig. 32).

On the axis, as formerly on the wall of the altar abse, Nowosielski placed a figure of the praying Theotokos Oranta, different here than in Byzantium because without the Infant (Fig. 33). She is accompanied by the Old Testament Patriarchs, Prophets and Kings and, in the semi-transsept, by the Holy Apostles, Martyrs, Fathers and Doctors of the Church not divided, Eastern and Western Orthodox. On the side axis of this transept are two scenes, i.e. Transfiguration and Crucifixion.



Fig. 31



Fig. 32

Under the skylight of the lantern is the scene Deesis – the Holy Mother, John the Baptist and the *veraikon* scarf between them. Across from them stands Archangel Michael, protecting access. On the side of the altar *etimasia* – is an empty throne awaiting Paruzja.

Next, of great importance to us, is the Church of the Divine Providence in Wesola, a suburb of Warsaw. This church was erected in 1938 in the Neo-Roman style (Fig. 34). Its interior was decorated as late as 1975 – 1976. It is a masterpiece of iconographic and architectural art, from the beginning to the end carried out by Jerzy Nowosielski. The interior of this church is a small white hall with a closing abse (Fig. 35). With a cross centrally placed on the axis and the Madonna posing as the Oranta without the Sign, as was the case in Byzantium. Here, following numerous reflections, however not without the burden of undertaking this decision Christ, who is usually placed with the Madonna as the Blacherniotissa, is replaced by the Crucifixion in an interesting transposition of the St. Francis of Assisi cross. However, they are still together by the spatial positioning of the cross and the Holy Mother (Fig. 36).

The magnificent Way of the Cross was painted on canvas in a white frame, as bas-relief, brown-black inside the defensive wall of Jerusalem and not in the open air scenes of Via Dolorosa (Fig. 37). This is an outstanding piece of art. In the altar section there is an interesting spatial transposition of the altar templon, a living copy from the first ten centuries, from the Justinian Basilica of Hagia Sophia. The architecture is superbly complemented by the iconography on the walls and abstract stained glass windows (Fig. 38). This is a unique example of the total realization of the interior of a Latin church in the Eastern Christian character.



Fig. 33

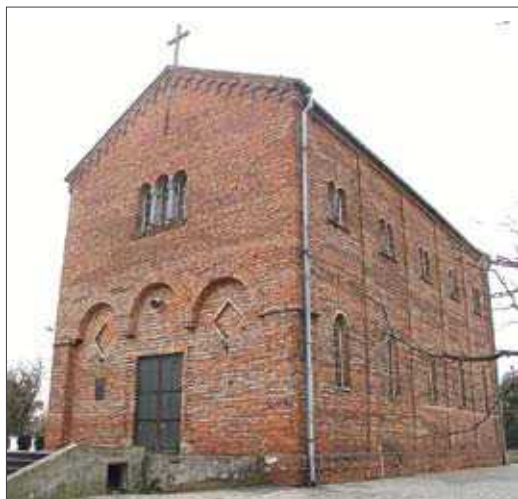


Fig. 34



Fig. 35



Fig. 36



Fig. 37

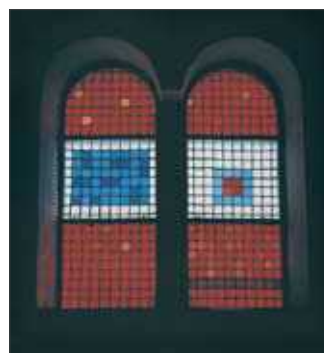


Fig. 38

4. Transpositions

Another example of a contemporary shrine built in the beginning of the '90s designed by the architect Jerzy Uścińowicz is the Orthodox church of the Resurrection located in the Słoneczny Stok district of Białystok. This shrine retains the traditional Orthodox symbolic structure. It is, however, an attempt to currently reinterpret it taking under consideration the particular historic and cultural context of the so called borderland region. The main themes link the Orthodox shrine with numerous fortified shrines built in the Byzantine-Gothic style, such as the aforementioned Orthodox church in Supraśl, Orthodox churches in Synkowicze, Małomożejków (Murowanka) or Nowogródek (Fig. 39). Indirect stylistic links are visible, however limited to the external form. They are structuralism of composition, "crystallinity", application of the typical Gothic pinnacle, buttress, gargoyle or the solutions of the entrance gables.

The Shrine has a central composition, built on the geometry of mutually penetrating figures of an octagon and a Greek cross (Fig. 40). Its external form emphasizes the Summons by the symbols of the Holy Sepulcher and the Resurrection, i.e. the geometry of an octagon as an eschatological figure, forms of buttresses as rocks removed from the Sepulcher, forms of the surrounding escarpment, the foundation made of erratic rocks or the eight poles. Situated on a hill, the shrine emphasizes the expression of form and its exuberance. The use of crystalline forms in the domes refers directly to the Revelation of St. John the Divine and his description of New Jerusalem, "down from God out of heaven, clear as crystal" (Fig. 41).

The Orthodox Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Biały Bór near Szczecinek located in west Pomerania. It was also designed completely by Jerzy Nowosielski. It is not big. The austerity of the naos,



Fig. 39



Fig. 40

small round and square windows and scant roofing recollects Early Christian basilicas of Syria or North Mesopotamia. Small towers of facade open on four quarters of the Universe. Between of them there is a double pediment: two twin semicircles with icons of Archangels – Michael and Gabriel. The semicircles fastens together, upwards, the Greek Crucifixion with the five circle stigmas. According to the old Apocrypha it is own this cross will descend to the hell. One Archangel there led him and the other Archangel from there in triumph deduced it. It is a fine, universal message. Below Veraikon - Scarf Saint Weronika – icon of the Jesus Christ (Fig. 42).

The mysticism of the interior is created by colours: and red of the triple arched door-frames (holy gates and deacon gates) witch separate the façade sanctuary and dark malachite-green of walls (Fig. 43). Black of the round columns separating the naos from slightly elevated side-galleries. Instead of the iconostasis, there are only two large icons of Christ and Virgin Mary with Emanuel. There is Crucifixion in the clearance and two separate icons by the figure of the Holy Mother and St. John Prodromos. In the saucer dome, hidden in the roofing, there is a icon of figure of Christ Pantocrator dominating the whole interior.

This suggestive iconography programme does not end there, though. It continues on the façade, like in old



Fig. 41

orthodox churches in Romania (Bukowina). The triple arched door-frames with icons amongst them are forming the outside iconostasis, for the outside liturgy.

Unusually a baptistery of St. John Prodromos is an interesting contemporary sacred realization in Bielsk Podlaski, which is work iconic and architectural also design by Jerzy Nowosielski. The spatial system of walls is classic. The pattern of the "quadrature of a circle" is

coming true through the dome, the octagonal tambour and the cuboidal trunk (Fig. 44). Unconventional solving the central liturgical zone is a true phenomenon i.e. of altar bow (Fig. 45). It is a novel solution in the form, at least all at the same time traditional in one's symbolic interpretation and the iconography. It is emphasizing the synthetic unity of the horizontal and vertical orientations of the Orthodox churches, focussed by this bow in the Eucharistic centre. It is an absolute masterpiece of the art.

And, finally, the last work realized by Jerzy Nowosielski. It is the cross in the Church of the Dominican Fathers in the Służewiec district of Warsaw or rather an Orthodox icon of the Crucifixion, which

has become the central icon of the chancel, organizing and concentrating on itself the entire liturgical time and space. It is worth noting that the notion of the Crucified Christ was the most circulated type of medieval Italian icon. Huge, supplemented by the figure of the Holy Mother, St. John the Prodromos and scenes of the Passion, it was placed on every iconostasis of the Italian Church. The Franciscan cross is the Italian type of Crucifixion from top of the iconostasis, a majestic magnificent icon which became the subject of contemplation of St. Francis. It also became a splendid, symbolic spiritual unifying force between the East and the West. Such, it remains till now (Fig. 46).



Fig. 42



Fig. 43



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46

5. Conclusions

1. There is no lay art and all crises of art are not so much of aesthetic nature as of religious character. They are caused by disappearing symbolism, and, consequently, by debasement of the sense of mystic sacrum.
2. A person's life is marked with symbols. In the domain of sacrum, in the temple, life is realized through holy symbols. They have their special compensation in the temple and vice versa; the temple is a concrete manifestation of the function of a symbol.
3. We need tradition and the canons, we need to be reminded of holy symbols. If the sacral art is to provide an authentic description of teofanic reality and, at the same time, if it is to be a source of all human metaphysical experience and not only intellectual speculation or a mere naturalistic representation of things, we have to find a way of regaining harmony with former symbols.
4. Thanks to the symbols and icons the Christian world is returning to its original unity. This unity is now being realized, it is happening in a direct way, it is being discovered by art. In this attempt of synthesis, the art of both the Orthodox and Western Church is regaining its meaning and fulfils its purpose. It realizes itself in the thing it was created for. It is turning into the art of one, undivided Church. "Beauty shall redeem the world" – as Fiodor Dostoyevsky rightly said. Today we would rather say – the entire world. In art, redemption is realized by holy symbols. Thanks to them "mute art is able speak" (St. Gregory of Nyssa).

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VERTYBIŲ KAITA ŠIUOLAIKINĖJE LENKIJOS RELIGINĖJE ARCHITEKTŪROJE – DIALOGO TARP RYTŲ IR VAKARŲ SIMBOLIS

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Santrauka. Lenkija, kalbant apie lotyniškąją ir graikiškąją-slaviškąją įtaką, yra tarsi kultūros ir religijos pasienyje. Autorius apžvelgia praeities ir dabarties vertybių kaitos krikščioniškose Rytų (ortodoksai ir unitai) ir Vakarų (Romos katalikai ir protestantai) bažnyčiose pavyzdžius. Jie yra apibūdinami analizuojant abipusę šventovių konversijas, tradicinės ortodoksiškos ikonografijos inkorporavimą į šiuolaikinės Romos katalikų bažnyčias, istorinių šventyklų pasisavinimą bendram visuotiniam naudojimui. Vertės liudija abiejų krikščioniškų bažnyčių menų sintezę, taip pat jų grįžimą į dvasinę (ekleziastinę) vienovę.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: simbolis, religinė architektūra, šventykla, vertė, kaita.

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