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On the Educational, Aesthetic and Ethic Benefits of Sacred Art

Georgeta Merişor DOMINTE[1], Marina VRACIU[2], Stelian ONICA[3]

Abstract

Although Sacred Art includes all manifestation with a religious substrate which address human senses, it stays in the memory of communities mostly by forms of visual expression. The latter have a longer impact on people and educate them both aesthetically and ethically. At the core of each image lies a conceptual substratum based on and translatable into words, which outflows by means of plastic and technological aspects. Generally, these aspects purport to some rules which become ordering canons when ethical needs command aesthetic varieties such as the primary requirement of continuity and the recognition in time of some models of behaviour. Representative artifacts require physical maintenance over longer periods of time by means of conservation and restoration; the latter explains the concern over heritage to be saved, to the benefit of the succeeding generations. By its very nature, Sacred Art expresses transdisciplinarity and assumes a representative unifying statute.

Keywords: *educational; aesthetic and ethic benefits; sacred art; representative and unifying status; sacred art; transdisciplinarity.*

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1. Introduction

From an artistic standpoint anything can be conceived. Artistic inspiration can be considered of one nature or another. Generally, revelations are attributed to what has been inspired into the creative mind of an artist. What is considered divine determines or draws out rules; then plastic expression are conducted or receive canons of representation. These rules are not supposed to be obeyed in order to preserve the specific nature of renderings. Christian Orthodox religion is not the only one which has iconographic canons. Visual canons exist in Islam, far-Eastern religions, in pre-Christian and animistic beliefs, where they emphasize their defining features and those characteristic modes which create their special shape over a long time. So, an education which includes Sacred Art along ethical and esthetical coordinates has great chances to improve the quality of life and to ensure durable sustainable development.

2. Some Educational, Aesthetical and Ethical Benefits of Sacred Art

Art mostly expresses feelings. Its role is not only to relieve the human being from the load of overflowing sensations and experiences, but also from the knowledge inherited from previous generations; it does so by means of artistic languages and methodologies. Although these can be said to grow with time, they include all the felt, lived and imagined aspects of reality. This is why most prehistoric artifacts seem disconcertingly modern in their brought-to-the-essential forms (Fig. 4). Moreover, even the most trivial works seem touched by the sacred gestures which have made them, reflected as these are in the very finding of the best shape, mostly among ritual images, buildings and objects (Fig. 1, 2, 3). Sacred Art proves to be intrinsic to the human being´s existence and growth, as a permanent support over a history in progress (Fig. 5 - 12). Since when, from where, until when - these are questions which imply an attempt to give an answer and make suppositions, while those given by our times seem to amplify up to the point of a future catastrophe. While apocalyptic warnings do not lack in quite a lot religious beliefs, in epic writings and visual forms, where they are supposed to be a Judgement of the souls incarnated on Earth, all these represent but a part of what Sacred Art used to include in time and space.

From a profane perspective, in a context which abounds in violence and destruction, a question arises: how can one still make art which conveys serenity, joy, positive aspects or which brings in the sublime? In an ordinary

human way, such expressions would point to a false face of a tense reality, or might seem a shining cover which hides the grief and misery of true life experiences. Artifacts of this sort would be counterfeit externalizations, they would look like *Proletkult* products, when art made up reality, in order to bring in the idea and sensation of upsurge, energy and development. On the other hand, art also has premonitory power, periods of decay of forms, of decomposition of structures; begun in the 19th century, they reached their peak in the next century and anticipated and expressed the loss of integrity, the horrors which tended to expand and amplify as a destructive potential. Postmodernism, with all its more or less bizarre associations in great alert, with the inclusion of kitsch, seems a warning prelude against a possible chaos which might cover all contexts of human life.

Therefore, measures to reestablish the order would be needed to counteract deviations and destruction which seem imminent. The conservatism characteristic of Sacred Art can uphold a bridge between historic stages, lest these stages be forgotten or important periods and moments rendered by Sacred Art be eluded. Beside Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, there exist a series of other beliefs which generated visual representation; some episodic examples which involve comparison from point of view of image, technique and dimension. The spiritual and information treasure brought to humankind by Sacred Art has no price when one is made aware that there are so many values included and how great the need for these values to stay in their parts of the world and time is (Fig. 13 - 29).

In our time, education brings together, also by the means of Sacred Art, the aesthetic and the ethic, as it shapes the messages and provides positive results are concerned by converting profane destruction and decomposition into durable values. The need to maintain spiritual values brings in the importance of heritage, which contains mostly religious items. The immediate need for conservation and restoration of partially damaged objectives of Sacred Art involves mostly the ethical side, next to the aesthetic aspects, and is overwhelming for the new art objectives. All these bring Sacred Art into public attention, complex and immense, as an endless informative good to be received and disseminated.

In *The Theology of the Icon,* the Russian theologian Leonid Ouspensky's best-known book "there is a revelation, from a historical and dogmatic point of view, the importance of the icon for the cult and the life of the Christian-Orthodox believer. One of the significant contributions of this book consists in the concept of 'iconographic tradition', which, Leonid Ouspensky insists upon with amazing precision. The moment in which one can find a first 'codofication' of the iconographic tradition is represented by the

Council of Trulo (the Sixth Ecumenical Council), which offeres in this respect the three fundamental canons: 73, 82 şi 100. Canon 73 deals with the regulation of the veneration of the Holy Cross, stipulates that no one has the right to paint crosses in places where they can be tread upon" [12].

Without knowledge of the role of Sacred Art, the young generations risk to fail to understand the need for a present full with spirituality, lest the future turn too early into apocalypse. In other words, humankind can still have a future on condition it delays, for as long as possible, the stage when this can become devoid of spirituality or rather even by annihilating all apocalyptic ideas and manifestations which attack the spiritual basics and expressions in their continuity. In this manner Sacred Art becomes a vehicle absolutely necessary and useful for spirituality to maintain a living connection between the peaceful progress-oriented life of people on a planet protected from all points of view, with its natural goods and products made by successive non-conflictual and cooperative generations. Irrespective of their specific nature, being open to communication and cooperation rests on educational factors in all their amplitude and diversity. By its quality and constant support of life on Earth, by its capacity to sum up positive experiences, Sacred Art represents a positive and stimulating phenomena by help it brings to human beings increase their beliefs and extend their prayers, in order to receive, as a reply to their spiritual endeavours, the Divine help they constantly need. So, any kind of education, no matter how avantgarde and sophisticated, could not offer true quality and sustainable development in the long run and a repeated manner, during our life on earth. Instead, Sacred Art has the experience and ability to take up humanity from the depth of its sinusoidal rhythm, from personal introspection to the height of spiritual outflow, with the radiant Light generated by shared Joy.

The rendering of Divinity through images has multiple forms of visual expression, specific to each religion and/or belief. With Christianity, God is understood in any representation of Jesus Christ the Saviour (Fig.20-25), and of the Holy Trinity (Fig.26-29). The image of the Heavenly Father – The Ancient of Days, represented alone and in the Holy Trinity of the New Testament, with the Holy Ghost as a dove and Jesus Christ, are less frequent. These represent Western influences, the Schism of the Christian Church marks also an image distinction between Catholisicm and Orthodoxy by freedom of expression, as compared to the basic canonical rigour. Related to them, 'Byzantine traditional iconography has two manners of representing the Holy Trinity: the Face of Christ and the Hospitality of Abraham. George A. Soteriou, the eminent Byzantine scholar, comments on the former as follows: „Theology decided before the 9th century that the Person of Christ Incarnate represents the Holy Trinity; and the believer has thought that by seeing the

Son, he also sees the Father, according to the words of Christ: *Anyone* who *has seen me has seen* the Father' (John 14:9, cf. 12:45)". The icon of Christ also expresses the Holy Ghost, as the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and is sent by Christ. So, Christ speaks to His disciples: „ When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father — he will testify about Me" (John 15:26). The representation of the Holy Trinity in the scene known as 'The Hospitality of Abraham' shows three young men under Abraham's tent in Mamvri, hosted by Abraham and his wife Sarah. The young men are represented with aureole, seated at the table." [13] In relation to these explations, one includes here, in a comparative and symbolic perspective, a few canonical representation chosen from a rich variety of older and newer local representations (Fig. 26-29). For a better understanding of the need to obey the visual canons in Orthodoxy (as in Buddhism and in other beliefs), Leonid Ouspensky's explanations serve again, as "he gave fundamental importance to preservation of iconographic canon, which is dependent on the confession of true faith.'

"In the life of the Church, the Sacraments and the confession of true faith and canonical oder are closely interconnected. If the confession of faith is false, canonical order is wrong; the notion of sacred image and the image itself are false. But it is by the image that the truth and its alteration can best be represented in the image. The words can be the same, but the image reveals the divergence from the doctrine and spiritual life of Orthodoxy, on one hand, and the Western confessions, on the other' [12] In 2018, the year which the Romanian Patriarchate ruled a Centennial Year, the year of the Union of the three Romanian provinces afted WWI, it also ruled the Unity of Faith and Nation, on December 1918. The fact that Romanian royalty combined Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christianity with the recognition of Orthodoxy as a specifically national religious right, for the cohesion and the good of the country, was a direct consequence of the *Nihil sine Deo* formula, which represnete the status and orientation of the royalty, in a practical way included. The resuming of educational, ethical and aesthetic by every one in particular and by the community would be beneficial; it would also answer and give efficient solutions of blessing to the problems of humanity both to nations and a globally.

3. Conclusions

Education, particularly in its institutionalized forms should not marginalize or exclude artistic aspects. The risks of deviant behaviour are the greater where artistic education is minimized, looked down upon and

excluded. As compared to lay art manifestation, religious ones can have a more consistent and longer impact in elevating the human being by improving one´s aesthetic feelings and devotion as well as their ethical involvement. By its very dogmatism, Sacred Art represents a permanent guarantee for the human beings´ patient understanding of their fellow beings and of the environment, as by the messages it gives art has the role of cleansing the human being, to perfect one's soul and positive attitudes, by externalizing them in a constructive manner, not destructively during life on earth. The fact that one finds in Sacred Art all aspects which address the human senses and consciousness, so the fact that one finds, in a nutshell, all aspects and fields by which the human beings explain their capabilities gives one a reason to consider sacred art an indispensable component of reality, beneficial for the human being in any time and space. In fact, its multiple actions and messages converge to transdisciplinarity and give Sacred Art an endlessly privileged status, both representative and unifying.

APPENDIX

SOME ARTISTIC ECHOES, SACRED ENCOUNTERS AND CULTIC EXPRESSIONA



1 2

Fig. 1- Duplicate ritual containers from two cultures, Yangshao and Cucuteni, from two points at a great distance from one another, almost coeval. The Cucuteni culture(5,000-3,500 BC), situated largely in North-Eastern Romania seems to have influence the products of the Yangshao culture (5,000-3,000 BC), in the Far Eastern Chinese space, as a result of trade and cultural exchange possibly begun at that time [1]

Fig. 2-The shape of some Cucuteni cult objects has striking similarities with the Chinese religious buildings [1]



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Fig. 3 - Similar ornaments painted on ceramic vases of the Cucuteni (Eastern Europa) and Yangshao (China) [1]
Fig. 4 – The Vidra Goddess – cult ceramics of Gumelnița (North-Eastern Romanian Plain), Stone Age (8000-5000 BC) [2]


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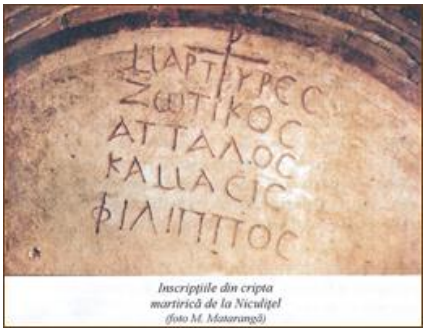

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Fig. 5 – The Visoko pyramid (at least 10,000 years old, polished stone plates), near Sarajevo, Bosnia, is covered by vegetation. It is 700 metres high, cf.to Giza pyramid, Egypt, 4500 old, is 146m [2]
Fig. 6 – The pyramid hills in Sona, near Brașov, Romania (eight mound, 5,000 yearsold), covered in vegetation, among artifacts found are a gold bracelet, a bronze ring, an iron axe, a ceramic vase, arrows, a small bronze wheel, glass beads, a crater with ashes [2]
Fig. 7 – The Tărtăria tablets (Banat, România), over 8000 years old (the Turdaș – Vinca culture), probably used in rituals, with signs considered to be the oldest writing in the world, 2000 older than the Sumerian writing [2]
Fig. 8 – Dacian sancturary in Sarmizegetuza Regia, Romania (BC) [2]


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Fig. 9 -11 - Images from the Monument which includes the Old Christian basilica of Niculițel –Dobrogea, România; these are the oldest remains of Christianity in Romania, six holy martyrs, four of them have been canonized - Attalos, Kamasis, Phillipos and Zottikos. The basilica and the crypt were built after the year 370 AD, during Emperor Valens, on the site of a third-century AD tomb.) [3], [19], [20]
Fig. 12 – Contemporary iconography in the Byzantine traditions representing the four Holy Martyrs of Niculițel, România, and an image of the crypt where their relics were found [4]


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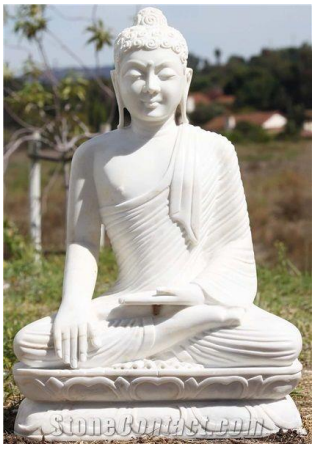
Fig. 13 – The statue of Buddha Shakyamuni (Gautama Siddhartha, monk, philosopher 8.04.566 BCE, Lumbini, Nepal –cca. 452 BCE, Kushinagar, India) in the Mahabodhil Temple, Bodh Gaya [5]
Fig.14 - Buddha Amida, a sculpture of the Tang dinasty, located in the Cave of the Hidden Spring, the Longmen Grottoes, China [6]



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Fig. 15 – Granite Buddha faces, recent production (2001, China) for oversize representation in religious statues [7].


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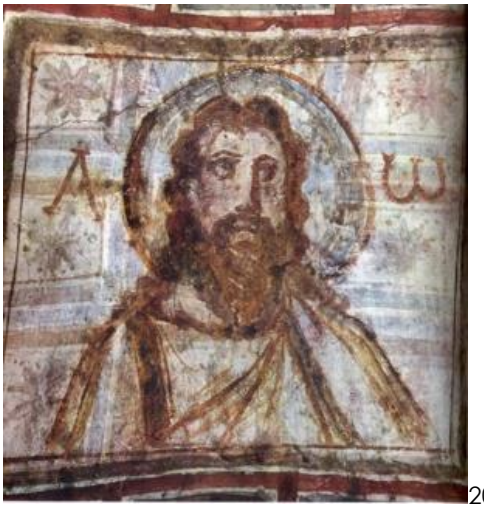
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Fig. 16 – Buddha head, volcanic rock, Bali, Indonezia, used for decorative gardens [8]
Fig. 17 – Contemporary statue of Buddha, white marble [9]


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Fig. 18 – Gilded statude of Buddha in meditation [10]
Fig. 19 – Golden Buddha statued for commercial use [11]


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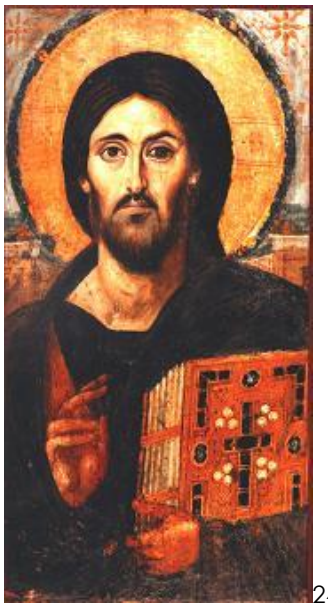

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Fig. 20 – Iisus Hristos, sec al IV-lea, pictură murală în catacombă [14].
Fig. 21 – Iisus, bunul păstor — pictură în catacombe din secolul al III-lea [14].

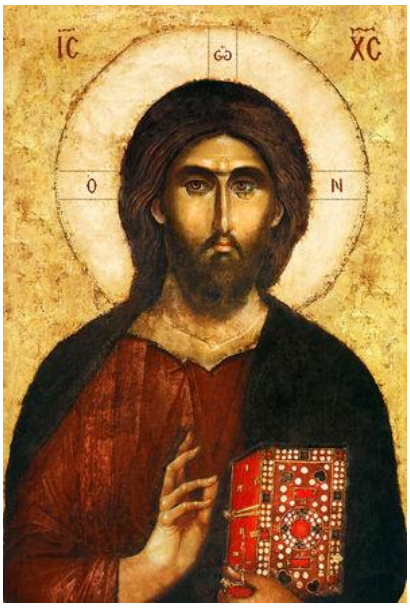

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Fig. 22 – Jesus, the Good Shepherd, 4th c. [14]
Fig. 23- – Jesus, the Good Shepherd , 6th c. mosaic, Galla Placidia, Ravenna [14]



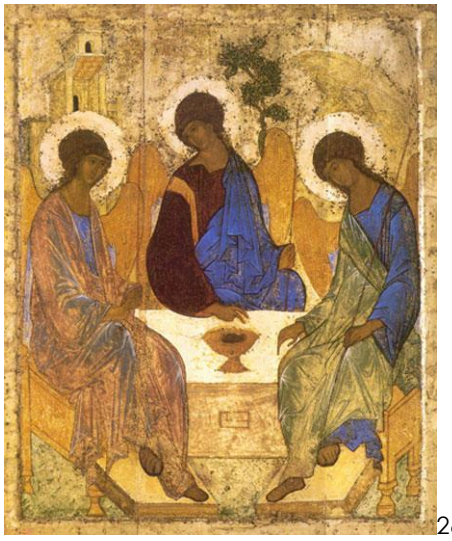
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Fig. 24 – Our Lord Jesus Christ, icon from the Saint Catherine Monastery, Mount Sinai (6th c.) [14], [15]

Fig. 25 – Jesus Christ Pantocrator, icon in the Serbian Monastery Hilandar, Mount Athos, Greece, cca.1260–1277 [14]



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Fig. 26 – The Holy Trinity of the Old Testament, icon on wood, painted in 1408-1425 by St. Andrei Rubliov for the Holy Trinity Saint Sergius Monastery; the Tretiakov Gallery, Moscow[16]

Fig. 27 – The Holy Trinity (The Supper in Mamvri – The Holy Trinity of the Old Testament) – icon on wood, the Museum collection of the Alba Orthodox Archidioce, Alba Iulia, Romania [17]



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Fig. 28 - The Holy Trinity of the Old Testament – icon on wood by St. Pafnutie (Pârvu Mutu the painter, 1659 -1735), Sinaia Monastery, Romania [18]
Fig. 29- The Holy Trinity of the New Testament, 1866) – icon on glass, the National Union Museum, Alba Iulia [17]

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