

BEAUTY AND CONSERVATION: A METAPHYSICAL, PEDAGOGICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

This paper deals with subjects of a philosophical and theological nature, particularly seen from an ontological and anthropological-pedagogical perspective, with respect to the concept of “*artistic*” and “*cultural*”, thus giving rise to reflections on the themes of *beauty* and *conservation*. We hope that what follows, which makes no claim to be complete or thorough, may however, be interesting and useful, considering that in Italy almost 85% of the cultural heritage is “religious”. This means it is important not only for “insiders”(experts) in this field, but also for all those who wish to work in planning and promoting artistic and cultural events or are engaged in related training and educational activities.

1. Technology and culture

As commendably stated by the historical-technical Journal “Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage”, today we live in a context of *internazionalization of culture*, with the result that there is an increasing need for *interdisciplinarity*, or rather *transdisciplinarity*. In fact it is becoming increasingly necessary for there to be a fruitful encounter and active collaboration between the so called “hard” sciences and the... “softer” ones, and also between “humanistic” and “technical-scientific” disciplines. Unfortunately knowledge today is fragmented and there is an alarming tendency to reduce “humanistic issues” within academia, at times sanctioned by the self-same new university syllabi, with the result that the anthropological dimension is not viewed as a decisive and central aspect in the various relational and professional¹ fields. By overcoming the various forms of reductionism which are often still too convoluted, starting with those of a neo-positivistic character, the concept of university itself, as a “convergence *ad unum*” of various disciplines², is compromised. On this same subject, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) – an author we will often refer to in this article – stated in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* that “*omnes autem scientiae et artes ordinantur in unum, scilicet ad hominis perfectionem, quae est eius beatitudo*» [1].

Today there is no shortage of interesting initiatives and activities for promoting dia-

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logue between disciplines and different kinds of knowledge, from the relationship between theology and various sciences, or art and technical-scientific³ disciplines. In these areas the particular importance of philosophy emerges as an essential element of mediation and as an interface within this dialogue, which in a more general sense emerges in its purely cultural profile.

We know how contemporary thought pays great attention to the issue of technology⁴. It is interesting to note that the Greek concept of *techne* was translated into Latin with the term “*ars*”. An interesting essay by G. Lombardi underlines that ancient authors were concerned about defining «the function and the value of *techne* in the human learning process or in acting or doing. Aristotle, in the *incipit* of the A volume of *Metaphysics* writes ‘all men naturally desire knowledge [...]’, describes the cognitive path of man as being stimulated from its earliest stages, towards not only what is useful but above all towards what is pleasing. He states that “*techne* begins when a multiplicity of experiences produces only one universal judgment which embraces all things that are similar”. In his opinion *techne* is closely related to - or indeed, dependent on – the experience, but differentiates it from the role of the experience, which although coming after feeling and memory, still seems to be the prerogative of other animals too. *Techne* allows there to be a possible distinction between the animal-man and other animals» [2].

Although for Plato and Aristotle there is a direct link between experience and *techne*, stopping at experience would reduce it to the mere understanding of the “what” and the “how” but would not lead to the “why”. It is interesting to note that the same opinion was shared by Pope Benedict XVI in a passage of the encyclical letter *Caritas in veritate* (2009), in which, complaining about a reductionist consideration of technology, he states that «technology can appear ambivalent», relating this reasoning to the fact that the notion normally applies to questions concerning man only on the “how”, without considering the many “whys” which drive him to act [3].

On the indispensable need to reach the *why*, required by an integral and “high” concept of technology, G. Lombardi adds in his study on ancient thought: «we know that according to Aristotle giving an answer to the *why* not only means explaining the cause but also the four causes of the object (material, efficient, formal and final); and giving the causes, together with the principles, is the requisite needed for our knowledge to be called real knowledge or science, that is, *episteme*. If *techne* allows us to understand the *why*, then this is where its value and importance lie from the point of view of the growth of our knowledge. A growth therefore, which does not identify itself with the simple accumulation of notions – already opposed by Heraclitus – as a parameter for wisdom (*sophia*): it is not valued so much in a quantitative way, but rather in a qualitative one, that is, in acquiring the ability for abstraction. A growth which does not find an end in mere personal enrichment, since according to Aristotle ‘the ability to teach is generally the distinctive sign (*semeion*) to discern those who know how to, from those who do not, so we think that *techne*, rather than experience, is *episteme*; those who have *techne* can teach, while others cannot’» [4]. It is interesting that aspects relating to conservation and transmission, are at least implicitly present in the same original concept of *technelars*.

Let us now consider the notion of *culture*; the term itself is difficult to describe and is at the same time complex. The pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* “about the Church in the contemporary world” promulgated by the Second Vatican Council de-

finis culture as: «all those instruments with which man develops and expresses the many qualities of his soul and body; [...] culture makes social life more human, [...] and expresses, communicates and conserves the great experiences and spiritual aspirations in his works as time passes» [5]. From these expressions, as C. Chenis notes, one understands that in the concept of culture it is possible to obtain «a *material* element, that is, the values and goods produced, a *teleological* element, namely the improvement of life, and an *efficient* element, which is knowledge and work. In other words, in the term “culture” it is possible to discern a *humanistic* aspect, since it is a quality that an individual can acquire, a *sociological* aspect, since society is the bearer of culture, and a *technological* aspect, since transformed material reality is what supports culture» [6]. Today the consideration of “transformed material reality” extends to all new “virtualities” which emerge from the extraordinary possibilities offered by the digital world, new technologies and *new media*. It can almost be said that culture is like «a *transcendental* property of man» [7], meaning that wherever there is *humanum* its inseparable cultural dimension is present too⁵.

The *Gaudium et Spes* also addresses the issue of the *relationship between faith and culture*, rightly placing the focus of attention on *the integrality of the experience of the human being*, who «when [he] man gives himself to the various disciplines of philosophy, history and of mathematical and natural science, and when he cultivates the arts, he can do very much to elevate the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty, and to the formation of considered opinions which have universal value. Thus mankind may be more clearly enlightened by that marvelous Wisdom which was with God from all eternity, composing all things with him, rejoicing in the earth, delighting in the sons of men» [8].

2. Beauty

2.1. “Thinking” beauty

We would now like to make some theoretical considerations on the subject of *pulchrum*, first by searching for its definition and then examining the question of its relationship with *bonum*⁶.

In the *Dictionary of Philosophy* under *Bello* (beautiful), M. Ferraris writes: «one can discern five fundamental concepts of “*bello*”, upheld and illustrated both inside and outside aesthetics. They are: a) demonstration of good; b) demonstration of truth; c) symmetry; d) sensitive perfection; e) expressive perfection» [9]. It is evident even from these titles how the issue concerning aesthetics also invests the relation between beauty, good, truth, harmony and taste⁷. Regarding this point S. Lorusso writes: «It is not easy to determine to what extent the fruition of a work of art is linked to affection, that is, to ethical and not only aesthetic participation» [10].

In referring to the idea of beauty, Saint Augustine recalled the balance between the different parts through which a group becomes one “unit”. In the last century too, there were thinkers who considered beauty, naturally in different degrees, as an *objective characteristic of what exists*: for example, Rosmini explicitly includes *pulchrum* among the transcendental features of being and makes an actual doctrine for it called *callogia*, directly linked to metaphysical questions [11]. Maritain instead believes that *pulchrum* is «the splendour of all transcendental features joined together » [12]; von Balthasar made it a fundamental point for theological reflection [13].

On the other hand the “anti-metaphysical” climate that characterised many thinkers during the late 20th century led instead to considering the question of beauty, universally recognized as being part of every culture, on the basis of a more regulatory and consensual nature. What R. Rorty states in *La filosofia e lo specchio della materia* (1979) is emblematic; in his opinion, art teaches that the meanings and values with which a man’s life is woven together are in a dimension that goes beyond the true and the false. Or rather, a dimension where the notion of truth as correspondence (correspondence to the reality of the statement it refers to) appears insufficient. He invites us to “experiment” this kind of truth in the name of freedom. Truth is thus a way of establishing “a meaning for us”, so tolerance and irony become features of a truth conceived on an aesthetic basis [14].

The philosophical consideration of the relation between aesthetics and art, between nature and art and more particularly between natural beauty and artistic beauty, with the consequent question about the essence of beauty, is obviously an issue of great noetic importance. In our opinion the metaphysical question regarding the *proprium* of beauty cannot be separated from the overall view of being and its fundamental properties⁸. Theoretically, one of the main questions about the issue of *pulchrum* is whether or not it is a “transcendental property”, considering “transcendental” in the classic pre-Kantian sense. It is not indifferent to ask oneself if a reality should be considered beautiful because it is – in some way – beautiful in itself or rather because it is conventionally considered such or in reference only to subjective criteria and so related. This is actually one of the problems currently affecting aesthetics, because “in the absence of the ideality of beauty, that is, its metaphysical nature, the possibility of a systematic framework for the philosophy of art is also invalidated» [15].

Firstly, for the definition of beauty, that given by the Italian philosopher B. Mondin is very interesting. For him, beauty «is that special grace by which a person, a thing or an action arouses admiration and enchantment, fascinates and gives pleasure. Truth on the other hand calls upon knowledge and goodness calls for willingness, while beauty suscitates admiration. In front of beauty we are ecstatic» [16]. Beauty is not an incidental additive to be added to complement an external equilibrium: it is instead a sign of inner fulfillment and expresses the perfection reached by a reality in accordance with its true essence [17]. This means considering beauty in a “*splendor formae*” perspective – on which we focus specifically – taking into account the main aspects of Thomas Aquinas’s concept of beauty⁹. Even though he did not indicate *pulchrum* as one of the transcendental properties listed in Question 1 of his *De Veritate*, in *Summa Theologiae* and in other texts he presents interesting information about the theme of beauty from a metaphysical point of view.

2.2. The Contribution of Thomas Aquinas

On the relationship between beauty and kindness in Question 5, Article 4 of the I *Pars* of the *Summa*, Aquinas states that «*pulchrum et bonum in subiecto sunt idem, sed ratione differunt*» [18]. It is claimed therefore that the beautiful and the good actually identify themselves with the subject in which they exist because they are both founded on the same “thing” that is their *form*; however Doctor Angelicus, in evident correspondence with the more general doctrine about transcendentals of being, states: «they differ in concept. Good is about the appetitive faculty of craving, good being what everybody craves for, so it acts as an end, since craving is like a movement towards a

thing. Beauty on the other hand is about the cognitive faculty; beautiful refers to those things that give pleasure when seen. So beauty is in due proportion; since our senses delight in well-proportioned things, as in something which resembles them; the sense is in fact a kind of proportion, like any other cognitive faculty» [19].

As M. Daffara points out, in Aquinas's opinion «when cognizable things are significantly or clearly proportionate and harmonized in the multiplicity of their parts, they lend themselves to being easily perceived by the cognitive faculties, causing delight, which is essentially beautiful: beautiful are the things that are '*quae visa placent*'. We like them because they are similar to the cognitive faculties themselves: harmonic multiplicity, unity, rich simplicity» [20].

Continuing with the *relationship between beauty and goodness*, another interesting and valuable reference can be found in Question 27 of the I-II of the *Summa Theologiae*. Thomas in wondering whether good is the only cause of love (Article 1: *Utrum bonum sit sola causa amoris*), clearly states that good is the exclusive cause for love (*unde relinquitur quod bonum sit propria causa amoris*). One of the difficulties about this is that not only good, but also beauty, appears to be lovable to everybody: on this question Aquinas offers another interesting clarification about the ontological basis of aesthetic experience stating that «(beauty identifies itself with good, except for a simple distinction of reason. In fact, while good is 'what everyone craves and implies satisfying this appetite, beauty implies satisfying this appetite only by its mere presence or knowledge. In fact beauty involves those senses that are mainly cognitive, such as sight and hearing which serve intellect, so we speak of things that are beautiful to see or hear. Instead for objects pertaining to the other senses we do not usually speak of beauty: in general we do not say that flavours or smells are beautiful. It is therefore evident that beauty adds to good, a relationship with a cognitive faculty: so, we call good what is pleasing for the appetite, while we call beautiful, what it is pleasant to know» [21].

Thomas also states in strictly theological terms, that *pulchritudo* presents a certain analogy with the personal features of the Son (*habet similitudinem cum propriis Filiis*). With this statement Doctor Angelico claims that beauty requires three features: - *integrity or perfection*, 'since incomplete things are misshapen; *due proportion or harmony between the parts*; - *clarity or splendour*, since we call beautiful, things that are splendid and have sharply defined colours [22].

Also in referring to the moral dimension of human existence and to a person's actions, for Aquinas the "*ratio pulchritudinis*" consists in *quadam moderata et convenienti proportione* and it is no coincidence that in his thought we can find a relationship between Ciceronian *decorum* and moral *pulchrum* [23], thus underlining the splendour and the beauty of *virtue (tota claritas et pulchritudo virtutis)* [24]. In Question 145 of the II-II of the *Summa* Thomas states: «As can be inferred from Dionysius's words (*De Divinis Nominibus* Chap. 4, Lect. 5) beauty is constituted by both splendour and due proportions: indeed he affirms that God is beautiful 'as the cause for the splendour and harmony of all things'. So the beauty of the body consists in having well proportioned limbs, with the right brilliance of colour. Likewise spiritual beauty lies in the fact that the behaviour and actions of a person are well-proportioned according to the light of reason. Now, this [...], is the constitutive element of honesty identified with virtue, that ultimately controls all human things. Therefore honesty is identified with spiritual beauty» [25]. For this reason beauty is essentially and formally found in contemplative life.

We may thus conclude with T. Centi, noting that for Aquinas, beautiful can be de-

defined as «Anything that brings a sense of pleasure in the act of its perception and for the simple reason that it is recognized as such regardless of the convenience of our natural appetites and the rational search for happiness; that is to say apart from our hedonistic and moral concerns. Elements of such a pleasure are: ‘the splendor of form’, that is the perfection of nature and its products with respect to the ideal principle that inspired them and the resulting perspicuity in the face of the faculties of sense and intellect» [26].

In light of the above it is evident that the Aquinas notion of beauty thus never indicates a purely subjective fact but always something objective: in Doctor Angelico’s opinion, reality, being able to present itself evidently and clearly to the spirit, is in itself beautiful. Beauty then is not an “*a priori* category”, even though obviously possessing an intrinsic relationship with our faculties, it is first and foremost a manifestation of the being in which they themselves live, since every entity – because it is an entity and to the extent to which it participates in the being – as well as being good and true, is also beautiful. The *Pulchrum* is an aspect of the *bonum*, even if – as we have seen – in Thomas Aquinas’s opinion noetically it distinguishes itself. In its constitutive elements of *integrity, proportion and splendour*, beauty essentially consists of a *relationship*: «a relationship of convenience or harmony between an aspect of the being and the faculty of an intelligent creature. [...] It does not coincide with the truth, even if it is related to knowledge, because in truth, what matters is the apprehension, cognition and intuition of the thing, while what counts in beauty is enjoyment, pleasure and admiration. Neither does it coincide with goodness, because what counts in goodness is possession while it is excluded in beauty» [27].

Doctor Angelico’s assignment of beauty to the cognitive faculty leaves open the issue of the relationship between knowledge and aesthetic experience and finds its primary response in *admiration*. The very word “admiration” is evidence: admire means “look towards”, «allowing what one sees guides one’s look without ever penetrating it, making it one’s own, without ever absorbing it. Admiration is tension and expectation, hope, attention more than intention. [...] The hope of our eyes and ears thus rises towards the Living one, which draws next to us patiently adapting itself to us» [28].

2.3. A “*via pulchritudinis*”?

As is known, Kant himself spoke of the beautiful as a reflex, a revelation of the infinite regarding the finite [29], of “God who shows himself”; on the other hand Cioran has affirmed: «When I listen to Bach, *I believe*» [30]. So we ask: can we speak of an aesthetic journey towards the Absolute, considering what has been said above, from a metaphysical point of view?

If the theme of beauty is considered within the horizon of the transcendental properties of being, one can first affirm that beauty has different degrees and that God, as the *totality and fullness of being*, can be in turn considered as unlimited Beauty, once pure perfection has been recognized in beauty¹⁰. In his commentary *Super librum Dionysii De divinis nominibus* Thomas Aquinas was thus not only able to praise God’s beauty, but also indicated in the Absolute the same *Subsistent Beauty* [31].

Beauty as *splendor formae* – John Paul II reminds us in his *Letter to the Artists* – has always been directly linked to God, «Infinite ocean of beauty where wonder becomes awe, exhilaration and unspeakable joy» [32]. John Paul II also states that beauty is «an

invitation to savour life and dream of the future. For this reason the beauty of created things can never fully satisfy and stirs that hidden nostalgia for God that a lover of the beautiful like Saint Augustine was able to express in incomparable terms. 'Late have I loved you, beauty ever so old and ever so new, late have I loved you'» [33].

The philosopher, S. Vanni Rovighi, expresses herself in this way: «The consideration of beauty as proof of God's existence may seem – and is – very fragile from a strictly rational point of view, but is not without effect for those who recognize the beauty of nature: the heavens declare the glory of God, not only because of the regularity of their movements, but also because they are beautiful. [...] I do not claim this to be a demonstrative argument, but I wonder if many of us have not been led to think of God by contemplating the beauty of nature» [34].

In his ideal and divine world Plato had already ranked beauty as the first, as it was the only one, among all the perfect substances to be considered *the most evident and loveable* [35]; in Christian thought God is explicitly indicated as the *princeps analogatum* of kindness and beauty, therefore as the Supreme-Good and the Supreme-Beauty [36]. For this reason he is the source and the cause for the beauty present, in different ways, in all creatures: a creature's beauty is indeed a "participant resemblance" of the same divine beauty (*similitudo divinae pulchritudinis in rebus participata*) [37]. God is "*pulchricifico*", he makes things beautiful and his beauty «infinitely surpasses every beauty we know» [38]. It is no coincidence that in Chapter 4 of the commentary *Super librum Dionysii De divinis nominibus*, Thomas Aquinas affirms that as the source and cause of the beauty in creatures, it is "He" who "gives beauty" to things.

In this perspective beauty anchored to being, has an intrinsic intelligibility as the splendour of *the substantial shape*: it makes the being in its sensitive features more evident, so that not only the "wonders" of nature, but also art forms manifest themselves as "clarity of being", revealing their intimate intrinsic and extrinsic basis [39]. Therefore the beauty of sensitive forms is one way that leads to divine beauty because aesthetic and conceptual forms are a manifesto of the inexpressible, "they speak the unspeakable", so that every fragment of contingent splendour may constitute *an opening*, a point of access to the Absolute»¹¹. Real art undoubtedly invokes transcendent values of beauty and truth, more or less fleetingly grasped as an expression of the Absolute, that can stimulate the *itinerarium mentis ad Deum* [40].

«The masterpiece - C. Chenis continues - establishes absolute communication with the subject. In the face of beauty embodied in the perceivable, the ego undergoes an *aesthetic* and *ecstatic* experience» [41]. This discussion is particularly important and significant when talking of *cultic art*, that *trespasses* on poetical knowledge (even though moving from it), *catalyses* the noblest emotions while going beyond them, *circumscribes* human will while referring to the divine one, *calls* the faithful to an assembly though it is God's house. This ultimately represents our 'speaking of God' beyond the knowledge, giving life to an encompassing human-divine *habitat* where people and things integrate themselves in ordaining to God with splendour of lives and forms» [42].

From the Christian perspective, the result is that in its harmonious position within Tradition, art is able to make the epithet of "sacred" its own, together with that continuous and righteous renovation that allows it to be an expression of fertile dialogue between faith and culture. Cultic art, which is indeed a constitutive element of liturgical action, acts - inside it – as a *sacramental action*¹².

Benedict XVI during his meeting with the artists in the Sistine Chapel on November 21st 2009, specifically remembered, on this subject, the "*via pulchritudinis*", «a path

of beauty that is at the same time an artistic, aesthetic journey and one of faith, of theological research». «The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar - Benedict XVI stated – starts his great work entitled *Glory. A Theological Aesthetics*, with these striking expressions: 'Our first word is called beauty. Beauty is the last word that the thinking intellect dares to say, because it only crowns, as with a halo of uncontained splendour, the two-fold constellation of the truth and good and their inseparable relationship'. [...] Hence, the path of beauty leads us to gathering the Whole in a fragment, the Infinite in the finite, God in the history of humankind. In this regard Simone Weil wrote: 'In everything that awakens a pure and authentic feeling of beauty in us, there is the real presence of God. There is almost a kind of incarnation of God in the world and beauty is the sign. Beauty is the experimental proof that incarnation is possible. For this reason, all art of the first order, is by its nature, religious'. An even more icastic description is that by Hermann Hesse: 'Art means: revealing God in everything» [43].

2.4. Anthropological-pedagogical aspects of beauty

Let us now briefly look at the anthropological-pedagogical aspect. The philosopher L. Pareyson rightly wrote «only aesthetic education is able to mediate the transition from the physical man to the ethical man» [44]. Art is first of all a *"gymnasium" for practising dialogue and reciprocity*, cultivating the *relationship between beauty and truth*. It stimulates one into *retrieving the wonder, marvel, enthusiasm* when faced with the richness of reality, starting with one's own life and history, nature, works and vestiges to which we have access in order to admire them. Accompanying young people in *developing an aesthetic judgment* contributes significantly to their overall growth: while with critical judgement it is the intellect that adapts to reality, while in aesthetic judgement this happens together with the sharing of feeling and emotion, considering the existential entirety of the person.

Art by its nature is disinterested, it has no other purpose – at least to start with – unless one considers the aesthetic experience itself and for this reason teaching art and beauty means *helping the transition from passive interest to active interest that emanates from within*: standing before a work of art we are involved in *going-inside*, of almost becoming co-creators, to such an extent that the aesthetic experience becomes *all-encompassing*, a subject-object relationship in which we are called to go outside ourselves using intellect and sensitivity, without estranging ourselves in order to reach *contemplation*. For this reason according to Christian thought, artistic creation is participation in God's creative ability and every true education in beauty is a school of freedom, ethics and citizenship. The responsibility of recognizing and sharing beauty is not always an easy exercise but is useful and precious in dialogue and in respecting identity and diversity. As S. Lorusso writes «in the words of those who sustain the possibility of learning from each other's cultures: 'I believe that the incompleteness of any culture is its first virtue, because it leaves the door open to encounter, interpretation and truth'» [45].

Art education is indeed, *demonstrating that "feeling is not enough"*, thus opening a path to *authentic freedom*. It is important to direct efforts toward acquiring that "mature" human structure characterized by the ability *to go beyond the feeling to recognize reality in its truth*, through the cultivated intelligence of things and value judgments, relations with others, the relationship between tradition/innovation. It is on this delicate passage that the efficacy of educational work can find a point of verification: when it

promotes the ability to recognize and choose what is really beautiful without impediments or ideological narrow-mindedness; it leads to an orderly and harmonious management of one's life starting from the relationship between listening/word and action/contemplation; it develops a capacity for "elegance" and true aesthetic taste. The concept of *Bildung*, as is known, helps in giving a good idea of this "spiritual education": «something both higher and more intimate, that is to say the attitude, coming from knowing and feeling the totality of the spiritual and ethical, harmoniously flows into the self-same feeling and character» [46]. Aesthetic education can and should stimulate and verify interior harmony and freedom, so helping to clarify the misunderstanding about the disengagement of freedom from truth.

A final aspect that seems important to point out is the consideration of existence as a "*calling to the masterpiece*". «The first page of the Bible - John Paul II writes - introduces us to God as if he were the exemplary model of every person who creates a work: in man the craftsman mirrors his image as a *Creator*. [...] In the 'artistic creation' man reveals himself more than ever as 'God's image' and accomplishes this task above all moulding the wonderful 'substance' of his human nature and then exercising a creative supremacy over the surrounding universe» [47]. This is how we are reminded of the task every man is charged with, the vocation of *making his life a work of art*: «to every man is given the task of being the creator of his own life: in a sense he must make a work of art from it, a masterpiece» [48]. If the work of art is beautiful when it is "finished", the result of a dynamic that is a sign of the metaphysical dimension of evolution of the contingent being, then *educating oneself for a dynamic consideration of the art work means recognizing one's own life as a work that is made and is-to-be-made continuously*. This is the meaning of the invitation to live as protagonists for a «renewed 'epiphany' of beauty in our times» [49], because the aim of education is to ensure *that every person is the most beautiful version of his/her own self*.

3. Philosophical concept of "conservation"

Let us now turn to the philosophical concept of *conservation*, which is inherently linked to the concept of creation. Christian thought has indicated conservation as one of the ways in which divine providence manifests itself and wisely and lovingly guides and supports all created reality. The notion of conservation derives from the concept of creation itself as a *continuous production achieved through the being of those in existence*.

The philosopher A. Alessi writes: «Contingent beings do not have sufficient reason for their existence in themselves but owe their existence to a cause that ultimately cannot be but divine cause. This reliance on Being is continuous, permanent, not definite. If an object were not continuously illuminated by the sun it would stop shining. When cause stops being cause, the effect fails. As a result the contingent being continuously shows its precariousness and continually requires support in being, from the Absolute, so the divine Being cannot stop his support otherwise not all things will exist. It must be noted however that from a creature's point of view there is a temporal distinction between creation (the initial moment when God made them exist) and conservation (the successive moments when the Absolute keeps them alive), from God's point of view, who transcends every spatial-temporal distinction, the act of conservation identifies itself with the act of creation. What is conservation, if not the action prolonged, *quoad nos*, through time» [50].

Therefore the notion of conservation philosophically represents the ontological “counter-weight” to aspects of insecurity, temporality, limits, etc. that mark the existential dimension of every creature and expresses its indispensable need for support in facing the metaphysical lability of creatureliness. Thomas Aquinas pointed out that «*Oportet quod idem sit causa rei et conservationis ipsius; nam conservatio rei non est nisi continuatio esse ipsius*» [51].

For more details on conservation within the discourse on creation and Providence, there are several useful texts that may be referred to¹³. The philosopher M. Pangallo appropriately writes: «Creatures and the whole of creation are totally dependent on the Creator both in starting to exist and to continue to exist, in every moment of their life or their being. The continuous reliance of creatures on the Creator is called *conservation*. Conservation is creation continued through which the being subsists from nothing. The expression ‘continuous creation’ means that a creature can never stop depending on God and hence the term ‘creation’ is used with the meaning of ‘being dependent’; this clarification is useful to avoid conceiving conservation as a continuous creative activity in which God directly intervenes in every aspect of becoming, creating every finished entity from nothing. In truth there are many artificial beings created by man and not by God from nothing (*ex nihilo*): for example appliances, cars, calculators, etc.; there are also many natural entities indirectly made by man, such as new breeds of animals derived from selections and crossbreeds or produced by the evolutionary dynamism of human beings. These ‘new’ beings are not drawn from thin air, but derive from pre-existing beings that are combined in a certain way; and yet they depend on God the Creator too because the primary causal influence of the divine allows [...] secondary causes to compete in many ways to produce multiple effects in many ways, such as new realities and new substances. Conservation is not a set of creative acts that follow one another in time but simply the continuation or extension of the creative action» [52].

From an anthropological point of view it is interesting to highlight how desire, “tension” in the persistence of being, represents one of the constants that accompany the human person’s existence tending not only to conserve oneself but also to “being more”, to self-transcendence [53].

Conclusion

Returning to the initial distinction between artistic and cultural, we could say first of all – in the light of the path taken – that we can and have to look at art, which is also science¹⁴, as a fundamental *cultural good*¹⁵. «Cultural heritage produced by the action of man’s making can be of artistic value. [...] In its etymological meaning the artificial contrasts with the natural but since antiquity, artistic connotation draws the artifact from its pure instrumentality in order to make it an evocative sign of man’s spirituality» [54]. In its relationship and its inseparable position in the environment art thus represents a necessary tool for eco-sustainability, ethics and aesthetics¹⁶.

From the theoretical perspective, both philosophical and theological and its applications in anthropology and education, Christian thought has necessarily deepened – in light of the fundamental notions that belong to it – both the meaning of beauty, the artistic one included, and the concept of conservation and in our opinion these perspectives in a certain way can represent an interesting contribution for those who work in the field of conservation sciences or in the planning and promotion of artistic and cultural events, particularly if these events relate to religious heritage.

Notes

- ¹ It is interesting to note that the term “*human flourishing*” in different languages, which recalls a person’s “blossoming”, “generation” and overall coherent maturation, is becoming more widespread. Cf. the main themes of the next Convention dedicated to ‘*Personal Flourishing in Organizations*’ to be held in Rome at the *Pontificia Università della Santa Croce* on February 24th and 25th 2014.
- ² For contributions given by recent Popes on the role and identity of the University, cf. Tanzella-Nitti G. 1998, *Un’idea di università nel magistero di Giovanni Paolo II*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato; Leuzzi L. 2008, *Allargare gli orizzonti della razionalità. I discorsi per l’Università di Benedetto XVI*, Paoline, Milano; Leuzzi L. 2011, *Una nuova cultura per un nuovo umanesimo. I grandi discorsi di Benedetto XVI*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano. See also the provocative volume by Ferraris M. 2009, *Una Ikea di Università*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano.
- ³ As regards the issue of the relationship between faith and science as the result of a dedicated series of meetings held in Rome at the Centro Culturale “Paolo VI” di Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza in the years 2006-2012, cf. Mantovani M. - Amerise M. (ed.) 2008, *Fede, cultura e scienza. Discipline in dialogo*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano; Carderi F. - Mantovani M. - Perillo G. (ed.) 2012, *Momenti del Logos. Ricerche del “Progetto LERS” (Logos, Episteme, Ratio, Scientia) in memoria di Marilena Amerise e di Marco Arosio*, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Roma. There is currently underway (2012-2015) a homologous initiative entitled “Art, Culture and Technology”.
- ⁴ For the importance of reflection on 20th century “technology” we cite, merely by way of example: Heidegger M. 1976, *La questione della tecnica*, in Id., *Saggi e discorsi*, Mursia, Milano, pp. 5-27; Guardini R. 1993, *Lettere dal lago di Como. La tecnica e l’uomo*, Morcelliana, Brescia; Galimberti U. 1999, *Psiche e techne. L’uomo nell’età della tecnica*, Feltrinelli, Milano.
- ⁵ On this issue see the interesting contribution by Montani M. 1996, *Filosofia della cultura. Problemi e prospettive*, Las, Roma.
- ⁶ On this theme see our previous contributions that are a direct reference for the writing of this paper: Mantovani M. 1999, *Verso Dio-bellezza: un percorso per i giovani?*, Note di Pastorale Giovanile 33 (8), pp. 13-21; Mantovani M. 2005, *Il pulchrum nell’orizzonte dei trascendentali dell’essere in S. Tommaso d’Aquino*, PATH 4 (2), pp. 377 - 394; Mantovani M. 2005, *Educating for Beauty (Pulchrum) as a Journey towards the Absolute*, Divyadaan. Journal of Philosophy & Education 16 (3), pp. 291 - 322; Mantovani M. 2006, *Una via musicale (estetica) verso l’Assoluto?*, in Messinese L. - Göbel C. (ed.), *Verità e responsabilità. Studi in onore di Aniceto Molinaro*, Centro Studi Sant’Anselmo, Roma, pp. 117-131.
- ⁷ To this end see Lorusso S. 2012, *La valutazione soggettiva e oggettiva dell’opera d’arte: due lingue di un’unica cultura*, Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage 12, pp. 22-24.
- ⁸ On this issue consider the following contributions: Molinaro A. 2002, *Metafisica. Corso sistematico*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo, pp. 111-113; Molinaro A. 2006, *L’arte come problema filosofico*, in Id. (ed.), *Filosofia e Arte*, Urbaniana University Press, Roma, pp. 5-20; Gilbert P.P. 1997, *Corso di metafisica. La pazienza d’essere*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato, especially pages from 309 to 321.
- ⁹ Cf. among other things, on this theme: Eco U. 1988, *The aesthetics of Thomas*

Aquinas, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.); Monachese A. 2008, *La bellezza come nome di Dio nel pensiero di Tommaso d'Aquino*, Pontificia Università Urbaniana, Roma; Monachese A. 2010, *Trascendentalità della bellezza. Uno sguardo sulla vita dalla prospettiva di san Tommaso*, Euntes Docete 63 (3), pp. 173-183; Papa R. 2009, *Bellezza ed arte alla luce di san Tommaso*, in Congiunti L. - Perillo G. (ed.) 2009, *Studi sul pensiero di Tommaso d'Aquino. In occasione del XXX anniversario della S.I.T.A.*, Las, Roma, pp. 331 - 337.

- ¹⁰ Spiritual beauty is gathered by the intellectually and morally more 'refined', but how can God be credited with sensitive beauty since God does not have a body? Sensitive beauty is a "mixed" perfection so it is fulfilled by God, only in a virtual way, therefore included in a greater perfection, that is "pure". On this question, see Venturini N. 1998, *La ricerca dell'Assoluto. Dio c'è? Chi è?*, Coletti, Roma, pp. 871-872.
- ¹¹ On this theme see the interesting contribution by Agejas Esteban J.Á. 2004, *La adecuada comprensión de la vía estética de acceso al misterio*, Doctor Angelicus 4, pp. 111-126.
- ¹² This argument has been translated in a series of editorials in the review *Armonia di Voci*. Cf.: *Una musica che conduce all'eternità*, *Armonia di Voci* 55 (2000/3), p. 1; *Dalla storia all'eternità*, *Armonia di Voci* 55 (2000/4), p. 1. this is particularly valid for the music destined for liturgy: « Seriously talking about art and 'music' in liturgy is not a matter of practical 'functionality' but first of all of a theological understanding able to guarantee an adequate and consequent artistic production». *Da Maria verso un tipo di arte per il culto*, in *Armonia di Voci* 58 (2003/2), p. 43.
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- ¹⁵ Cf. De Nardis P., Alteri L. 2010, *Per una fenomenologia dei Beni Culturali*, *Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage* 10, pp. 132-141.
- ¹⁶ It is properly stated in Lorusso S., Braida A.M. 2012, *Arte e Ambiente come mezzo per l'ecosostenibilità, l'etica e l'estetica*, *Conservation Science in Cultural Heritage* 12, pp. 68-75.

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