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**VIA PULCHRITUDINIS. THE PROPOSAL OF SPIRITUALITY BASED ON
BEAUTY ON THE EXAMPLE OF EL GRECO'S WORKS**

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Abstract: Spirituality is not anything static but it is a reality that is constantly developing (what is more, that development is necessary) and changing like every interpersonal relationship. The dynamism of spirituality invites to different ways of its development. One of the ways practiced for centuries is “the way of beauty” – via pulchritudinis. Though often forgotten, the way as a proposal of spirituality seems to be important and still valid for contemporary man so sensitive to all kinds of pictures. The article consists of three parts. In the first one it is presented in a synthetic way how in the issues of beauty and knowing God through beauty have been dealt with in the history of theology. In the second part the author, referring to the statements of popes and the teaching of the Catholic Church, indicates the significance currently attributed to beauty in theology. The third part presents in an exemplary way how through meditation of a painting “the way of beauty” can be discovered, referring to the output of one of the most famous painters, El Greco.

Key words: Christian Spirituality, via pulchritudinis, El Greco, painting, theology, meditation.

The Christian spirituality is an answer given to God's calling, to the invitation to God's life. That relation results in the clearly specified attitude following the example of Christ (conviction and life consistent with faith), in accordance with the words of the Eucharistic Doxology, namely: "Though Him, with Him, and in Him" (Chmielewski 2002, 226–232). A Christian identifies his life with Christ whom he is still getting to know.

Spirituality is not anything static but it is a reality that is constantly developing (what is more, that development is necessary) and changing like every interpersonal relationship. The dynamism of spirituality invites to search for different ways of its development. One of the ways practiced for centuries is "the way of beauty" – *via pulchritudinis*. Though often forgotten, the way as a proposal of spirituality seems to be important and still valid for contemporary man so sensitive to all kinds of pictures.

Religious paintings have been and still can be an essential factor of spiritual development. Reading of paintings does not have to concentrate only on the question what an author wanted to convey to his viewers. It seems that it is more significant to answer the question what can be discovered in paintings contemporarily and, referring to the title of the article, to what extent the religious paintings of El Greco can inspire faith and deepen spirituality of the twenty-first-century people.

1. The history of theology – toward the theology of beauty

Over the centuries, Christianity have defended itself against two extreme attitudes, namely the praise of beauty (idolatry) and its rejection (iconoclasm). It seemed that the Old Testament clearly presented the issue "no images". However, the advocates of beauty cited the famous excerpt from the Paul's Epistle to Colossians about Christ who is "the image of the invisible God" (cf. Col 1:15), arguing that God can use a particular image to awaken and strengthen man's faith. Faith that is born from listening (*fides ex auditu*) can be given to a man also through images (*fides ex visu*). Aesthetics has found its significant place at the level of the Christian theology (Burrichter 2001, 1139–1144).

For St. Augustine, the surrounding world was "the most beautiful poem" in which balance, proportion, and rhythm can be noticed. The basis of that esthetical optimism was a belief that the world is a creation of God and thus cannot not be beautiful. If the world is beautiful, it is not for its physical beauty but mainly for its spiritual beauty revealed in Christ and the saints. Above the beauty of the world is the highest beauty of God who is "beauty itself". There is no image that could reflect that beauty as it is completely unsensual. Augustine was reluctant to look at religious paintings, receding from the ancient aesthetics and approaching the Old

Testament idea, anticipating a sort of forthcoming iconoclasm. He emphasised that God's beauty cannot be seen with the senses but with a soul, that eyes are not necessary for that but truth and virtue are, and the beauty can be seen only by chaste souls, only saints. Augustine, referring to the Stoics, stated that corporeal beauty itself is neither good nor bad, but it becomes good or bad depending on how it is used: "Everything serves a pious soul to praise the mysteries of faith". Augustine created the concept of „divine beauty”. According to his assumptions, broadly understood art included all activities aimed at creating beauty. For the following thousands of years Augustine became an authority of Christian aesthetics to whom only Pseudo-Dionysius can be compared. In the Middle Ages their metaphysical concept of beauty was adopted and further developed (Tatarkiewicz 2009, 61–67).

John Damascene, called also “a theologian of an image”, formulated the thesis, fundamental for the Christian thought, that the Old Testament prohibition of images was merely of a preventive character. God's command “you have not seen a figure and thus do not make an image of him or her” means “do not make an image of God until you see Him”. According to John Damascene, the existence of painterly images of God is not negation of the Old Testament but its fulfilment. A Christian image is a consequence, fulfilment as well as an end point of the Old Testament command and at the same time the “primogenitor” of a Christian image is not a pagan idol but the fact of non-existence of a particular image before God's incarnation (Uspienski 1993, 16).

St. Thomas, in the spirit of Aristotle, moved from the ideal Plato's notion of beauty to an empirical notion. He described beauty in a narrow way as the proportion of shape and colours and in a broad way using two properties, namely liking and contemplation. Owing to that, Thomas managed to pursue unusually difficult reflection, specifically to separate beauty from the good. Beauty is the object of contemplation and not aspiration. The good, however, is the object of aspiration, not contemplation. We strive for the good and do not look at it. Beauty is a form we can see and the good is an aim that we pursue. To satisfy the desire for the good one needs to possess it and in order to satisfy the desire of beauty it is enough to possess its image. The definition of beauty proposed by St. Thomas relativised it, referring it to a contemplating subject. For the ancients, beauty was an objective property and for Thomas and other Christian thinkers, beauty depended on a man that perceived it. That view relativised beauty but did not subjectivise it, namely there is no beauty without a subject, but it does not exist without a particular object causing inclination for it either. Similarly to Augustine, St. Thomas claimed that a thing is not beautiful because we love it, but we love it since it is beautiful and good. Beauty includes a certain objective element, specifically it is an object of knowledge through perceiving. Man gets recognises beauty through the senses (precisely only two so called

“cognitive senses”, i.e. sight and hearing) and mind (aesthetic intellectualism). Thomas believed that in the face of beauty we experience a feeling of pleasure of watching (*delectatio visus*) or contemplation (*delectatio contemplationis*). It is a privilege of man who is the only being, as Thomas claimed, that enjoys beauty of things just for their beauty and is able to love them (Tatarkiewicz 2009, 271–273). Esthetical and theological considerations of theologians were translated into the Church practice, mainly through a developing preaching movement and common catechesis. The pedagogical function of paintings strengthened: “Artists began to gain a realistic form to picture the history of salvation” (Boruta 2006, 19–20). Together with the Renaissance development of art, Western Christianity became a visual religion.

2. *Via pulchritudinis* in the contemporary theology

Since the 16th century art has been becoming more and more distant and beauty has ceased to be a significant subject of theological investigations. Modern aesthetics has moved towards subjective experiences, leaving the objective categories of the good and beauty beyond its considerations and not referring beauty to God anymore. The Church in modern times has become less and less inspiring for artists, left the role of a patron of the arts, and consequently, lacked the theological reflection of esthetical values as well. Great artists have been left beyond the influence of Christianity. Works of arts have enriched the collections of museums and private art galleries. A kind of stagnation as well as the domination of “Art for Art” could have been observed (Knapiński 2002, 1173–1186).

In the second half of the 20th century one can notice a “new” beginning of theology that took an esthetical perspective as a property, willing to, as H.U. von Balthasar wrote, provide theology the primacy of revelation, the form of “faith through experience”. *The Glory of the Lord*, one of the most important works of von Balthasar with its meaningful subtitle *A Theological Aesthetics*, is a great synthesis of the entire theological thought, beginning with biblical and Greek roots and ending with the mid-twentieth century, a synthesis designed around the esthetical dimension of God as well as the work of creation and redemption. The book is an obvious criticism of the theology of the last centuries, mainly in terms of a method and the lack of the esthetical dimension in theological considerations as well. Von Balthasar’s contribution lies in a method that recognizes beauty as a theological category.

The work of von Balthasar, without entering an artistic creative process itself, is absolutely significant for the development of the contemporary theology of beauty. The Swiss theologian treated dogmatics as aesthetics. He presented the whole systematic theology, centring his

considerations around the category of beauty. In his thought, maintaining its material and formal subject, *theo-logia* was *kalo-logia* and the concepts “God” and “beauty” were identified with each other. “God is Beauty in the deepest and total understanding of the meaning of that notion” (Klauza 2008, 48). Balthasar created his work with the hope that contemporary, positivistic and atheistic man, blind not only to theology but even to philosophy, faced with the phenomenon of Christ, will learn to «see» again. That “seeing” is situated in esthetical categories among which delight is the most important attitude. The theological aesthetics of Balthasar is a teaching about perceiving the greatness of God manifesting in human history, widely-understood humanistics, art, and metaphysics. Beauty according to Balthasar is a manifestation of greatness of God in the world and history (Balthasar 2011, 16).

In the second half of the 20th century the attitude of the official representatives of the Church to art undergone a significant change. The speech of Paul VI addressed to artists was a kind of breakthrough: “The Church needs you (...). You can find accessible and comprehensible forms for invisible things (...). The friendship between the Church and artists should be restored” (Paul VI 1965). A clear confirmation of the ecclesial openness to art were the words of John Paul II: „to proclaim the message, entrusted to us by Christ, the Church needs art. It has to render the spiritual and invisible God’s reality perceivable and even attractive, as far as possible. It has to express in comprehensible forms what is inexpressible itself” (John Paul II 1999). In many similar statements John Paul II created and, more precisely, recreated the theology of beauty, indicating that also the Church in the West can and should open more to the reality of broadly understood beauty.

Towards the beauty progressed also numerous speeches of Card. Joseph Ratzinger. In *The Theology of Liturgy* he wrote about the connection between art and God’s cult, reminding that in Christ God revealed His face as “the image not made with a human hand”. While showing what is beyond human senses one should remember that paintings of Christ and the saints “are not photographs. Their essence is to reveal to a much greater extent what is not externally cognisable, awaken inner senses, and teach a new way of seeing that allows to perceive in the visible what is invisible” (Ratzinger 2012, 97–111). The way of knowing God through beauty, so dear to St. Augustine, became characteristic also for the pontificate of Benedict XVI. That specific aesthetical aspect of the relation with God was the beginning of his theological aesthetics, namely “aesthetics of faith” that, among other things, raised the question: What is the place of art in the life of the Church? The answer was obvious: “A theologian who does not love art, poetry, music, nature, can be dangerous. Blindness and deafness to beauty is not a secondary issue but can leave a mark on his theology” (Ratzinger 1986, 111–112).

A direct echo of the teaching of Benedict XVI can be found in the encyclical of Pope Francis *Lumen fidei*. In that document the issue of *fides ex visu* has returned, especially with regard to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ: „If laying down one’s life for one’s friends is the greatest proof of love (cf. Jn 15:13), Jesus offered his own life for all, even for his enemies, to transform their hearts. This explains why the evangelists could see the hour of Christ’s crucifixion as the culmination of the gaze of faith; in that hour the depth and breadth of God’s love shone forth. It was then that Saint John offered his solemn testimony, as together with the Mother of Jesus he gazed upon the pierced one (cf. Jn 19:37): He who saw this has borne witness, so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth (Jn 19:35)” (Francis 2013, 16).

The latest papal teaching clearly emphasizes the complexity of human knowledge and the reference of faith, through image and word: „The bond between seeing and hearing in faith-knowledge is most clearly evident in John’s Gospel. For the Fourth Gospel, to believe is both to hear and to see. Faith’s hearing emerges as a form of knowing proper to love: it is a personal hearing, one which recognizes the voice of the Good Shepherd (cf. Jn 10:3-5); it is a hearing which calls for discipleship, as was the case with the first disciples: Hearing him say these things, they followed Jesus (Jn 1:37). But faith is also tied to sight. Seeing the signs which Jesus worked leads at times to faith, as in the case of the Jews who, following the raising of Lazarus, having seen what he did, believed in him (Jn 11:45). At other times, faith itself leads to deeper vision: If you believe, you will see the glory of God (Jn 11:40). In the end, belief and sight intersect: Whoever believes in me believes in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me (Jn 12:44-45). Joined to hearing, seeing then becomes a form of following Christ, and faith appears as a process of gazing, in which our eyes grow accustomed to peering into the depths. Easter morning thus passes from John who, standing in the early morning darkness before the empty tomb, saw and believed (Jn 20:8), to Mary Magdalene who, after seeing Jesus (cf. Jn 20:14) and wanting to cling to him, is asked to contemplate him as he ascends to the Father, and finally to her full confession before the disciples: „I have seen the Lord!” (Jn 20:18). How does one attain this synthesis between hearing and seeing? It becomes possible through the person of Christ himself, who can be seen and heard. He is the Word made flesh, whose glory we have seen (cf. Jn 1:14). The light of faith is the light of a countenance in which the Father is seen. In the Fourth Gospel, the truth which faith attains is the revelation of the Father in the Son, in his flesh and in his earthly deeds, a truth which can be defined as the light-filled life of Jesus. This means that faith-knowledge does not direct our gaze to a purely inward truth. The truth which faith discloses to us is a truth centred on an encounter with Christ, on the contemplation of his life and on the awareness of his presence. Saint Thomas Aquinas speaks of the Apostles’ *oculata fides* – a faith which

sees! – in the presence of the body of the Risen Lord. With their own eyes they saw the risen Jesus and they believed; in a word, they were able to peer into the depths of what they were seeing and to confess their faith in the Son of God, seated at the right hand of the Father” (Francis 2013, 30).

The significance of beauty for faith, including also religious paintings, is emphasized by *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Already in No. 32, it refers to the biblical argumentation and the statement of St. Augustine concerning the possibility of knowing God through beauty. The references to the resolutions of the Second Council of Nicaea can be found in the Catechism three times, namely in CCC 476, 2131, and 3132. In the last point it is highlighted: „The Christian veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment which proscribes idols. Indeed, the honour rendered to an image passes to its prototype (Basil of Caesarea), and whoever venerates an image venerates the person portrayed in it (the Second Council of Nicaea). The honour paid to sacred images is a respectful veneration, not the adoration due to God alone: Religious worship is not directed to images in themselves, considered as mere things, but under their distinctive aspect as images leading us on to God incarnate” (Thomas Aquinas)” (CCC 2132).

The authors of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* pay attention to the relation between truth, beauty, and sacral art (CCC 2500–2503) emphasizing the particular importance of religious works of art: „Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God – the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ, who reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily. This spiritual beauty of God is reflected in the most holy Virgin Mother of God, the angels, and saints. Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer, and to the love of God, Creator and Saviour, the Holy One and Sanctifier” (CCC 2502).

The contemporary theology should search for such a form of expression of the revealed truth that, remaining faithful to the Tradition, will be open to a difficult dialogue with the contemporary culture. One of the possible ways of practising theology is to discover faith through the category of beauty. The way of beauty (*via pulchritudinis*) cannot remain only a historical method of theology, but following, among other thoughts, the thought of H.U. van Balthasar, it should be rediscovered ever anew and realized. Beauty should be rediscovered as a spiritual category, indestructible and independent of changing external conditions. In that meaning beauty is God’s name since God is Beauty, the Good, and the Truth. Man, striving for beauty, as a consequence, pursues God. His vocation is to become the image of God, thus, among other things, to discover beauty in and around himself and realize it according to his abilities (Kawecki 2006, 52–54).

A theologian talking about God, therefore talks about beauty for God is beauty. Considering beauty present in the world, he refers to Him who is the source and the final aim of beauty. Through the theology of beauty the Church proclaims the message of salvation. “The way of beauty” is able to “touch” the hearts of contemporary people expressing the mystery of God and man and also constituting the measure of dialogue with those who are ready to discover the richness of the Christ’s Gospel (Pontifical Council for Culture 2006). *Via pulchritudinis*, basing on the experience of meeting beauty, becomes a privileged way of evangelisation and catechesis and also a manner of development of human spirituality in modern times. The way of beauty that, despite the sin, is present in the world can lead to meeting God.

Beauty connected with the truth, the good, and love, namely the supreme beauty, Beauty that is a personal God, Jesus Christ will save this world (Figuera 2009, 211–215). Redeeming beauty reveals Itself mainly in the humility of God when suffering and death are the expression of love that selflessly gives itself (John Paul II 1998, 93). The theology of God’s self-emptying, the theology of the cross can be considered as the theology of beauty. As expressed by Isaiah, “He had no form or charm to attract us, no beauty to win our hearts” (Isa 53:2) and still the “hidden beauty”, “paradoxical beauty” revealed itself that way (Cottin 1997, 9–16). The Son of God abandoned on the cross is the most beautiful of the sons of men and *scandalum crucis* became “the provocation into seeing” (Goecke-Seischab 2004, 112.). Indeed, the beauty of the crucified Christ has nothing from tranquillity, harmony, or bliss. That agony, suffering, loneliness is motivated by love. That kind of beauty coming from Calvary is like from other category and still, historically depicted by brilliant painters and other artists, remains the contents of worldwide masterpieces. It is salvific beauty that in the crucified love saves the world. Christ is the most beautiful of the son of men as He is full of grace owing to which God frees man from sin, liberates him from the evil, restores him to original innocence. Christ is the model of a beautiful life and the prototype of Christian sanctity. Thus the theology of beauty is not just delight in the greatness of nature or art for themselves. It is discovering beauty with reference to its ultimate source, beauty connected with the good and the truth. It is about continuous revealing of Christ and the infinite beauty of His love.

3. Discovering Christ in the works of El Greco

Just as contemporary theology needs new great opening to beauty, so too contemporary man needs to experience of the depth, namely to discover and develop spirituality that will enable not only to meet himself but also build and shape relationships with other people and God.

The way to God through beauty (*via pulchritudinis*) can become inspiring for contemporary man, if he reaches various works of art. During that meeting a method of meditation of paintings can be unusually fruitful. That method is particularly important and useful for the people of the 21st century whose basic experience of communication is founded less on words and more and more on various images. Living in the world of images, he has become more susceptible to their influence.

The proper way of meditation of a religious painting consists in starting with an external view and delving deeper into its content (meaning) and next, identifying oneself with that content in order to, as far as possible, become a participant of the presented mystery of faith. Staying in front of the painting for a longer time, connected with the desire of one's own development, leads to a meeting with an internal image in such a way that the external image in a way disappears out of sight. A man experiences the mystery, recognizes the essence of the representation, feels inner commotion not only on the esthetical level, but mostly on the theological one, namely he discovers the truth about God, other people, and himself. The source of effectiveness of such meditation is not so much man's effort (indeed very important) as God's grace, that is the gift allowing to explore the hidden mystery. Since a painting relatively easily leads out of the notional sphere, meditation with its use is recommended for beginners (including children and youth) for whom concentration on words (notions) would be much more difficult. Additionally, painting representations can be a way to deepen spirituality for people knowing their faith well. A painting influences a recipient as a peculiar whole, giving him the possibility to meet the reality it depicts and discover what initially seems to be hidden. Meditation of a painting serves to gain inner integration of a person in an easier way and for a Christian it is a crucial means of creating and developing his spirituality.

One of the artists, whose painting is a special meeting place for aesthetics and theology, is Doménikos Theotokópoulos (Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος), called also "El Greco" (1541-1614). The painter was born and brought up in the capital of Crete, Heraklion. About 1567, already as a promising artist, he left his home island and moved to Venice where he further developed his talents, learning from great masters like Titian, Tintoretto, or Veronese. In the following years he lived in Rome and finally settled permanently in Spanish Toledo.

Among almost 280 known paintings of El Greco the vast majority is of a religious character. As his biographers emphasized, "The knowledge of the Catholic doctrine and spirituality was visible in El Greco's relations with people, books in his private library, and the way of presenting religious themes in paintings. The artist rejected the literary interpretation of sacral motifs, trying to express their meaning with the use of iconography and painting style. In his works he combined elements of Plato's philosophy and the Christian doctrine. Forms painted by the

artist seem to be devoid of matter in a way and colours are pure and shining. Light in the paintings of El Greco is usually bright, harsh and space where figures are placed is indefinite, often dark and empty". El Greco, considered to be an extravagant painter, gradually developed his own, original style which was influenced by his earlier experiences with the post-Byzantine art and the Italian Renaissance and also with the Spanish art. "The stylistic revolution certainly contributed to the eccentricity of the painter. Already in the first works of El Greco, still faithful to the traditional iconography, his striving for break with formal schemes became visible. During his stay in Venice, the artist was fascinated with mannerism, changing colours of his paintings, the way of applying paint to a board, and finally he resigned from distemper in favour of the oil technique. He elongated the shapes of figures more and more and deformed them, thus achieving unusual strength of expression that became a distinguishing mark of his style. Most of the figures painted by Dominikos refer to the mannerist typology. Still, the artist broke with the rules of drawing and anatomical proportions used by the Italian painters. The colours of his paintings, in turn, are of Venetian origin. El Greco applied paint through energetic brush strokes and sometimes painted with pieces of fabric or fingers" (Giorgi 2006, 77–85). Thus he belonged to those painters who prioritized his own searches above certain canons both in terms of form and contents of presented works.

The figure of Christ is in the centre of the works of Doménikos Theotokópoulos. In his paintings, El Greco repeatedly presented Jesus and, in a way typical for him, tried to face the most important question of a Christian: Who is Jesus for me personally? Based on the work of the artist, one is able to show the subsequent stages of Jesus' life, namely from His birth through activity, death, and resurrection until His glorious ascension. Discovering Christ with the eyes of El Greco is a kind of a "way of spirituality". It does not consist in following Christ only outside but in empathizing with Jesus, imagining His way of thinking, and learning to ask questions about issues of daily life as follows: What would Jesus do or recommend to do in this situation? It is not sufficient to read the Gospel superficially but It needs to be contemplated, experienced (Špidlik 1991, 15). El Greco's painting is an opportunity to meet Christ at different stages of one's life and deepen one's own spirituality.

The nativity of Christ was depicted in a few paintings portraying Mary (the classical subject of Eastern icons) with Joseph and Anna but also in pictures presenting shepherds that pay tribute to the Christ Child (the traditional thread of the Catholic theology exposing the newborn Jesus' openness to simple people). There are as many as five renowned paintings titled *The Adoration of the Shepherds* (from Venice, Santander, New York, Toledo, and Madrid) and twelve depicting *The Bow of the Shepherds* (among others from Madrid, Santander, Bucharest, or Athens). The baptism of Jesus was portrayed on three canvases, of whom the most famous is the

painting from Toledo (1608-1614, oil on canvas, 330×211 cm, Hospital Tavera) (Alcolea 1990, 34–35; Scholz-Hänsel 2004, 90). As many other paintings, that one also presents dual reality, namely earthly and heavenly, reminding that they are closely connected: our earthly life has its consequences in eternity. Baptism, as the first and basic sacrament, introduces into faith and the community of the Church and opens to Christ's salvation. The event of the baptism of the Lord is the revelation of the Holy Trinity at the same time. The voice of God the Father "This is My beloved Son" and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus were depicted by El Greco in a very expressive way. At the very centre of the painting is a dove. The Son and the Father are surrounded by angels. One of the angels covers Jesus with a red cloth symbolizing and announcing His suffering. That motif can be found in the paintings of El Greco that depict the Passion.

Unusually moving is the presentation of the Saviour in the painting *Christ as Saviour* (ca. 1610-1614, oil on canvas, 99×79 cm, Casa y Museo de El Greco, Toledo) (Scholz-Hänsel 2004, 95). The composition of the presentation closely refers to the canon of icon writing, namely Christ Pantocrator blesses inviting to join the reality of salvation. Again appears the iconic motif of a scarlet robe (*hiton*) worn by the Saviour with a blue cloak (*hymation*) over it. Red corresponds to love and sacrifice and blue to spirituality and infinity as well as the majesty and deity of Christ.

Basing on the works of El Greco, it is safe to say that he was a passion artist. All his paintings related to the passion and death of Christ comprise several dozen of canvases, beginning from *the Last Supper* (ca. 1568, oil on canvas, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna) (Giorgi 2006, 28–29) and the prayer in the Garden which was depicted by the Master from Toledo at least nine times (Scholz-Hänsel 2004, 41). In one of those representations, Christ kneels on his blue cloak and gazes at an angel giving Him a chalice cup – a symbol of the forthcoming passion. The composition of the painting is complemented with two scenes, namely sleeping disciples on the left and approaching armed guards on the right (Alcolea 1990, 56–57).

Spirituality means "complete entering, by a baptized man, the orbit of an event that is Christ, complete potential and updated effectiveness of redemptive activity of God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit. It is about a full life in the reality of God that was revealed and made available by Jesus Christ: spirituality is both the life given to us in the Holy Spirit and our consent to be seized by the kindness of God; it is the life in the condition of a changed man, the spiritual life" (Weismayer 1993, 9). The meditation of El Greco's paintings, especially those dedicated to the passion, gives an unusual opportunity to discover the meaning of salvation fulfilled by Christ. Out of love for man God took the cross on His shoulders in order to save everyone. Accepting the truth is a fruit of faith which is also the gift of God and a fruit of commitment of a man who accepts that gift.

The theme of one of the most famous paintings of El Greco, namely *El Espolio, the Disrobing of Christ* appeared in his work several times. That prototype from the years 1577–1579, still hanging in the sacristy of the Cathedral of Toledo, is a monumental masterpiece (285×173 cm) (Scholz-Hänsel 2004, 36) that exposes Christ in a red robe surrounded on all sides by different figures. Characteristic for El Greco is the play of colours: the cumulation of grey and dark figures creates the background for the red robe of the Saviour and the two figures at the front wearing yellow clothes, specifically one of the executioners and a woman, probably Maria Magdalena. Facing such a pure figure of Jesus, it is difficult to pass by indifferently. One has to declare and choose to be with or against Him. The crowd can be read symbolically as the world in which we live, filled with all kinds of doubts and religious divisions.

El Greco painted at least thirteen versions of the representation of Christ who wears a scarlet robe with a blue cloak over it and carries the cross embracing it and lifting up His eyes to the heavens (Alcolea 1990, 42). Looking into Christ's eyes can make one realize the beauty of the Saviour who out of love agreed to his redemptory suffering. Christ's tears awaken the reflection on one's own life and living it.

The scene of the crucifixion itself was depicted by El Greco several times. In one of the most famous paintings, *Christ on the Cross Adored by Two Donors* (ca. 1580, oil on canvas, 260×178 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris) (Giorgi 2006, 83), the Saviour gazes upward at the sky and people at the foot of the cross, just like in some Eastern icons, are situated in such a way that the blood from Christ's wounds falls onto their heads. Navy blue clouds, being the background of the painting, specifically symbolize the darkness of sins that the Saviour delivers his disciples from. In the context of the crucifixion of Christ, El Greco depicted the Triune God: *The Holy Trinity with the Dead Christ* (1577–1579, oil on canvas, 300×178 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid) (Scholz-Hänsel 2004, 32). In that case the play of colours used by El Greco is completely different. The painting is brightened, with clouds left only at the bottom and dark blue earthly reality below. The body of Christ is held up by both God the Father and the cluster of angels over whom a dove hovers, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The exact centre of the painting is marked with an open wound left by the spear of a Roman soldier who pierced the right side of Christ. The Saviour's wounds, clearly exposed by the artist, are confirmation of His redemptive sacrifice.

The biographers of El Greco point to three different paintings in which, in a style typical for him, the artist presented the resurrection of Christ, namely from Bucharest, Madrid, and Toledo (Alcolea 1990, 9). The risen Lord creates a new reality raising his left hand to heaven and looking down to the earth on which both his disciples (also donors among them) and soldiers are fast asleep or frightened of the fulfilling victory. Only a man immersed into the death of Christ can discover in himself the hope of eternal life.

The passion, death, and resurrection of Christ are aimed at His glory and that is depicted by El Greco in *The Adoration of the Name of Jesus* (1576-1579), oil and distemper on wood, 58×35 cm, The National Gallery, London; a similar but larger painting can be found in the Escorial) (Alcolea 1990, 13-15). As it is typical for the post-Trident art, the juxtaposition of two and even three worlds in this case is clearly indicated: on the bottom right the condemned who disappear in the jaws of a monstrous beast symbolizing hell and on the left the angels praying on earth and in heaven and adoring the name of Jesus. That composition should make the addressees aware of the inevitability of consequences of their life choices and emphasize the fundamental role of Christ in the salvation of man.

It is not possible to present the whole richness of spiritual inspirations related to the work of El Greco in a relatively short text. Meeting his paintings, a contemporary man, moved and interested by the Christian spirituality, can experience that “way of beauty” (*via pulchritudinis*) and consequently open to the supernatural reality and allow to be led to God. The meditation of subsequent paintings creates an opportunity to stop or at least slow down a hurried life and discover what is really essential in it. God’s Spirit who discovers the image of Christ in a Christian’s heart uses different ways and one of them is “the way of beauty”, a theological and esthetical proposal of meeting Christ, left to us by El Greco.

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