

ARS LITURGICA

The original Roman-Catholic liturgical clothing in the Czech Republic and Slovakia since 1989

Introduction

Twenty years after the Velvet Revolution it doesn't seem adequate to complain about the lack of opportunities to present the art with sacral and religious themes.

On the other hand, occasionally it seems that the religious thematic have somehow become a kind of fashion. However, there are areas that still remain long on the peripheries of the interest, by both the professional as well as the general public. Even the artists themselves these areas remain marginal. Such an area is also the issue of liturgical art.

The Sacred space of the Roman Catholic rite has been occupying minds of creators of all times and has a significant importance within it. Especially during the era of grand styles, Romanesque and Gothic, Renaissance, or Baroque and Rococo, every component played an important role and an essential part of Christian cult.

Unusual attention was given not only to the Fine Arts but also to Crafts and Applied Arts, of what we could refer to as Design today. Nothing was left to chance, or even to the discretion of the individual. All has interwoven into one another and was a subject to one singular concept. It's hard to imagine for instance a post-trident liturgy without beautifully decorated missal robes, splendid pontifical liturgical assemblies.

At present it is not so obvious, for us to perceive liturgical clothing as an essential component of visual side of the liturgy. The message that is proclaimed in words, in the liturgical action and in a varied symbolic language of the rite itself, becomes equally well transposed to the field of visual communication.

The liturgical garments are substantially being the essential part of the completion of the ceremonial atmosphere. They underline the exceptional occasion of a man meeting his God.

The Second Vatican Council

The most significant changes in many areas of the church and public life in the 20th century were brought about by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The council meant to open up to the world in the areas of the communication, ecumenical circuit, culture, politics and other sectors of social life. The changes are most noticeable within the field of the rite. The

council has completed efforts of the new liturgical movement, which called for the restoration and return to the simplicity of the early Church liturgy. These changes in the liturgy have had an obvious impact on the liturgical vestments. The liturgical vestments have regained and took on its original simple yet gracious form. Its symbolic value hasn't been obtained through magnificent decoration, but itself becomes an eloquent sign of the "sacred veiling." This sacral symbol is expressing the inner approach of the servant of God. (Antons, *Paramente - Dimensionen der Zeichengestalt*, 1999, p. 85) As oppose to a two dimensional image, the garment has appeared as " the vibrant spatial object." (Antons, 1999) Its symbolism derives from the basic premise: a priest serving Mass "in persona Christi"¹, in the name of Christ.

Original creative process of the paraments

A brief excursion into modern history of the paramentics help us to understand that at first sight such a traditional theme, such as paramentics is, can achieve high artistic standards of modern design and contemporary art. An original contribution in view of the importance of liturgical clothing has risen in the 1950s by Augustine Flüeler².

In the works "Paramente" (1949; 1955) and "Das Sakrale Gewand" (1964) she presents a concept of return to an ancient form of bell chasuble. In liturgical vestments, author sees the symbol of the sacred veiling. Providing garment for servant of God reflects his glory and at the same time resembles the interconnection between the God and a man. In her studios, Flüeler created paraments from hand-woven silk and woolen fabrics. The garments had almost no symbolic decorations. Modernist decor consisted of thin strips or embroidery, which is extending as the whole surface of the garment. Considering her era, she was bravely using simple geometric patterns.

Henri Matisse (1869-1954) has in the early 1950s created one collection of liturgical vestments for The Rosary Chapel of Dominican nuns in Vence. Rosary Chapel is a unique example of a coherent concept of the liturgical space beginning with architecture, furniture, wall decorations, stained glass, liturgical objects through to the liturgical vestments. Its patterns and morphology, typical of the final period of life of the author, extends over the

¹ Sacred Congregation for Sacraments and Liturgy: Instruction: *Redemptionis sacramentum*. Sacrament of Salvation. Rome, 25th March 2005. Trnava : SSV, 2004, no. 30.

² Augustina Flüeler (1899 RC 1992), Swiss nun, specialist in paramentics.

entire surface of the vestments. It is remarkable, how he has as the leader Fauvism coped with the requirements of the canon of liturgical colors, meaningfully and creatively built on the traditional Christian iconography. The traditional liturgical clothing has through his work been pushed to the level of a modern art-piece.

The last example of the unique solution of liturgical clothing is the most current one. The artist from Austria **Leo Zogmayer** (1949), representative of conceptual and minimalist art, has in the year 2005 created a chasuble named "Lichtzeichen Kreuz" for the 20th World Youth Day in Cologne. The minimalist solution with a single horizontal strip at the back and one vertical strip in front represent the peak of theology of the liturgical clothing. Zogmayer offers the interpretation of the liturgical robe as a symbol of the cross, which can be perceived only in the context of liturgical celebrations. Its purpose becomes fulfilled in moment of the „veiling“ when priest wears it. The liturgical vestment illustrates the essence of the ministerial "in persona Christi." By using a consistent reduction in the use of formal and decorative art, the author is channeling the essence of the Christian message in the language of contemporary art to the world today.

The work of Czech and Slovak Authors

In the former Czechoslovakia in 1970s the debate about a relatively marginal topic, such paramentics discourse is, was largely avoided if existing at all. At the backdrop of normalization, it was the bishops, attending the Councils conferences, who endeavored upon the broadening of new forms of liturgical vestments. The transformation was carried out in many places throughout the seventies. The unnecessary part of the paraments were burned, in better cases they were re-stitched and old embroideries were transferred to new fabrics. The liturgical vestments created by nuns in very difficult conditions, often in the same room where they were sleeping or received visits.

Due to the limitations of Communist regime, it wasn't easy to develop a theological discussion concerning the visual processing of sacral vestments. While the practitioners in Western Europe have developed a rich theological discussion on many versatile levels, including sacred and liturgical arts, in the former Czechoslovakia the open exploration of the authors was very much non-existent.

In the 1980s and the 1990s **Marie Applová** (1954-2008) has worked in Czech Republic. Almost in complete isolation from public attention, she has created a unique hand-woven woolen garments. Vestments of monumental proportions of hand spinning yarns have a rough surface and the only decoration is a variation on the texture of wool fabrics in natural shades of white. The creations of Marie Applová seem to be solely unique example of original

paraments in the former Czechoslovakia.

Few years after the Velvet Revolution, the former communist countries began to see the slow emerging of the interest in paramentics. The first attempt to revive attention of the official institutions was the *Ars liturgica*³ competition in 1993. Its contents were liturgical objects and liturgical textiles. The competition was attended by a remarkably few textile artists and some art students. The sacred objects were represented in numerous entries. Neither the critics, nor the general public have responded with great acclaim. The initiators of the competition could be for many authors, perhaps making liturgical items restricted to functionality requirements. (Kvasnicová, *Ars Liturgica, Designum*, 1994/2) This can be reasoned via a statement that the formation of liturgical art is for many artists' 'terra incognita', and function, richness and ambiguity and layers of meaning remains an unknown." (Kvasnicová, 1994) Today, twenty years since the Velvet Revolution, it remains challenging to bridge the interrupted tradition. The hope is shining through by the individual creators, and by few of the Art Academies. Eva Cisárová-Mináriková operated between the years 1991-2008 in the studio of Textile Design production at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava (Slovakia). Aside of the rich existing program of study, she has integrated the topic of liturgical garments into it. Today this tradition continues in Textile Design studio of Mária Fulková at the same Academy of Fine Arts in Bratislava. The Department of Fine Arts Faculty of Education, Catholic University in Ružomberok, several students led by Marta Bošelová devoted their academic work to the liturgical garments.

Exhibition *Ars Liturgica* – liturgical vestments

The exhibition "*Ars liturgica* RC liturgical vestments" seeks to offer an insight into the creations of contemporary Slovak and Czech authors. This is a unique collection of works by artists, who are connected through this exceptional theme of RC liturgical robes. Problems associated with the original creations of Sacred Art in our countries are still facing some measure of lack of understanding in various ways. This applies on the side of creators as well as of recipients, the RC church. From the perspective of the authors it could be the case of misinterpretation and ignorance of the issue of liturgical art, liturgical norms as well as the possible lack of understanding in the field of theology and liturgical garments. For many creators, the problem is to combine the rules of liturgical art and their own inspiration. Liturgical Art is Applied Art. Therefore, for a professional designer it should be natural to search for new and current forms to express the language of modern and contemporary art

³ The competition was announced by the Slovak Design Centrum, association FORMA SVU, Association of critics and theorists SVU, Association of St. Gorazd in cooperation with the Liturgical commission by the Conference of Bishops in Slovakia. *Ars liturgica*. In: *Profile of the Contemporary Arts*. 1993, year.3, no. 8-9, page .

and also to develop and innovate the Christian tradition. In case of many church leaders, one could detect some level of distrust over the new and previously undiscovered.

Czech and Slovak artists have dedicated their work of creating paraments in most cases, in the form of a singular garments or sets of liturgical vestments.

Rarely there are authors who consider the issue of liturgical vestments for permanent and significant part of their work. The sources of each individual artists, who have subjective character. The work arose from a variety of motives and circumstances in different time span of nearly twenty years. Some authors consider the creation of sacred vestments larger scale than authorial intention of cross-field cult or experimental clothing. There are those who make up the garment, or a series of liturgical space for a specific assignment. The work of other artists is oscillating on the boundaries of the open-ended textile object. A common feature of all the creations is a striking, clean character of the textile fabric, present in a variety of traditional and non-traditional textile fabric processing techniques. The liturgical vestments, however, can't be viewed only as a textile artifact. It remains the liturgical object, and as such we should see it as a sacred object with properties of the sacred veiling, which is accompanied by and reflects the special symbol "Sacrum" of the Holy Mass.

Katarína Böhmová (1957) began to create the liturgical vestments only recently. In her work, she builds on clothing garments made of patchwork technique. The garment has a clear logical structure, while the composition is dominated by monumental constructivist tendencies. The author alternates the use of hand-modified silk fabrics, together with industrially manufactured mixed textiles. The liturgical vestment named "Tower of Ivory" is of a theme based on the architectural design of clothing in creative symmetry, with the emphasis on substitution of different structures and areas of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines. The subtle colours of Maria's robe are offering a variety of interpretations in the form of "Marian cloak" or "infinity of the heavenly sky."

Marta Bošelová (1955) has in the year of 2000 created a collection of paraments in almost all liturgical colors for The Two Heart's Church (architect Peter Abonyi) in Liptovské Sliače-Vyšné. She worked on the hand knitting techniques using a hand-weaving machine. Onto the hand-knitted fabric, she has applied layers of crochets and embroidery. The knitted fabric provides a vast amount of expressive possibilities in terms of structure, overlapping colors and nuances. Fabric texture and subtle symbolism that evokes fishing net, is concluded with a symbol of the cross in the dorsal part of the garment. Unusually solution is provided in the copper-beige tones. This chasuble was used to sanctify the church, which is not the color of the day.⁴ She is paying respect to the tradition, offering solutions, which regardless of its unconventional execution can make out the high demands for the functionality of the design

⁴ [□] The order of the Catholic Church allows the use of colours that do not comply with the colours of the day, in especially precious and historic relics. Congregation of the God's Cult and the discipline of the Sacraments: Instruction Redemptionis sacramentum.

for liturgy.

Zuzana Branišová (1980) has in 2011 presented a collection of vestments in bold minimalist style. Traditional textile materials such hand-woven flax, silk and woolen felt are combined together with expressive means of the contemporary art. On the edge of the minimalism, the author extends a simple sign of the across the whole width of the garment. In order to understand the meaning of the vestment, we need time and space, we have to observe the pieces in spatial movement. This makes these garments a unique example of processing the theme on the borders of the traditional and contemporary design.

The collection chasubles in four liturgical colors of white, red, green and purple from **Mária Fulková** (1962) of 1992 is processed with the original weaving technique. The vestments are showing as an ambitious concept without any additional symbolic decoration. The symbol itself is a habit, liturgical color and sophisticated weaving technique. The dominant liturgical color is being highlighted and develops it further to the additional tones. In the case of red chasuble, she is experimenting with the form of clothing, in which she shapes the clothing on the body of the celebrant through an intersection of two strips on front and back of garment. The drama of liturgical colors is escalated via gold and silver threads. The white robe is decorated with sober lace detail technique created using vertical triangle located in the center of the garment.

Michaela Klimanová-Trizuljaková (1951) is known author of the knitted garments in the style of "Art to Wear". The work of Klimanová is specifically aimed at creating female clothing. One could refer to fashion in its true sense. Her clothes are not of a subject to trends, but purely aesthetic and individual to the perception of the author, same in the way she seeks to interpret the personality of each of her individual client. At present time she is embarking on creating garments understood in a broader context of the cult robes. The author works with the very nature of clothing as an expression of personality, its specific radiation with the ability to express and to transform any intrinsic individuality of the wearer of the cult. It highlights the mutual transfer of meaning between "robe" and its proprietor. When it comes to the liturgical vestments, the essential is the encounter of human with God, with what one has to include the individuality of the priest, although it mysteriously has to retreat into the background. The transparent creations of Klimanová show its meditative and experimental character.

Karin Rothensteinová-Kolčáková (1976) and **Zuzana Boteková** (1969) have in 1997 processed chasubles on the topic of "Light". Ecclesiastical vestments were made using the "ikat" technique. This clothing – smaller objects are more alternative unconventional character and are not intended for use in the liturgy. This is a reflection on the theme "liturgical vestments." The formation of these two authors, gives hope that in future when faced with a similar predicament, it won't be foreign to them and they will be able to deal with confidence and determination, finding solutions of such alternative assignments.

Petra Graffe (1983), in 2008 created a collection of four liturgical vestments in white liturgical colour. She has elaborated the theme of family heritage - the cross. She used a cross that belonged to her great-grandmother and heated and imprinted it on fax paper. Using modern technology caught "timeless message." She passed and "coded" it through a variety of textile and alternative techniques. The robe made using this "ikat" technique enhances the textile and exploits semantic levels. The printed forms are incorporated into several layers of the processed fabric. These textiles are thus in a sense becoming "texts" (cf. Volp, *Textilien als Texte*, 1992, in: *Kunst und Kirche*) and refer us to a wider semantic connotations. The creations of Petra Graffe are uniquely creative concept and these artifacts will confidently hold up as a work of Fine Arts.

Adam Souček (1973) has in 1997 proposed two chasubles rich in symbolism, following a medieval iconography. The actual liturgical vestments and the symbol is elliptical. Each garment in itself semantically associated pairs of liturgical colors red and green, and violet, which combined with gold. Chasuble named "Earthly Jerusalem" is of a dramatic character. Any remaining symbols refer to earthly pilgrimage. He created the graphic symbols by hand printing. The garments were made using technology of textile applications.

Jana Zaujecová (1977) has in 2003 conducted a series of vestments. She is decorating the chasubles with a weaved center line. The original technique of using felt and textile collages is introducing two structural contradictions, which opens up the surface of the vertical belt. Thin strips of silk create a horizontal rhythm, while felting shapes and blurs the forms and allows for colored fleece to be seen from the depth of the material. The author masterfully uses a variety of color silk shantung and spun sheep fleece.

Pavla Lazárková Trizuljaková (1968) seeks expressive possibilities for her creative work in strict geometric division of the whole area of the garment. The symbolic solution is limited to the liturgical colour, combination of colours and hint of the hidden symbols, most of which are the cross or the circle, which are the Roman Catholic symbols of the Eucharist. She creates the chasubles with a simple formal vocabulary of modern design using the full width and height of these garments divided into four fields. Onto these defined areas, she applies various shades of hand-woven and silk dyed in liturgical colours.

The creation of liturgical clothing suggests an immense range of possibilities. It is a multi-formal and vibrant symbol, which provides plenty of scope for creative artists. The Church does not limit creative production, on the contrary, it always encourages artists of all times and summons them to their service.⁵

5 ² SC 122.

Ars liturgica exhibition attempts to bring light into the area of creating worthy liturgical garments. It spreads hope of that the term "beauty" is still justified, and that it may be the key to the mystery, an open gateway, which transcends us and enables us to "see" behind the veil of ordinariness of everyday life and leads us into the celestial realm and the heavenly world.

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