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NARRATIVENESS AS A CHARACTERISTIC FEATURE  
OF MODERN STAINED GLASS ART IN MODERNIST  
AND POSTMODERNIST INTERIORS OF THE CHURCHES  
IN KRAKOW

NARRACYJNOŚĆ JAKO CECHA CHARAKTERYSTYCZNA  
WSPÓŁCZESNEJ SZTUKI WITRAŻOWEJ  
WE WNĘTRZACH MODERNISTYCZNYCH  
I POSTMODERNISTYCZNYCH ŚWIĄTYŃ KRAKOWA

Abstract

Narrativeness, often manifested by direct, figurative way, sometimes also encoded within the abstraction, is the essence of stained glass paintings in church interiors. One of the ways of reading the ambiguous content is to define mutual relationship of form and the imagery hidden in stained glass, as well as to diagnose the imaging methods adopted by the artist in the context of sacred architectural space. The aim of this paper is to analyze in that way selected works created after the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which complement the interiors of the Krakow churches.

*Keywords: contemporary stained glass, church architecture, Krakow*

Streszczenie

Istotą obrazów witrażowych we wnętrzach sakralnych jest ich narracyjność. Objawia się ona za pomocą bezpośredniego, przedstawieniowego przekazu, bywa też zakodowana w obrębie abstrakcji. Jednym ze sposobów odczytania niejednoznacznej często treści jest określenie wzajemnej relacji formy i ukrytej w witrażu metaforyki oraz diagnoza przyjętej przez artystę metody obrazowania w kontekście sakralnej przestrzeni architektonicznej. Niniejszy artykuł podejmuje próbę analizy w powyższym zakresie wybranych dzieł powstałych po Soborze Watykańskim II (1962–1965), uzupełniających wnętrza kościołów Krakowa.

*Słowa kluczowe: współczesny witraż, architektura sakralna, Kraków*

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## 1. Introduction

Modern stained glass art traditionally maintains a deep relation with religion – it proudly represents modern visuality, highlighting narrativeness of sacral architecture at the same time. Presence of numerous valuable works from this field, which supplement visual arts of church interiors in Krakow proves that the fascination with optical and psychological aspect of the illumination process does not fade away, as a result of which the transcendent divine sphere can be captured by a human eye under the impact of light. A stained glass picture, is conventional border between *sacrum* and *profanum*, a surface of mutual infiltration of symbolism and context, as well as an “agent” facilitating decoding meanings and hidden allegories, still seems to be an ideal supplement of a church block.

In the article entitled *Najnowsze polskie witraże sakralne (The newest Polish sacral stained glass pictures)*<sup>1</sup> Maria J. Żychowska writes that individuality of Polish modern stained glass art results directly from conservative attitude of artists to applied technologies, which as a consequence, places it out of the world-wide “stained glass avant-garde”. This observation can be referred to the environment of artists from Krakow, in which the technology of traditional lead stained glass picture is still the most popular, whereas alternative solutions, such as *fusing*, or even *dalle de verre*, are rarely used. Conservative approach to technologies of creation can even be interpreted as a specific feature of stained glass industry in Krakow, which, however, does not determine a lack of formal abundance of works, which in many cases represent a high artistic level and a multi-layer form. A very significant (or even foreground) is also a characteristic feature given by the artist; among the representatives of Krakow the following persons should be mentioned here, inter alia, Teresa Stankiewicz, Józef, Tadeusz and Tomasz Furdyna, Maciej Kauczyński, Wiktor Ostrzolek and Jerzy Skąpski. All persons are the authors of valuable works, both in old and also new modernized sacral interiors.

What language does a stained glass window use in the sacral scenery today? In what way does it become a carrier of complex form, requiring special interpretation and reflection? This article makes an attempt of analysing interactions of selected examples of stained glass compositions supplementing the form of churches in Krakow and Christian “genius loci”.

## 2. Representational art: a dialogue of an archetype with a colourful symbol

Representational works dominate as regards stylistics adopted in interiors of churches in Krakow, which are differentiated in the scope of methods of visualising contents (from historic to synthetic) and are sometimes characterised by a wide range of applied colours and geometrisation of forms. Thanks to the play of light, colours and shadows of coloured pieces of glass, organised in clear pictures, this type of narration often plays a role of illustrating selected parts of the Holy Bible and invariably brings their contents closed to the recipient by accessible application of a literal message. The scenes use a comprehensible language of an archetype, however, the process of “illumination” itself in the case of representational

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<sup>1</sup> Sacrum et Decorum. Materiały i studia z historii sztuki sakralnej (Materials and studies from the history of sacral art), 1/2008, 124-138.

stained glass pictures, can be interpreted as simultaneous infiltration of *splendour*, *sacrum* and knowledge through church windows, as they play the role of contemporary *Biblia pauperum*.

Out of figurative representations completed in the last 50 years, which prevail on stained glass pictures in many churches in Krakow, very expressive “vibrating” pictures can be referred to that are located in the church of St. Wojciech (ul. św. Wojciecha 4, arch. arch. W. Seruga and M. Buratyńska-Seruga, 1992–1997) of the authorship of M. Kauczyński. The works of this famous artist (honoured with the Order of St. Sylvester by John Paul II) present saints and blessed that are related to the archdiocese of Krakow (Ill. 1) and the Resurrected Christ – the artist uses, inter alia, multi-colour, restless background, combined with a bright red colour coming out of it, symbolising blood, suffering – but also revival and resurrection. Providing strong contrast between each other, saturated colours in combination with irregular course of joints cause that there evokes an impression of movement, whereas the stained glass pictures themselves by constituting an element of the interior with of significant impact, decide in greater extent about its character.

In the church of Christ the King in Przegorzały (ul. Zaskale 1, arch. arch. W. Pietraszewski, O. Vogt, 1970–1971, the last renovation 1986) there is a group of seven stained glass representations of the authorship of Wiktor Ostrzołek. They are characterized by expression obtained thanks to using the limited number of highly contrasting colours of glasses by the artist (inter alia, combining aggressive red colour with orange and celadon green). The prevailing vertical system of joints makes an impression of order and stability of composition, disciplining to some extent the colour scheme, which has intensive impact on a recipient. The Biblical topic of stained glass pictures was illustrated with the help of highly geometrized forms; within the area of five representations located in the south-western wall, the earlier lower parts provide figurative representations: sacrifices of Abel, Melchizedek, Isaac and Christ, as well as the Lord’s Supper (Ills. 8, 9). Above them in the form of later additions the appropriate symbolism was placed (inter alia, an ear of grain and a bunch, a thurible and a Paschal lamb). All figures have clearly marked face features: big eyes, hair in shades of light azure and grey colours and light clothes. However, the red colour stands out in the background area. The solutions used by the artist are coherent, the fragments with different time of creation are harmonious and combine with each other in an unnoticeable way. The manner of presenting faces evokes distant associations with icons. In the interior of the church the works of Ostrzołek contrast with asymmetric, irregular abstractions of Helena and Roman Husarscy (Ill. 10).

Figurative stained glass pictures of the authorship of Danuta and Witold Urbanowicz (Ills. 4–6) fill window openings with varied sizes and their inhomogeneous arrangement in the church of St. John the Baptist (ul. Dobrego Pasterza 116, arch. arch. W. Obtulowicz, D. Olędzka, 1984–1989). The most effective of them (inter alia, the biggest one presenting the flood) are located on the eastern wall and their subject matter refers to the traditional relation of the Old Testament topic with the left side of the church. A vertical, abstractive stained glass picture is located in the Presbyterian part of the church and plays the function of the luminous background for the sculptural composition of “baptism in Jordan”<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Designed by Wincenty Kućma.



III. 1. *Blessed Aniela Salawa*, stained glass picture of the authorship of M. Kauczyński, the church of St. Wojciech (photo by D. Szyszko)



III. 2. *Real architecture*, stained glass picture of the authorship of M. Kauczyński, the church of St. Wojciech (photo by D. Szyszko)



III. 3. *Architectural motifs*, stained glass picture of the authorship of M. Kauczyński, the church of St. Wojciech (photo by D. Szyszko)



III. 4. Stained glass picture of the authorship of Danuta and Witold Urbanowicz, the church of St. John the Baptist (photo by D. Szyszko)

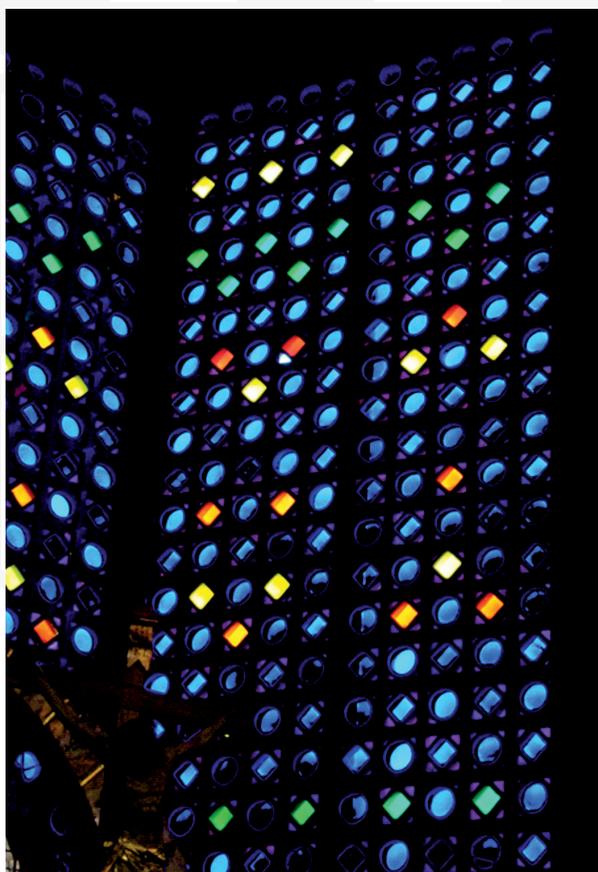


III. 5. *The sacrifice of Isaac*, stained glass picture of the authorship of Danuta and Witold Urbanowicz, the church of St. John the Baptist (photo by D. Szyszko)



III. 6. *Peacocks* – a symbol of immortality, resurrection, stained glass picture of the authorship of Danuta and Witold Urbanowicz, the church of St. John the Baptist (photo by D. Szyszko)

The colours of glasses refer to historically preserved symbolism and highly contrasted in the scope of colour scheme and temperature: red colour dominates, which builds intensive relations with the shades of yellow and azure colours. The interesting thing is the fact of small glazed pieces placed on the western side, which constitute modest, mostly abstractive compositions, disturbing at the same time the rule which is common in the Christian symbolism, ascribing the main significance to the right part of the church – they also make it possible to move to the next level of interpretation: turning the church towards the values of the Old Testament. Does a Synagogue play a more significant role than Ecclesia according to designers? The postmodernist architecture, which changes a viewer into an active recipient as a rule, obtains on such supplement an additional level, which can be subject to decoding; when stained glass pictures “speak” on various levels, by their hidden contents and enrich an architectural masterpiece with a spiritual aspect, then they not only open the world of beauty for their believers, but also incline them to reflection and take up a theological discourse, to whom the narration becomes to be subject to.



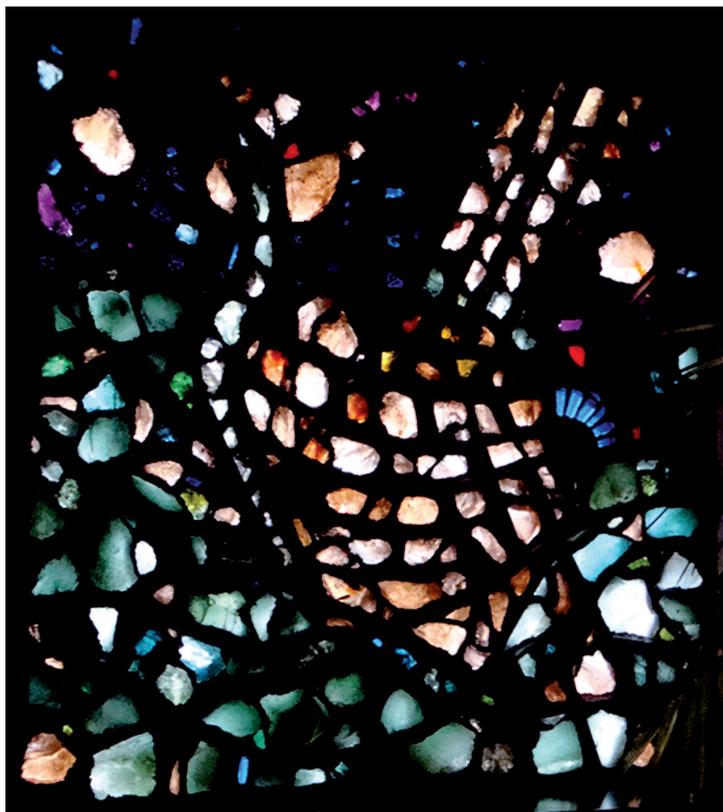
III. 7. Abstract stained glass pictures made by Waclaw Taranczewski supplement the earlier modernist interior of the church of Our Lady of Victory (photo by D. Szyszko)



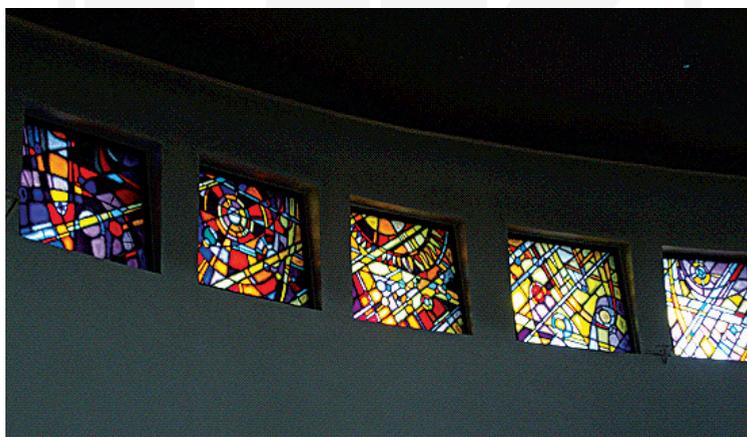
III. 8. *The sacrifice of Isaac*, stained glass picture of the authorship of Wiktor Ostrzołek, the church of Christ the King in Przegorzały (photo by D. Szyszko)



III. 9. *The Lord's Supper*, stained glass picture of the authorship of Wiktor Ostrzołek, the church of Christ the King in Przegorzały (photo by D. Szyszko)



III. 10. Irregular abstractions by Helena and Roman Husarski, the church of Christ the King in Przegorzały (photo by D. Szyszko)



III. 11. The horizontal sequence of the authorship of Andrzej Dzięgielewski, the church of St. John Kanty (photo by D. Szyszko)

### **3. Stained glass as a hologram. Three-dimensionality and two methods of building relationships with the environment**

Stained glass pictures engage the scenery in an active and direct way, which reflects light, is subject to influence of atmospheric conditions, and is unclear and located beyond them: changing contour of clouds, trees submitting to wind and finally a day-to-day solar cycle. Thereby they cause spatial effects going beyond the levels of window partitions and openings. Greater clarity guarantees interaction of the interior with the exterior, imposing the role of a multi-layer hologram of the existing and created reality for the glazed parts. The artists, who are aware of this property, go beyond the limits of flat geometry and also use spatial relations in compositions created by them. This takes place e.g. in the case of the glazed parts of the Road of the Cross in the Church of Jesus Christ's Sacred Heart (ul. Ludźmierska 2, arch. arch. K. Ingarden, P. Gawor, J. Ewy, 1998–2001) of the authorship of Józef Skąpski, which expose their subject matter almost like a screen at the background of the buildings of the estates in Nowa Huta. Subtly coloured buildings, which are seen from the inside, gain oneiric lightness, raw colour of the surrounding areas undergo moderate transformation, contrasting at the same time with the drama of the subject matter presented on the stained glass pictures. The surrounding areas are depicted as the background of the picture – it brings its subject matter closer and “tames” it.

A different approach can be found in the interior of the post-modernist church of the blessed Aniela Salwa (al. Kijowska 29, arch. arch. J. and A. Dutkiewicz, 1991–1995). The intensity of saturated colourful patches dominate in it, which affect each other in a suggestive and unconventional manner in the area of figurative glazed parts of windows designed by Teresa Stankiewicz at the half of the 90's of the last century. The stained-glass manner of visualising applied in these compositions also finds its continuation in the painted stations of the Road of the Cross painted by this artist. Apart from the references to pericopes of the Gospels, the architectural motifs can also be found in them: reproduction of the basilica of St. Peter in Rome, Wawel, Nasareth House and scenery (bend of Vistula, mountainous landscape). Similar topical solutions were applied by inter alia, Maciej Kauczyński in the church of the Our Lady of the Rosary (ul. Skotnicka 139 a, arch. arch. J. Duliński, P. Koperski, L. Morys, W. Padlewski, 1997–1999) and already mentioned the church of St. Wojciech (Ills. 2, 3), but also Edward Dawidowski in the interior of the church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (os. Bohaterów Września, arch. arch. M. Janowski i Z. Janowski, 1991–1993). Narrative realism can be observed here, which – thanks to the application of different variants of representing a landscape – enables to directly refer to postmodernist postulate of building relations of architecture of art with the environment.

### **4. Between abstraction and representation: from additions to modernist interiors up to a “cosmic” stained glass**

Solutions with the character of colourful abstractions have become more and more popular since the half of the 60's of the last century – this is, inter alia, a response to the recommendations made by the Vatican Council II of opening of the Church to modern

art<sup>3</sup>. Abstract glazed parts of the stained glass pictures evoke sensual experience, above all, thanks to gradation of colours in the architectural area. The process of light diffusion itself, which is contrasted with explicit form of connections, results in the effect of a kaleidoscope and is sufficient for a stained glass picture to become the strong means of shaping atmosphere. When applied both in the area of small window opening, as and in the form of a part of monumental solutions – even quite often as transparent partitions – it gives unreal, but dynamic dimension to the walls. Thanks to illuminating with rays at the same time, exuding from the glass, it enriches architectural space with colourful “soul” of the symbolism of colours consolidated in the tradition and builds the micro-cosmos of a heavenly dimension in the contemporary world. It is worth to refer to the opinion here of the father Piotr Cholewka, who fully appreciates the possibility of intuitive experiencing of abstractions, by acknowledging it as a proper and contemporary way of religious message and states that *putting together the “harmonies of colours” themselves with the composition of suggestive graphics constitutes the direct clearness of the spiritual message of each non-figurative masterpiece!*<sup>4</sup>

Modernity arising from the traditional basis is represented by a unique formal clarity of the set of stained glass pictures made by Waław Taranczewski, who supplements the earlier modernist interior of the church of Our Lady of Victory (ul. Zakopiańska 86, arch. T. Reuttie, 1937–1939). The sequences of rhombuses and circles arranged on the irregular grid of joints constitute contemporary and at the same time static background for the altar, which has a strong impact on a recipient (Ill. 7). The kinetic spectacle of rhythmical, non-figurative patterns obtained only with the help of the set of shapes, lines and colours (in which a mystic azure prevails), has the enormous power of impact and makes it possible to experience the atmosphere marked with divine presence. Although this “pop-art” composition, which was created about the year of 1965, brings to think about the stylistics of visualism that was popular at that time, however, it affects the senses and emotions of a viewer by a subtle and expressed play of colours. The solutions that are close to the aforementioned examples are very rare in Krakow, as one, less or more precisely defined topic is mostly taken within the framework of the stained glass pictures, whereas the internal partitions of the stained glass pictures do not have so clear regularity. Although the ordered rhythm of quadrangular partitions can also be found e.g. in the monumental post-modernist church of St. Maximillian Kolbe (os. Tysiąclecia 86, arch. J. Dutkiewicz, 1976–1983), however, the level of its impact is incomparably smaller: mild and subdued colours of glasses blur and disappear there in the enormous interior.

<sup>3</sup> “Moreover, the art of our epoch, as well as of all nations and regions can freely develop in the Church, as long as it serves to churches and religious ceremonies with due reverence and respect, so that it could add its voice to this wonderful hymn of glory, which the greatest artists sang in the honour of the catholic faith in the previous centuries (...)” (*The Constitution on Liturgy*, n. 123, [in:] *Vatican Councili II*, Poznań 1968, sp. 68).

<sup>4</sup> *Stained glass windows in Kupno. Katecheza piękna światła (Catechesis about the beauty of light)*, texts: P. Cholewka, K. Ivosse, Lieusaint 2004, 53, quoted after: M.J. Żychowska, *O. Piotr Cholewka – known unknown*, *Sacrum et Decorum. Materiały i studia z historii sztuki sakralnej (Materials and studies of the history of the sacral art)*, 4/2011.

It is worth to mention about a set of stained glass pictures designed by the Salesian, priest Tadeusz Furdyna for the modernist church of St. Stanislaus Kostka (ul. Konfederacka 6, arch. W. Krzyżanowski, 1932–1938) and made in 1970. As it is the case of the church of Our Lady of Victory, the stained glass pictures complement the older interiors here. Non-figurative compositions predominate, within the framework of which ordered gradation of colours causes impression of ascending and lightness. The pictures seem to be “woven” with rays of light and enhance the atmosphere of concentration. There is no violent expression; combinations of colours are balanced and coherent; red colour is dominated by numerous shades of azure, violet and green, which are applied with great intuition. The artists synthetically presented few figures, however, he operated with clear symbolism, which facilitates interpretation. He visualised the illustrations of twelve Apostles, who have no faces and are schematically outlined, in the green areas, however, the fiery tongues show the presence and acting of the Holy Spirit that descended to them in the Cenacle, which is a clearly signalled reference to the subject matter of the Holy Bible<sup>5</sup>. Adam and Eve keep the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge on the picture illustrating the birth sin. The blessing hand of the Creator, emerges from the heaven and dominates over them, from which the rays and conventional figures of the saints come out (it is possible to differentiate them thanks to nimbuses). Tiny plant-like motifs constitute an integral part of the background.

In the case of both aforementioned examples, the stained glass pictures complement interiors of objects of modernist churches, which results in the interesting effect of enriching their severe aesthetics with an element of beauty, which is not entirely subject to construction. Adding colours and texture is a response to the charge of sterility, which is often made for modernist sacral objects. Both in the church of Our Lady of Victory and in the church of St. Stanislaus Kostka, the mutual relations of colours play the foreground role now, although the methods of visualisation used by the artists, extremely differ from each other.

The majority of stained glass pictures located in the church of St. John Kanty (ul. Jabłonkowska 18, arch. K. Bień, 1983–1992), can be classified as being between abstraction and representation. Horizontal sequence of the authorship of Andrzej Dziegielewski (Ill. 11) copies the system of the ceiling, which constitutes the architectural interpretation of the firmament; the stained glass pictures here become a continuation of a horizon, maybe even constituting a distant reference to assumptions of the cosmologic philosophy. Their futuristic message has strong impact in the surrounding of the raw interior. A dynamic, unordered division and a graphic structure of lines intensify expression of references to the sphere of Cosmos, whereas the line of glazed parts visualising vibrating celestial bodies and depopulated, fanatic landscapes, perfectly bonds bright walls of the interior with spacious, dark and horizontal area that is hung over them (which is additionally punctually lit with electric “stars”). Their structure suggests a horizon, a border of a contact point between a cosmos and the earth surface as well as a symbolic *axis mundi*. The vertical course of window openings intensifies this horizontal axis, however, it makes it possible for the “divine” light to fill the area below at the same time.

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<sup>5</sup> (Acts 2, 1-13).

## 5. Conclusions

The stained glass pictures in Krakow created in the interior of churches in the period of the last fifty years constitute a result of numerous independent factors: decisions of the Vatican Council II, the complex political situation in Poland and the new tendencies occurring in the architecture. Allusions to popular philosophical trends are reflected in them, as well as multi-layer references to the religious subject matters, speaking with a subtle language of symbols and allegories, which is particularly appreciated by the artists of the post-modernist period. It should be remembered while interpreting narrativeness of the stained glass pictures that context differences often have impact on exposing their definite features<sup>6</sup> – they determine the final shape and subject matter of a piece of art to a great extent. The theological individuality of stained glass pictures determines their independence: a stained glass picture subordinates to architecture and construction only at a certain level, but in many cases in full, even maintaining semantic and formal autonomy at the same time.

The limited status of studies over post-conciliar stained glass art, developing in the area of church interiors in Krakow (and the whole Little Poland), arises a necessity of making the analysis, which is based on earlier collected and detailed documentation. Only few tendencies and transformations in the scope of narrativeness of modern sacral stained glass pictures have been outlined and enumerated in this article, for which the impulse was, inter alia, the decisions of the Vatican Council II; increasing acceptance of abstraction as a proper way of artistic transmission of subject matters related to religion and faith, with relentless popularity of representational compositions, occurring of numerous solutions to popular trends of modern art of painting and confronting archetypes with modern methods of their illustrating, as even application of expressive, simply fauve colour scheme in the pieces of art of M. Kauczyński, on the contrary – rigorous limitation of colours applied by W. Taranczewski in formally “disciplined” stained glass pictures of the church of Our Lady of Victory, significant conventionality in the case of the visualisation made by the priest Tadeusz Furdyna of the illustrations of twelve Apostles without faces in the church of St. Stanislaus Kostka or limiting or increasing the number of joints and highlighting their horizontal or vertical rhythm, which can be observed e.g. in the work of W. Ostrzołek in the church of Christ the King in Przegorzały. Moreover, the attention has been drawn to the evolution of the form and brave behaviours of the artists going beyond two-dimensionality of pictures by conscious involvement of the environment in the designed compositions. The most popular topic of stained glass representations in Krakow in the period of the second half of the 60’s of the last century until today has also been presented to a small extent. However, the starting point for making evaluation of the level of individualism and uniqueness of the stained glass pictures in churches in Krakow in the broader context – as well as the basis for adopting future conservational solutions – should become the detailed semantics including the influence of, inter alia, cultural, historical and social factors, as well as differentiating regional features occurring in numerous works.

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<sup>6</sup> In the scale of an interior, however, sometimes also in a broader meaning: a surrounding area of a church.

Taking up the aforementioned studies could make it possible to determine the causes, resulting in evolution of the role of contemporary stained glass pictures in the area of the sacral architecture, as well as stylistic and iconographic differences between them.

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