

Article

Visual and Artistic Expressions in the Service of Catechesis

Denis Barić 

Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia; denis.baric@kbf.unizg.hr

Abstract: Over the course of history, humans have had a deep need to express themselves not only through words but also through images. Furthermore, images and artworks have the potential to serve as a path to God. This article aims to explore the presence of images and artistic expressions in catechesis and their role in education and growth in faith throughout a person's life. In this regard, the article is structured into three sections, also including an introduction and a conclusion. The first section elaborates on the power of imagery in today's world, emphasising the human need to express oneself visually as well as verbally and highlighting the significance of all factors that contribute to the interpretation and understanding of images. The second section discusses catechesis, which serves the purpose of an individual's education and growth in faith, emphasising various methods and ways of teaching in faith. This section also underscores the place and role of images and works of art in the history of the Church and in catechisms. Finally, the third section highlights the importance of aesthetic and artistic formation among all participants in catechesis, whereby the images and artworks are used to facilitate a better understanding and experience of the faith and its content in all its beauty.

Keywords: image; artwork; catechesis; Christian faith; formation

1. Introduction

Today, it is no mystery that we live in an era dominated by images. Visual perception has completely taken precedence over auditory perception, which is why it is not surprising that the saying that a single picture is worth a thousand words has become ubiquitous. We are becoming more aware of this notion today, in the age of technological advancement, i.e., in the 'era of the media', where expressions such as *the power of an image*, *digital and virtual imagery*, *visual culture*, *picture theory*, and the like are being used more frequently. An image communicates a message, conveys content, and encourages the expression of impressions.

The pinnacle of God's creative work is man, entrusted with the care of the created world. In a more specific definition of human creation, the 'pinnacle' signifies, among other things, the versatility of human expression—from words in writing and speech to images and works of art that convey the deepest mysteries of the human spirit. In addition to their susceptibility to multiple interpretations, they also serve as a hermeneutical key for generating various explanations, approaches, and conclusions. In this sense, visual expressions and works of art require the utilisation of numerous tools to ensure that the initial experience remains unimpaired in its essence, leaving individuals the freedom for what is seen, experienced, and learned to be integrated into their everyday lives, shaping their own *Sitz im Leben*.

Since living in a multimedia and visual world enables us to have an extended knowledge and understanding of images, we often face challenges when encountering new and different forms of mediating visual content and works of art. One of these challenges lies at the intersection of the verbs 'to watch' and 'to see', which are very similar at first glance. However, their use in different contexts and situations suggests that there is a distinctive relationship at play, which may or may not indicate a significant connection. The fact that this is indeed the case is confirmed by the common experience of encountering two



Citation: Barić, Denis. 2023. Visual and Artistic Expressions in the Service of Catechesis. *Religions* 14: 1259. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101259>

Academic Editors: Ružica Razum and Nenad Malović

Received: 19 August 2023

Revised: 27 September 2023

Accepted: 1 October 2023

Published: 4 October 2023



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works of art or two life situations that may appear the same yet reveal a difference that becomes evident depending on who is watching or seeing them and how they are doing so. Therefore, it is extremely important not only to refer to a particular image or artwork, i.e., to look at them and stop there, but also to see through them, beyond what was previously unreachable through words or speech.

Considering the significance of images and artworks in shaping personal, cultural, and religious identity and reading the signs of the times, this paper aims to see how and in what ways visual and artistic expressions are present in catechesis and to identify the challenges their presence in catechesis faces. We will follow these challenges throughout the history of the Christian faith, asking ourselves certain questions: Has the modern era contributed to a change in the paradigm of understanding images? Do visual and artistic expressions contribute to a better understanding of faith, or does catechesis contribute to a better understanding of Christian art? Do we need education in aesthetics and the arts?

To answer these questions during our work, in the first chapter, we will point out the power and perception of images in today's age, emphasising the importance of the human need to express oneself not only through language and words but also through images. Moreover, we will highlight the necessary importance of understanding and expressing what we observe ('watch') and see around us. In the second chapter, our focus will shift towards catechesis, which serves the purpose of fostering an individual's growth in faith. We will explore the role of images in catechesis in relation to words throughout the history of the Church. Additionally, we will closely examine the place and role of images and artworks within catechisms, i.e., in texts containing fundamental, clearly formulated Christian truths that can be easily studied, understood, learned, and embraced in life. Finally, the third chapter delves into the necessary aesthetic and artistic formation for catechists and all participants in catechesis. Since visual and artistic expressions are indispensable in catechesis, we believe that through appropriate formation and education of all catechesis contributors, it is essential to advance toward the language of beauty and cultivate the ability to comprehend the message conveyed by images and artworks in order to understand and realise the education in faith.

2. The Power of Images in Today's World

In today's world, humans find themselves encompassed by a multitude of facts, events, and phenomena, and as social creatures, they actively engage in communication with others on a daily basis. As beings capable of thought, humans also strive to utilise their surroundings for contemplation, deduction, the acquisition of new insights, and the transmission of acquired knowledge. In doing so, they not only enhance their own experience and development but also that of others, thus contributing to the development of the society and world they inhabit.

Throughout history, humans have felt the need to express themselves not only through words but also through images. Regardless of the perspective from which we observe, involvement in the visual arts has had a positive impact on people (Kušević and Brajčić 2020, p. 532). Therefore, even in the present time, it is easy to understand that words are not the sole means of expressing and preserving human observations, delights, hopes, failures, and successes. More and more, colour, drawing, artistic expression, sound, volume, movement, and various other components are being incorporated to fulfil such a purpose. (Kupareo 2007, p. 339). Memories of significant life events and the immediate feelings following certain periods of life often become clearer and more deeply embedded in a person's consciousness when we associate them with certain visual representations. Considering that images and artworks have an extraordinary power to convey information, emotions, and ideas, in order to effectively express what we see and observe, it becomes necessary to immerse ourselves completely, engage in contemplation, explore our inner depths, heed our inner voices, and, through cognitive processes, extract the fundamental essence from those phenomena, images, and artworks. Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI has also pointed out: "It may have happened on some occasion that you paused before a

sculpture, a picture, a few verses of a poem or a piece of music that you found deeply moving, that gave you a sense of joy, a clear perception, that is, that what you beheld was not only matter, a piece of marble or bronze, a painted canvas, a collection of letters or an accumulation of sounds, but something greater, something that ‘speaks’, that can touch the heart, communicate a message, uplift the mind. A work of art is a product of the creative capacity of the human being who in questioning visible reality, seeks to discover its deep meaning and to communicate it through the language of forms, colour, and sound”. (Benedict XVI 2011).

In this sense, a common question arises: “What did the ‘artist’ mean to say by using the image, or rather, what message did they want to communicate, for what reasons and in what context? No matter how much the power of an image and artwork is reflected in preserving its unique nature, which reaches its culmination in an individual’s creative imagination, the artist, while creating ‘must be vigilant’ to ensure that the emotion embodied in the work is not only experienced or lived through but also elevated to a spiritual level. In other words, it should transcend personal inclinations or experiences”. (Kupareo 2007, p. 292). An artist who believes their greatness and value lie in being misunderstood or in ridiculing the viewer by offering enigmatic creations is not a true artist, though it should be noted that a lack of understanding of a work can also depend on the lack of knowledge of the viewer or reader. (Kupareo 2007, p. 290).

In an era when information is rapidly and effortlessly transmitted and the power of images is undeniable, it is crucial to highlight that the concept of an image in modern times has gained multifaceted significance and has experienced a substantial evolution in its core understanding. Namely, “an image is no longer just a classical artistic (visual) creation, but rather refers to every product of visual arts and other media such as photography, digital art, film, the human body, etc. An image is revealed as a carrier of communication, a source of knowledge, or a distinct form of reflection”. (Kovač 2022, p. 17). This was particularly evident during the recent global COVID-19 pandemic, where, for instance, the image on a computer screen served as a medium that conveyed necessary information and opinions and acted as a ‘meeting point’ for people given the restrictions on physical contact and interactions. As images surround us and provide a realm for communication, contemplation, and the perception of the world, emancipating us from the limitations that might otherwise restrain uninhibited expression, it will undoubtedly be pivotal in the future to intensify our focus on fundamental aesthetic and artistic formation. In this context, images and artworks will be understood experientially rather than merely by studying them. This means that individuals will engage in the interpretation and shaping of images and artworks with their entire being.

We can conclude that the modern era has contributed to a change in the paradigm of understanding visual and artistic expression. Namely, the image is no longer just a means that facilitates our path to the goal; however, it helps us experience the goal in its fullness, requiring the synergy of all areas of human development—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor.

3. Catechesis—In the Service of Man’s Growth in Faith

For faith to grow and develop throughout one’s life, a person needs to nurture and enrich it, assuming that they have learned about faith and grown in it since their childhood years, and build their knowledge according to their abilities, interests, and life circumstances.

In this sense, teaching in faith, among other things, changes and adapts according to the signs of the times and circumstances in which an individual lives and grows. This leads us to discuss new ways and methods of teaching in faith, whereby ‘new’ does not refer to altering the content of faith but rather to adaptations aligned with the changes in the world, i.e., the new context in which the modern man lives (Ivančić 2011, p. 580).

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ entrusted His apostles with the mission of making all nations His disciples, sending them across the world imbued with the light and power

of His Spirit (cf. Matthew 28:19–20). Therefore, from its very beginnings until today, the Church has always considered education in faith to be its fundamental and primary mission.

From the earliest days of the Church up to the present, the term “catechesis” (from the Greek *katechéin*, meaning “to resound”) aims to encompass the demanding and responsible task that the Church has undertaken in its effort to proclaim to people Jesus’ Good News of the Kingdom of God. Recognising that catechesis strengthens and revitalises its collective existence as a community of believers, the modern Church views catechetical work as one of its fundamental and primary tasks, which is why the Church is bidden “to offer catechesis her best resources in people and energy, without sparing effort, toil or material means” (John Paul II 1994, n. 15). Catechesis, as a form of ecclesial action that leads communities and individual Christians to maturity of faith (Sacred Congregation for the Clergy 1971, n. 21), is intended for all age groups—children, adolescents, young people in their developmental stages, as well as adults. Given that man’s thirst for the transcendental and the meaning of life is now more vulnerable to dangers from which modern individuals cannot easily escape, catechesis can serve as an excellent instrument to address modern man’s need for discovering life’s meaning. Taking this fact into account, we can affirm that catechesis, among other things, is tasked with identifying obstacles and providing appropriate solutions in response to the needs of a modern man (Barić and Galović 2018, p. 150).

3.1. Catechesis through Images in the History of the Church

When discussing catechesis and its various forms, it is worth pointing out its educational value, whether it pertains to the fundamental and significant component of Christian and religious education or to the broader educational dimension as a factor in socialisation, literacy, cultural and moral development, etc. This is a fact that clearly derives from the very history of the Church and from the theoretical deliberation on the nature of catechesis. In this sense, catechetical work is associated with educational settings and areas of socialisation and takes its own forms of educational activity through teaching, instruction, initiation, training, education, and literacy. As such, catechesis has been an effective means of religious socialisation for many generations and has contributed to shaping the human and Christian identity of believers (Fakultet odgojnih znanosti Papinskog salezijanskog sveučilišta 2017, p. 438).

Considering the distinct epochs in the history of the Church, we can distinguish between different methods and ways of teaching in faith, each of which is characterised by its own unique qualities and specificities. Understanding these characteristics aids us in comprehending the importance of particular methods of teaching in faith throughout the history of the Church.

Since the family is a fundamental social unit, the primary and basic community of life, parents are the first and irreplaceable educators of the faith of their children (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, n. 226). In fact, the family has always been and remains the primary foundation for teaching in faith, the first catechists within the ‘domestic Church’. As an illustration, in the Middle Ages, no external aid was involved in the educational process within the confines of the family household; therefore, it is apt to assert that the family functioned as a primary catechetical setting. Words, and even more so, the role models provided by the father and mother, held significant value during that time. Parents were the first teachers of faith to their children and, at the same time, responsible for their preparation to receive sacraments. Parents received the foundation of religious knowledge from their caring parents and ancestors, as well as from the communal sermons that were obligatory in churches on Sundays and holidays since the Carolingian era, which were delivered in the local dialect. The communal sermon, functioning as adult catechesis, laid the groundwork for home-based catechesis that parents provided to their children. Since the Church had not introduced dedicated catechesis for children, they would join their parents in attending Sunday liturgy, which consisted of sermons tailored for adults. It was the parental duty to discuss various arguments and insights highlighted in the sermon

during family conversations after the Sunday Mass and to explain these to their children, most often utilising images from everyday life (Läpple 1985, pp. 84–85).

The preparation for the sacrament of Holy Confession was also interesting, particularly due to the limited literacy of the general populace. This constraint prevented the use of extensive texts, leading to the creation of confession tablets that featured a sequence of the Ten Commandments, which were explained with various colourful and striking images. Medieval confession books for pastors and confession tablets for laypeople constituted a rich source of catechesis content and popular piety at that time. Within these materials, the basic structure of mediaeval Christian teaching could be uncovered. By examining them, it was also possible to observe the popular folk customs of different tribes and nations, along with their difficulties and sufferings that contradicted the proper imitation of Christ.

Also, it should not be overlooked that death was a common occurrence in mediaeval households. Epidemics often devastated families, which made death a family matter as well. Every person, whether poor or wealthy, newborn or elderly, layperson or church dignitary, was led away by the “Sister Death”, as depicted in the vivid portrayals of the cruel dances of death. Alongside confession tablets, booklets were also used to prepare believers for the inevitable encounter with death, making them a part of the catechetical literature of the Middle Ages. In them, through the use of images, believers were taught the *ars moriendi* and encouraged to prepare for the encounter with death.

An essential aspect of catechesis through images in the history of the Church is undoubtedly the *Biblia pauperum*, which draws attention to the renowned “Bibles for the Poor” created for the illiterate. These took the form of large-format “illustrated books” with religious characters. These Bibles for the Poor were consistently produced in new series and featured a wide variety of themes, including the lives of saints, significant figures from the Old Testament, and a significant selection focusing on the life and, above all, the suffering of Jesus Christ. However, the term *Biblia pauperum* should be understood in a much deeper sense, beyond merely illustrated Bibles for the Poor, in order to grasp the astonishing array of social communication tools, without which mediaeval Christian teaching would indeed remain somewhat enigmatic in its thematic scope, depth, and emotional resonance. Furthermore, the fact that many Gothic churches were adorned with a large number of altars, paintings, statues, and Stations of the Cross can now be considered a critical review of significant proportions in the realm of liturgical theology. However, it was these very images and symbols, at times diverting attention from elements of the church space and the Eucharistic celebration, that significantly shaped the faith of mediaeval people, as well as catechesis, which had the task of fostering the growth in faith among the people of that time. Paintings and statues, along with medals and reliquaries, as well as rosaries and Stations of the Cross, functioned as invaluable communication tools that influenced the faith of those who were illiterate in the Middle Ages. Utilising the “mass media” of that era, the religious truths heard in sermons were not only adapted but also further enriched through a meditative process. Knowledge and facts regarding the Apostles’ Creed, initially conveyed through spoken communication and teachings, evolved into subjects of prayer and meditation within practises such as during the praying of the Rosary, eventually becoming an integral part of daily life. Clearly, there was no deeper, historical-critical exegesis related to the suffering of Jesus Christ, as presented in the New Testament. Still, a mediaeval Christian who could not read the Gospel, through the meditative prayer of the Stations of the Cross and by sharing his own cross with Christ, could delve into the agony and death of his Saviour more profoundly and with greater understanding than through a simple encounter with the words of the biblical text or the analysis of individual lines (Läpple 1985, pp. 86–90).

3.2. The Place and Role of Images in Catechisms

A historical overview enables us to recognise the significant contribution of catechetical efforts in the processes of upbringing and education, utilising catechisms in which numerous images and artworks found their place, as well as various forms of religious

instruction and preaching to the people. Namely, alongside the family, the process of teaching faith occurs, among other things, through catechisms (Latin: *catechismus*, ‘to instruct orally’). The Second Vatican Council marked the end of a long catechetical period dating back to the 16th century, during which the Book of Catechism held a central position in the field of both pedagogy and doctrine (Alberich 1986, p. 11). Catechesis has for a long time entailed learning by heart, explaining, and applying to everyday life the summaries or handbooks of Christian doctrine, which were prepared in a clear and concise style (Alberich 1986, p. 12).

In its original meaning, the term ‘catechism’ denoted oral and familial instruction in the Christian faith provided to children and adults after baptism, and by the beginning of the 16th century, this term began to refer to a book of summaries of the fundamental truths of Christianity. As such, it became a popular handbook—an accurate and precise overview of Christian doctrine—presented in a question-and-answer format approved and recommended by bishops for their dioceses. Great importance was attributed to traditional catechisms, starting with the Catechism of the Council of Trent, through the most widespread catechisms by well-known authors, including Luther, Canisius, Auger, Astete, Ripalda, and Bellarmine, all the way to the Catechism of St. Pius X (Fakultet odgojnih znanosti Papinskog salezijanskog sveučilišta 2017, p. 439). The text of the catechism was read aloud, repeated, and memorised, and thus played a decisive role in the formation of those who used it and contributed to the shaping of a religious vocabulary, ways of thinking, and expressions of faith (Fakultet odgojnih znanosti Papinskog salezijanskog sveučilišta 2017, p. 440).

It is interesting to note that apart from words, catechisms also included images and certain artworks, not with the aim of replacing words or breaking the monotony of religious truths in words; however, to provide the reader with an easier understanding of catechetical content because “a sacred image can express much more than what can be said in words and be an extremely effective and dynamic way of communicating the Gospel message” (Ratzinger 2005). Similarly, certain artistic images in catechisms speak about the rootedness of faith content in the concrete reality in which a particular truth of faith inspired many authors in their artistic expression. To bring about this expression, not only knowledge was necessary but also a sense of the transcendent, of what surpasses oneself, “since visual language touches the realms of the human spirit much deeper than mere words” (Garmaz 2010, p. 327).

Without delving into an analysis of individual catechisms throughout the history of the Church in order to point out the presence and significance of images and specific artworks within catechisms or certain content of the faith, we will focus only on the most contemporary ones. Thus, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which consists of four chapters, introduces the reader to each chapter with a particular work of art that is thematically related to the chapter, offering a theological and artistic elaboration of the connection between the truths of faith and artistic expression.

In the introduction to the first chapter, titled “The Profession of Faith”, the reader is introduced to a fragment from a fresco at the Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome, dating back to the early 3rd century, depicting the oldest image of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This image is one of the oldest paintings of Christian art and represents what forms the heart of the Christian faith: the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. The depiction highlights the entire anticipation of the Old Covenant and the cry of fallen humanity for the Saviour and Redeemer (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992, n. 27 and n. 528). This prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, who became human, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. Mary gives birth to Him and offers Him to humanity, and thus she is the purest image of the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992, n. 967).

In the introduction to the second chapter, “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery”, there is a fresco from the catacombs of Saints Marcellinus and Peter in Rome, dating back to the early 4th century. The painting depicts the encounter between Jesus and a

woman who had been suffering from a haemorrhage for many years. Upon touching the edge of Jesus' cloak, she was healed by the "power that had gone out from him" (Mark 5:25–34). The painting symbolically portrays the divine and salvific power of the Son of God, who, through the sacramental life, saves the entire person—both soul and body. The sacraments of the Church continue the works that Christ performed during his earthly life. The sacraments are like the "powers that go out" from Christ's body to heal the wounds of sin and to bestow upon us a new life in Christ ([Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992](#), n. 1115).

At the beginning of the third chapter, "Life in Christ", we are presented with the central part of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, discovered beneath the main altar in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, dating from 359. The glorified Christ, depicted in his youthful form as a sign of His divinity, has ascended to the heavenly throne. Under His feet—the pagan god of heaven, Uranus. Alongside Him stand the holy apostles Peter and Paul, who turned toward Christ to receive from Him two scrolls: the New Law. Just as Moses received the Old Law from God on Mount Sinai, now the apostles—represented by their two leaders—receive the New Law from Christ. Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, bestows the New Law upon the people of the New Covenant. This law is no longer written on stone tablets but is imprinted by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers. Christ Himself gives the strength to live in harmony with this new life ([Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992](#), n. 1697). He came to fulfil in us what He commanded for our good ([Catechism of the Catholic Church 1992](#), n. 2074).

And finally, the fourth chapter, "Christian Prayer", begins with the miniature from the Monastery of St. Dionysius on Mount Athos, painted in Constantinople around the year 1059. In prayer, Christ is turned toward the heavenly Father. He prays alone, in a solitary place. His disciples observe him from a reverent distance. St. Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, turns towards the others, pointing to the One who is the Teacher and the Way of Christian Prayer, vividly portraying the gospel words: "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

Upon closer examination, we can also observe that the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church showcases "two types of images: those that exude pure symbolism (primarily icons and illustrations from liturgical books) or reformed symbolism (Beato Angelico), but there are also a few that, on the contrary, emanate realism and materiality (particularly El Greco). [...] within this duality, a theological message can be read, for instance, in the context of the beginning of John's prologue: The Word became flesh. The Eternal Word is depicted through iconographic symbolism, while the stark reality of Christ's bodily sacrifice is portrayed through realism!" ([Mateljan 2005](#), p. 438). From this example, it is also evident that faith was an inspiration to many artists in their expression and mediation of beauty. However, it was not just the flawlessness of artistic expression that was necessary, but also the alignment with the very event of religious truth. This is why it is always interesting and necessary to explore the *Sitz im Leben* of individual artists in relation to a particular painting and/or artwork.

Thanks to this panoramic overview of catechesis and exploring the role of images in catechesis and catechisms, we have seen that throughout the history of the Church, images have been companions in understanding the Christian message, especially in the early Christian era and during the Middle Ages. Images guided people towards understanding the Christian message. The visual and artistic expressions in catechisms show us how the truths of faith have influenced the expression of individual artists, where not only expertise but also the experience and influence of the truths of faith on human life were important, and the artist brought their entire self in all dimensions of their life.

4. Aesthetic and Artistic Formation

The term 'formation' is commonly used in both social and ecclesial realities, and it finds frequent application when organising various professional seminars and workshops. Often, the success and efficiency of a particular sector are evaluated based on competent

and professionally trained individuals who are ready to face the diverse challenges that confront modern man and society as a whole.

In order for images and artistic expressions to find their place within catechesis or to aid in the communication of content, it is necessary, among other things, to have well-trained catechists. These catechists should not only be well-versed in art but, above all, knowledgeable about their audience—those whom they are educating in faith (Kupareo 2007, p. 228). In catechesis, sociogenic and anthropogenic conditions are often discussed as important elements in shaping religious education. When it comes to education centred around aesthetics, beauty, and art, it is crucial for the catechist to understand their learners, identifying both their innate and acquired inclinations towards visual and artistic understanding, which is why the learner's personality plays a pivotal role in their ability to comprehend and connect with the subject matter. Therefore, the catechist will provide the students not only with fundamental information about specific images and artworks but also teach them how to observe, listen to, or read an image or artwork. They will assist in comprehending art through experiencing it, not just studying it, since art is not only about reason but also the will, imagination, memory, and feelings (Kupareo 2007, p. 238).

Furthermore, the use of visual expression in catechesis will depend not only on the innovation and creativity of the catechists but also on linking the content of the faith with the visual and artistic achievements of a specific period and individual artists. Creative expression is indeed a desirable element in catechesis, as it broadens the horizons of the human spirit and aids in experiencing and living what has been learned through written or spoken words. Indeed, artists of various epochs have portrayed the most significant events of the mystery of salvation, evoking contemplation and admiration among believers and depicting them in the splendour of colours and the perfection of beauty. This serves as a sign that today, more than ever, in a civilization of images, sacred images can convey much more than mere words, given their dynamic capacity to communicate and transmit the Gospel message remarkably effectively. Therefore, one of the competencies of the catechist is creativity, which in communicating the content of faith implies openness to novel and diverse ideas, the use of creative expression, the introduction of new methods of work, functionality, and harnessing the will and desire for new insights. That is why even today, within catechesis, creative expression is valued, in addition to the knowledge imparted, as a didactic-methodological variable through which participants have the opportunity to express their impressions on a visual, musical, dramatic, and literary level.

When discussing aesthetic and artistic formation, it is worth pointing out the constant changes in society and the world that we encounter daily. The Church, existing in and with the world, must keep pace with the times and adapt to the mentality of today's individuals while remaining faithful to its original mission—the proclamation of the Gospel.

One of the main and enduring changes in society that is gaining momentum is undoubtedly digitalisation and its influence on daily life. Digitalisation is a process through which specific operations can be conducted using digital media, such as computers or smartphones; it involves changing the format of documents from physical to digital, meaning that files, in simple terms, have shifted from paper to screens of media (Hrvatska enciklopedija 2021). Without delving into the question of whether digitalisation is a boon or bane in today's society, it is important to recognise that, when considering its impact on teaching in faith, the dedication to the Gospel necessitates an ongoing exploration of innovative avenues for catechetical instruction. This implies the need to discover more tailored modes of communication and the utilisation of new tools (Hrvatska biskupska konferencija 2018, p. 85).

In the present era, digital media enables the migration of art into the digital domain. However, virtual space thereby becomes a space of artificial or technically generated reality, where the visual nature of the digital image is an entirely processual aspect of a reality that is 'artificially' constructed (Paić 2008). In this regard, it is important to consider the power of perception when encountering a digital image or artwork in a virtual space, i.e., how much one can truly see, hear, smell, touch, taste. . . How feasible is it to concentrate on

what is authentic, genuine, pure, and convincing in the real world? (Filipović 2012, p. 129). Without intending to diminish the importance and value of digital media in conveying the Christian message and fostering faith, especially in today's era of digital media, one of the challenges in the aesthetic and artistic formation of the future will be not only how to employ digital media for spreading the Christian message and nurturing faith, but also how to integrate the message itself into this new culture created by contemporary communication.

Despite the need to adapt to the challenges of the new and different, in this case, the modern digital platforms, catechists and other pastoral workers must bear in mind that the catechetical process is not solely about learning faith, even through remote communication; however, about deliberate gathering in which the face-to-face encounter is of paramount importance. Therefore, while it is necessary to stress the advantages of using modern media for conducting catechetical encounters, it is equally crucial to highlight the priority of face-to-face encounters and communication. It is important to keep in mind the words of Pope Francis:

“Today, when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a ‘mystique’ of living together [. . .], of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage. Greater possibilities for communication thus turn into greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity for everyone”. (Francis 2013, n. 87).

5. Conclusions

This paper examined the use of visual and artistic expressions in the service of catechesis, aiming to explore the significance of images and artworks as well as their role in catechesis.

The first section explored the concept that images are a prevalent medium in today's society, and at times it seems as though no other medium is as captivating, impactful, or successful as an image. Therefore, it is crucial to understand and distinguish the role of images, which can range from serving as mere ‘supplements’ to content to being vehicles for conveying messages or interpreting content. Furthermore, we have come to the conclusion that, throughout history, humans have expressed themselves not only through words but also through images. The process of creating or interpreting an image requires one to completely immerse oneself in it, engage in contemplation, explore one's inner depths, heed one's inner voices, and, through cognitive processes, extract the fundamental essence from those phenomena, images, and artworks. In this sense, visual expressions and works of art require the utilisation of numerous tools to ensure that the initial experience remains unimpaired in its essence, leaving individuals the freedom for what is seen, experienced, and learned to be integrated into their everyday lives, shaping their own *Sitz im Leben*. In the process, there emerged a clear shift in the paradigm regarding the role of images in the present day. While in certain historical periods, images and artistic works served as auxiliary tools to better understand the content of faith and catechetical material, the contemporary era, rich in visual elements, helps us experience the truths of faith in their fullness, requiring the synergy of all areas of human development—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor.

In the second section of the paper, we have focused on the concept of catechesis. After establishing the *status question* related to catechesis, we sought answers to how catechesis, which is dedicated to fostering growth in faith, has utilised images and artworks throughout history. We have come to the conclusion that the use of images in catechesis was prevalent within the family, which constituted a catechetical setting, as families did not rely on “external aid” in upbringing and education. With the help of images from everyday life, parents would explain to their children the mysteries of faith that were related to various events in human life (birth, life, prayer, sacraments, death, etc.). Moreover, during the mediaeval period, the *Biblia pauperum* served catechesis as an illustrated book for

instructing the uneducated (poor) masses, offering a wide range of religious topics for teaching, and acted as a kind of mass medium of that time. Analysing the Catechism of the Catholic Church in particular allowed us to understand the significance and role of images and artworks in catechisms, which during the Middle Ages transformed into didactic and methodological tools for teaching faith. In summary, our findings led us to the realisation that the inclusion of images and artworks in catechisms had a purpose beyond substituting words or breaking the monotony of religious truths. Rather, their role was to enhance the comprehension of catechetical material and to facilitate an engagement with the content of the faith in all its beauty.

In the third section, we have underscored the importance of aesthetic and artistic formation, believing that through appropriate formation and training of all catechesis participants, it becomes imperative to engage with the language of beauty and develop the ability to understand the message of Christian art in order to comprehend and facilitate a personal interaction with the figure of Jesus Christ. We have arrived at the conclusion that achieving this goal requires primarily having well-trained catechists who will not only provide basic information about individual images or artworks to the students but also teach them how to look at, listen to, or read an image or artwork and help them to understand art by experiencing it rather than merely studying it. Furthermore, the importance of innovation and creativity in catechists was highlighted, as these qualities involve being open to new and different ideas in faith education, using creative expression, introducing new methods of work, being functional, and utilising the will and desire for creative expression. In the context of this formation, one of the challenges in the future will also be the world of digital media, including their use not only for spreading the Christian message and educating in faith but also finding ways to integrate the message into the new culture created by contemporary communication.

In conclusion, when considering the relationship between catechesis and art, we can say that catechesis needs art, and furthermore, catechesis is an art itself, as it educates for something sublime that not only involves understanding but also experiencing. Catechesis, with the help of images and artworks, aims to affirm that “God’s loving care for all people in Christ must be expressed in the digital world not simply as an artefact from the past or a learned theory, but as something concrete, present, and engaging” (Benedict XVI 2010).

Funding: This researcher is funded by the Catholic Faculty of Theology, University of Zagreb.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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