

## Iconographic distinctiveness of the painting the Annunciation by the Slovenian expressionist France Kralj

Boštjan Marko Turk

Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

### ABSTRACT

Kralj's Annunciation, painted in 1922, clearly stands out from other traditional representations of the same subject. While other works physically separate the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, the Slovenian painter fuses the two figures in a unique composition. This mystical union embodies a theological vision of divine time, inspired by the reflections of Saint Augustine and others (Boetius, Tomas Aquinas, C. S. Lewis and Paul Tillich). In this perspective, divine time is not linear like human time, but coincides in a simultaneity where past, present, and future converge. Thus, Kralj's Annunciation represents a moment already fulfilled in divine eternity, although Mary is still awaiting conception in human time. The work is also distinguished by a subtle palette and expressive use of forms, which serve to intensify the emotional and spiritual tension of the scene. Although Kralj does not use the bright colours typical of expressionism, he manages to enhance the emotional impact through the masterful handling of light and colour. He thus merges expressionist influences with stylistic elements of mannerism and cubism unique to his artistic vision. In the historical and political context, the Annunciation positions itself as a response to the oppressions of the time. Through this work, France Kralj would express not only a powerful spiritual message but also a form of resistance against the dominant ideologies. The painting thus becomes a bridge between sacred art and political engagement, reflecting both the quest for transcendence and the struggle for national identity of Slovenes. Concerning the deeper message of the canvas, the Annunciation of France Kralj presents the union of the divine and the human, with subtle eroticism playing a key role in the depiction of the conception of Jesus Christ. Mary and the angel Gabriel are portrayed as a single body and identity, symbolizing the synchronous merging of the divine and human worlds. The conception is presented as part of human reproduction, highlighting the purity and innocence of subtle eroticism, much like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the fall. Kralj's painting reflects the Chalcedonian Council's definition of Christ as both fully divine and fully human. The painting thus blends theological depth with expressionist intensity.

Correspondence: Boštjan Marko Turk.  
E-mail: Bostjan-marko.turk@guest.arnes.si

Key words: national and cultural identity; expressionist form; symbolism; metaphysical time; Henri Bergson; Paul Valéry; Saint Augustine; Christ; subtle eroticism.

Received: 27 September 2024.  
Accepted: 15 November 2024.

Publisher's note: all claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article or claim that may be made by its manufacturer is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

©Copyright: the Author(s), 2024  
Licensee PAGEPress, Italy  
Proceedings of the European Academy of Sciences & Arts 2024;  
3:46  
doi: 10.4081/peasa.2024.46

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.



France Kralj, Annunciation (Kranjc, 2001).

## Introduction

France Kralj (1895-1960)<sup>1</sup> was a painter of European stature and a leading figure in Slovenian expressionism and the new reality<sup>2</sup>. His work is characterised by autonomy, sovereignty and a brilliant pictorial narrative, which quickly attracted attention abroad. «Kralj worked independently. He exhibited successfully in Slovenia, was regularly invited to annual exhibitions of artists from Yugoslav cultural centres in Belgrade and was invited to take part in Yugoslav selections of artists exhibiting in Europe and the United States» (Kranjc, 1995).

In 1913, he joined the sculpture department of the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. He studied there until he was called to the front in mid-1914, where he was seriously wounded. He was then posted to the home front, where he convalesced. He occasionally worked as an illustrator and decorator<sup>3</sup>. For the next two years, he studied painting at the Prague Academy. In 1933, he published his autobiography *My Way* (Kralj, 1996). Six years later «He received two *Diplome de médaille d'argent*, awards with which he was honoured by the Administration of the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937. In 1938, based on the quality of the works he sent to the *Erste internationale handwerks-Ausstellung*, he was included among the exhibitors, and in addition, he received international recognition for his craftsmanship and artistic creation» (Kranjc, 2022)<sup>4</sup>. As for his main artistic orientation, it must be said that Expressionism championed the personal approach. It made the thinking subject an integral part of the work it was creating. Everything became personal. We will see later that, in the case of the painting the Annunciation, this literally meant the realisation of the Roman poet Horace's famous dictum: «*Omne tulit punctum*»<sup>5</sup>.

The use of tints is also characteristic of France Kralj. Although he did not use such vivid or unusual colour palettes as the expressionists, he did use colour to emphasise an emotional effect.

But the subject matter is even more important. His works often feature strong, introspective themes, including religious motifs, which is common in expressionist art. France Kralj's painting is above all marked by the search for a national identity. This is evident in his many works dealing with Slovenian culture and history. Although his works are not entirely Expressionist, they do contain elements of this movement.

His evolution has been summed up by the art historian France Stele<sup>6</sup>. He wrote: «*Formal symbolism was soon joined by colour symbolism, based on the temperament of individual colours. It culminated in abstract symbolism, which considered line and colour in their abstract values. It was no longer possible to continue along this path, and France Kralj then turned to the expressionism of abstract form in order to exhaust the other possibilities of expressionist form. This is his final phase. His aspiration also influenced his way of designing. The works of Marie-Madeline<sup>7</sup> are characteristic in this direction (the form is composed of realistic elements, whose composition is not realistic, but serves only to stimulate a general, unspecific state of mind). The influence of this approach on the plastic form is illustrated by Christ the Priest<sup>8</sup> and Mary of the Annunciation.<sup>9</sup> All attention is now focused on the content and its appropriate form. This is obviously a synthesis of what has been achieved so far. It also influences the circle of motifs that characterise religious and patriotic experiences. The innate Slovenian lyricism can no longer be suppressed, and it resonates in the beautiful face of the Madonna in the group of the Annunciation of the Angel*» (Stele, 1925).

France Kralj was so an expressionist, among other. This

movement was born of a sense of chaos during and after the Great War. The latter particularly affected him, as he narrowly escaped death in the trenches. Throughout his life, he bore the consequences of his involvement in the fighting, both physically and psychologically.

Expressionism is therefore a kind of global formula by which talented individuals sensitive to injustice protested against a degenerate society and its technical civilisation, which was increasingly losing the sense of human individuality, particularly that based on metaphysics. It is therefore *ipso facto* a spiritualised art.

In his aforementioned autobiography *My Way* (Kralj, 1996), he wrote that the artist's mission was now ethical rather than merely aesthetic. In addition to the Kralj brothers<sup>10</sup>, painters Fran Tratnik<sup>11</sup> and Veno Pilon<sup>12</sup> are among the Slovenian Expressionists. But it was France Kralj who was the driving force behind the movement. Founder of the Club of Young Slovenian Artists (1921), the Slovenian Art Society (1926) and the Slovenian Character Society (1934), he made a significant contribution to the revival of Slovenian art<sup>13</sup>. The ethnologist and art historian Ivan Sedej wrote the following about the essence of Kralj's expression-

<sup>1</sup> We assume that most PEASA readers are not familiar with the historical circumstances in which the Slovenian nation found itself at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. We also assume that not everyone is familiar with France Kralj's activities, which is why we have included several elements in this article that will enable the reader to gain a better understanding of this period and to present the painter's role in it more accurately. This is why there is so much information which, in relation to the primary intention of the article - to clarify the uniqueness of France Kralj's Annunciation for the history of fine art - is in fact secondary, but not redundant.

<sup>2</sup> The focus of this article is philosophical rather than theological. Philosophy seeks to explain the world, while theology contemplates its mysteries. The aim here is to analyse the Annunciation, a painting by Slovenian artist France Kralj, using a philosophical-hermeneutic framework, and to situate it within the broader context of European art history. It is not our intention to interpret the Annunciation as a theological phenomenon or one of the great mysteries of history. Thus, the scope of this text is confined to a philosophical examination of the artwork and its historical placement, rather than a religious or theological interpretation of the event itself.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://revija.ognjisce.si/revija-ognjisce/27-obletnica-meseca/2334-france-kralj> (consulted on 5 September 2024).

<sup>4</sup> The mentioned book is one of the most exhaustive monographs on the topic of France Kralj.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.loebclassics.com/view/horace-ars\\_poetica/1926/pb\\_LCL194.479.xml](https://www.loebclassics.com/view/horace-ars_poetica/1926/pb_LCL194.479.xml) (consulted on 16 September 2024).

<sup>6</sup> See [https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/France\\_Stele\\_\(art\\_historian\)](https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/France_Stele_(art_historian)) (consulted on 6 September 2024).

<sup>7</sup> See <https://museums.eu/collection/object/4561/magdalena-magdalene> (consulted on 6 September 2024).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://museums.eu/collection/object/232357/kristus-pridigar-christ-the-preacher> (consulted on 6 September 2024).

<sup>9</sup> It is a sculpture Mary of the Annunciation from 1924, made of patinated wood, with a height of 110 cm. The signature is located on the lower left: KRALJ/24. The sculpture is housed in Moderna galerija, Ljubljana.

<sup>10</sup> France Kralj had a brother, Tone, who was also a successful painter. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tone\\_Kralj](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tone_Kralj) (consulted on 5 September 2024). See also below.

<sup>11</sup> See [https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran\\_Tratnik](https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fran_Tratnik) (consulted on 5 September 2024).

<sup>12</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veno\\_Pilon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veno_Pilon) (consulted on 5 September 2024).

<sup>13</sup> See [https://avdio.ognjisce.si/oddaja/mz\\_2023\\_04\\_23\\_brata\\_Kralj\\_Igor\\_Kranjc](https://avdio.ognjisce.si/oddaja/mz_2023_04_23_brata_Kralj_Igor_Kranjc) (consulted on 5 September 2024).

ism: «*The starting point of France Kralj's art was the form that had to express the deepest human emotions in the most appropriate way. This is why France Kralj elongated and contorted his figures, shaping them like flames tending towards unattainable ideals, and therefore chose bizarre compositional devices and bold expressions*»<sup>14</sup>.

It is a reflection of El Greco, whom France Kralj knew well when the great painter began to reveal himself to the European public at the beginning of the twentieth century<sup>15</sup>. He inspired Picasso<sup>16</sup>, and above all painters with a religious sensibility who were influenced by the serpentine bodies of the saints and Christ, the curves that bear witness to the fusion between heaven and earth, between the linear time of man and the synchronous time of God, as we shall see later. Kralj, who was well acquainted with Italian culture, may also have been inspired by Tuscan Mannerism or the Renaissance in his serpentine forms<sup>17</sup>.

Later, in the 1930s, we can speak of an escalation of the creative period based on expressionism. France Kralj combined mastery of form with expressive colour. But a new and essential moment appeared: the painter was sensitive to ethical and religious questions, as well as national issues. At the time, the latter were intensifying to the point of becoming unbearable. The Slovenes were increasingly crushed by the boot of Italian fascism, and the artist was eager to defend the Slovene ethnicity on its western border<sup>18</sup>. His choice of motifs was a struggle against the increasing ideologization of society. The art historian Igor Kranjc wrote of the situation in which the artist found himself at the time: «*In the 1920s and 1930s, a period of crisis in world history, Kralj clearly perceived the ideological and ideological currents that, in the face of the increasingly acute confrontation of the dominant totalitarianisms, predicted the collapse of individual values - from personal artistic choices to the threat of the loss of one's own cultural identity - due to the smallness of the Slovenian nation*» (Kranjc, 1995). The cataclysmic space was opening up and threatening to engulf the Slovenes, especially those on the West.

## Italian fascism and the art of the Kralj brothers in defence of a nation doomed to disappear

The south-western part of Slovenian territory was promised to Italy under the London Agreement (1915)<sup>19</sup>. This was a fateful moment for the painter and for a large part of the Slovenian (and Croatian) ethnic group. This was an agreement reached between Italy and the Allies (Great Britain, France and Russia) before Italy officially entered the First World War. The Allies promised Italy more territory as a reward for its commitment in the fight against the Central Powers, in particular Austria-Hungary. The territories promised included Trieste, Gorizia, Istria and Dalmatia. These territories were mainly inhabited by Slovenes and Croats.

The London Agreement therefore had direct consequences: the Treaty of Rapallo (1920)<sup>20</sup> is linked to it - and ipso facto to the creation of France Kralj. The fact is that after the end of the First World War and the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the new kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes<sup>21</sup> was faced with territorial claims from Italy. At Rapallo, Yugoslavia and Italy concluded an agreement confirming the territories already promised to Italy in the London Agreement. With a certain amount of bitterness, we could say that the word flesh has become, as Kralj's painting the Annunciation shows in another context.

Italy thus obtains the Slovenian and Croatian Coast region

(Trieste, Gorizia, part of Istria and part of Dalmatia). The Rapallo border defines the boundary between Italy and the Kingdom of SHS. It is controversial from the point of view of the Slovenian and Croatian populations, as many of them remained under Italian rule.

<sup>14</sup> See <https://revija.ognjisce.si/revija-ognjisce/27-obletnica-meseca/2334-france-kralj> (consulted on 4 September 2024).

<sup>15</sup> See <https://journals.uni-lj.si/ActaNeophilologica/article/view/9685> (consulted on 7 September 2024).

<sup>16</sup> He saw the influence of El Greco, for example, in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), one of Pablo Picasso's most emblematic works. In this work, El Greco's influence is subtle but nonetheless present, particularly in the deformation of the bodies and the dramatization of the pictorial space. In the foreground are the elongated and distorted figures: El Greco is famous for his stretched human figures, which seemed to transcend realistic proportions to express emotions or spiritual qualities. In *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Picasso also departs from realistic forms by stylizing and fragmenting the bodies of the figures, which evokes El Greco's approach. Some of the female figures have angular faces and deformed bodies, reminiscent of El Greco's exaggerated silhouettes. Then there is the dramatic expressiveness: El Greco infused his compositions with an intense expressiveness, often accentuated by dramatic lighting and dynamic postures. Although Picasso adopted a more geometric and cubist approach, there is a similar tension in *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, particularly in the piercing gazes of the women and their rigid, confrontational postures. Finally, we see bold colours: El Greco used bright, contrasting colours to accentuate the spirituality and dramatization in his works. Similarly, Picasso experimented with a bold palette and flat colours, breaking with the conventions of light and shadow to create almost sculptural forms in the two-dimensional space of the canvas. He encountered *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in relief, but in France Kralj's *Annunciation*, we naturally reconsider our approaches, particularly in terms of technique. The *Annunciation* delivers a fundamentally different message from Picasso's work. It is much closer to the art of El Greco, since in both cases the work of art mediates a metaphysical message, which is not the case with *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*.

<sup>17</sup> We asked Ferdinand Šerbel, art historian and specialist in Slovenian visual arts, in particular Christian painting and iconography, what influence El Greco, and the Tuscan Renaissance had on France Kralj's art, in particular on his *Annunciation*, in terms of its serpentine form. Here is his answer: «*By examining the work of France Kralj, different stylistic and iconographic horizons for interpreting his work emerge. If we limit ourselves to the form, we see that it is quickly recognizable, but at the same time, as such, it is formally different from that of his peers' generation. Its round shapes, clear lines, smooth, pure surfaces of colour and often curved postures evoke the forms of Tuscan Mannerism. Tuscan Mannerism liked clear lines and smooth surfaces like glazed ceramics (the High Renaissance liked semi-glazed ceramics), typical of the Florentine workshop of the sculptor Della Robbia. This material and the skill with which it was executed placed him at the pinnacle of the Tuscan Renaissance. In addition, Giovanni Bologna's ingeniously designed serpentine figures, and his intertwined figures were certainly not lost on Franck. Their legacy is even more evident in the Annunciation.*

*That's why I don't see any parallels with El Greco, who is certainly slender in a mannerist way, but whose colours are of a leaden welder, whose «rough» surfaces with peeling layers of colour can hardly be identified with the bright colours of Slovenian expressionism, as defended by France Kralj.*» We respect this judgement, but we would also like to point out that the colour of the *Annunciation* is, in many respects, close to the Toledo genius' pictorial landscape in its subdued colours.

<sup>18</sup> Alongside his brother, Tone Kralj.

<sup>19</sup> See <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/london-treaty-of-1915/> (consulted on 7 September 2024).

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100404398> (consulted on 7 September 2024).

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.britannica.com/place/Kingdom-of-Serbs-Croats-and-Slovenes> (consulted on 7 September 2024).

Serious problems, particularly for the Slovene ethnic group, which is geographically closest to the Kingdom of Italy, began in 1922 when Benito Mussolini and his national-socialist (fascist) party came to power. Mussolini made the erasure of Slovene identity and the politicisation of Slovene speakers one of his main missions.

France Kralj responded to oppression with his whole being. The National Encyclopaedia of the Slovenes provides information about his state of mind in the 1920s and later 1930s: «Despite his contrary appearance, France Kralj experienced pain most deeply. To the Slovenian public, he brought from his school and his youthful mood, in addition to the Viennese expressionist form, a considerable number of contextual tendencies of a literary nature, which appear above all in his plates and early illustrations. In reaction to this scholastic heritage, he later experienced the era of linear expressionism and the formal, colourful symbolism of «pure» painting.

*During the following period, the painter's interest, particularly with regard to motifs, became clearer. It became more limited, and the painter's experience in his home country came to the fore. The last period that followed was one of less frequent creation, but one that was rigorously considered and completely refined. The power and poetry of his native land and his own experience now became his main themes, and each major work was a surprise to the observer.»<sup>22</sup>*

As already mentioned, he was close to his brother Tone, who protested against the persecution of the Slovenian spirit on the western border with an opus based on religious motivations. France Kralj felt the same: he used religious imagery as a lens to explore and represent deeper truths about reality. These motifs helped him convey more profound, often symbolic meanings in his work. If totalitarian systems have no metaphysics to draw on, it is the latter that offers the best starting point for a comprehensive critique of despotism. Since Tone Kralj can serve as a natural bridge for understanding the sacred narrative in the work of his brother, France Kralj, it is important to pause and reflect on him for a moment.

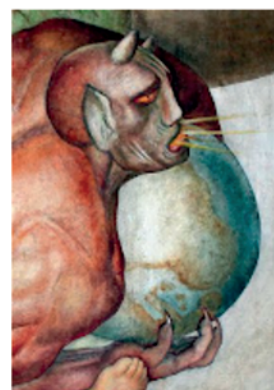
Tone Kralj painted in the churches of the Littoral region during the height of the fascist dictatorship. The Slovenian Littoral (Primorska, in the vernacular language) represents the south-western part of Slovenia's ethnic territory<sup>23</sup>. In several of the churches painted by Tone Kralj at the time, you can still see the faces of the Italian 'Duce' Benito Mussolini, the German 'Führer' Adolf Hitler and the Fascist politician who led the invasion of Rijeka, the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio<sup>24</sup>.

Tone Kralj painted more than 40 churches in Primorska. During the Fascist era, when most artists in the region were forced to remain silent or emigrate to Yugoslavia, he clearly expressed his protest against Italian and German imperialism.

The painter was not afraid of the fascists and had already shown this before the Second World War. The biographic note on

him states: «Tone Kralj returned to the Littoral and continued to paint churches, from where, during the war, he was forced to take refuge in Italian cities due to insecurity and persecution: in 1939, he enrolled at the Venice School of Architecture and, in 1940, he went to Rome to study the same subject. In 1941, he returned to the Littoral, where he remained until the end of the war; doing the same job»<sup>25</sup>.

In 1934, Slovenian cultural associations in Primorska region were abolished, the Slovenian language was banned in churches and many patriots were imprisoned. At that time, Tone Kralj was commissioned to paint the frescoes in the church of St Silvester in a village called Pevno<sup>26</sup>, newly built after the First World War. He depicted the martyrdom of the first Christians: through them, the inhabitants could identify with their suffering. One detail bears witness to this. It is a ceiling fresco depicting the Archangel Michael. It is he who plants an elongated cross, with a sharp point at the end, in the devil's back. The evil spirit clings to the earth with its claws. If you look closely at the devil's upturned face, you'll recognise the image of Benito Mussolini, despite the ears and horns.



Source: Koršič Zorn (2018). A close look at the Thief reveals the claws he digs into the earth's surface. A careful analysis of the map shows that they are embedded in the territory of the Slovenian Littoral.

<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi300245/> (consulted on 5 September 2024).

<sup>23</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovene\\_Littoral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovene_Littoral) (consulted on 7 September 2024).

<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.giorgioperlasca.it/impresa-di-fiume/> (consulted on 7 September 2024).

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi299895/> (consulted on 7 September 2024).

<sup>26</sup> See <https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pevma> (consulted on 7 September 2024).

In a nutshell: «*His work all along the western border of the Slovenian nation made it possible to build defensive trenches at a time in our darkest history when we were threatened with national extinction*» (Koršič Zorn, 2018).

## Sacred motifs in response to the difficulties of life, particularly in times of autocracy and indiscriminate violence. Examples from the treasure trove of world art

There was a kinship of spirit between Tone and France Kralj. Both, in their most artistically refined phases, used religious motifs to convey fundamental truths, including those concerning resistance against tyrannical political systems. Unfortunately, these experiences were part of their daily life. As far as France Kralj is concerned, we have to establish the following. Once the danger of fascism had passed (after the capitulation of the Kingdom of Italy on 3 September 1943), a new dictatorial government loomed on the horizon. Once again, it was time to roll up his sleeves and face up to a new evil. The decade and a half that followed 1945 was namely the most difficult period of his life.

The individualist that he was, the totalitarian communist regime pushed him into internal exile and to the limit of material survival. Thus «*at the end of the war, he found himself in a completely new environment, which in this part of the world signified the beginning of revolutionary power and the reflex of the Soviet principle of government. France Kralj was instantly pushed to the margins of society, condemned to create under the glass bell of a politically dysfunctional artist*» (Kranjc, 1995).

But he did not give in: he protested with all its might, this time against another type of socialism. Unlike Italian communism, which was national, Yugoslav communism was international, like Soviet communism. An important historical study of his fate in those cruel times reports: «*Because of his 'incapacity', he was retired on disability without being recognised as an artist. Therefore, in existential danger; on 3 May 1953, he covered his works in the permanent collection of the National Gallery<sup>27</sup> in Ljubljana with protest signs*» (Jančar and Simoniti, 1998).

However, in the mid-1950s, as ideological pressure eased, Slovenian culture paid tribute to France Kralj on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday with a major retrospective at the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana<sup>28</sup>.

Despite extremely difficult creative conditions, Kralj retained until his sudden death (in 1960) all the vitality of a master, always ready to confront his own creative genius and the dilemmas of contemporary art.

Awakened by a profoundly negative experience of history, he opened up to sacred art in his mature years. It was a metaphysical protest against a twisted world that was preparing to destroy everything that stood in the way of its totalitarian ambitions. Igor Kranjc notes: «*The general chaotic and tragic nature of the approaching war was confessed by Kralj through religious themes, centred on the cataclysmic dimensions of events, based on personal experience*» (Kranjc, 1995).

But he was not alone. Throughout history, in times of social unrest such as wars and revolutions, many painters have found in religion reasons to persist in the absurd world. This evolution often offered them personal comfort and the opportunity to express their feelings, find a certain stability or confront existential questions. The greatest artists did the same before or alongside him, in anticipation of the cataclysms to come.

Among the painters, let us first mention the one whose technique France Kralj drew inspiration from in essential parts of his work, as we have already mentioned, El Greco (1541-1614). His religious paintings, such as *The Funeral of Count Orgaz*<sup>29</sup> and *The Undressing of Christ (El Espolio)*<sup>30</sup>, are imbued with a deep spirituality that often reflects the religious turmoil and tensions of the Counter-Reformation in Spain. It was also a time when the Inquisition was targeting the great painter. Greek by birth, and therefore having once belonged to Orthodoxy, he became a suspect. At this critical time, full of violence, the artist took refuge in a profound religious experience.

France Kralj's contemporaries include Marc Chagall (1887-1985), who lived through the Russian Revolution and then fled Europe during the Second World War, turning to biblical themes. He was seeking refuge from the violence and anti-Semitism of his time. *The Bible series*<sup>31</sup> represents the strongest impulse towards an exploration of faith and spiritual heritage.

There is also Georges Rouault (1871-1958), who used Fauvism for a similar purpose to that which led France Kralj to use Cubism. Thanks to this inspiration, both expressed more of a religious feeling. Rouault survived both wars and became a committed Catholic in the face of their horrors: his faith grew stronger as he confronted the violence of the times: «*Many of Rouault's works reveal his strong Catholic faith. The Crucifixion, representing Christ's sacrifice for the salvation of humanity, is a predominant theme. The thick application of bright colours is characteristic of the Fauve movement, with which Rouault was associated. While other Fauves tended to avoid social or moral commentary, he used Fauve techniques to express his religious convictions*»<sup>32</sup>. His works such as *Christ Mocked by Soldiers*<sup>33</sup> and *The Holy Face*<sup>34</sup> are known for their dark, expressive style and deep religious symbolism.

Otto Dix (1891-1969), another of Kralj's contemporaries, also falls into the category of religiously inspired artists. Although best known for his depictions of the horrors of the First World War, Dix also painted religious subjects such as the *Ecce Homo*<sup>35</sup>. These paintings seem to be a search for meaning in the face of the horrors he witnessed.

Faced with the conflict, oppression and social disintegration, many artists have turned thus to faith as a source of comfort and inspiration. Their works often reflect a search for deeper meaning.

<sup>27</sup> See [https://www.ng-slo.si/en/?\\_gl=1\\*1th3shs\\*\\_up\\*MQ.\\*\\_ga\\*NDE1Ntc2MDA5LjE3MjU3NDMxMjk.\\*\\_ga\\_0ZD9RK1WKb\\*MT-cyNTc0MzEyOS4xLjAuMTcyNTc0MzEyOS4wLjAuMA](https://www.ng-slo.si/en/?_gl=1*1th3shs*_up*MQ.*_ga*NDE1Ntc2MDA5LjE3MjU3NDMxMjk.*_ga_0ZD9RK1WKb*MT-cyNTc0MzEyOS4xLjAuMTcyNTc0MzEyOS4wLjAuMA) (consulted on 7 September 2024).

<sup>28</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum\\_of\\_Modern\\_Art\\_\(Ljubljana\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum_of_Modern_Art_(Ljubljana)) (consulted on 1 September 2024).

<sup>29</sup> See <https://smarthistory.org/el-greco-burial-of-the-count-orgaz/> (consulted on 8 September 2024).

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/446826> (consulted on 9 September 2024).

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.masterworksfineart.com/artists/marc-chagall/bible-series-1958?srsId=AfmBOorgw1d5ZcEMhWBgntL97MxEtesp-ryxrCVjegoxTZIPJLww7ZV> (consulted on 9 September 2024.)

<sup>32</sup> See <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/1259/the-crucifixion-georges-rouault> (consulted on 9 September 2024).

<sup>33</sup> See <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79640> (consulted on 9 September 2024).

<sup>34</sup> See <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79640> (consulted on 9 September 2024).

<sup>35</sup> See <https://www.artnet.com/artists/otto-dix/ecce-homo-Sddh96nipnyHm4bXjtWquw2> (consulted on 9 September 2024).

spiritual reflection or an attempt at reconciliation. It is understandable that we have cited only a few of the most striking examples. But that would be enough to confirm our research thesis on the influence of wars, dictatorships or other similar catastrophes on the artist's perception of transcendence and its entities, particularly in the case of France Kralj, *mutatis mutandis*.

If we follow this logic and move from the plane of common history and its violence to the reasons why the painter protested against it, we find that the religious period coincides in time with the formation of the forces that led humanity into the worst conflict in history. Fascism, Nazism and Communism shared responsibility for the outbreak of the Second World War: they cooperated with each other for the first third of the war. After 22 June 1941, the configuration of forces changed. The war ended with the defeat of fascism, but unfortunately the eastern part of Europe was not completely liberated until 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall. These are all well-known facts.

So, inspired by his own intuitions, France Kralj sought solutions in sacred expression, because it was the optimal response to dictatorship. Yet this response does not come from the surface, in the form of a technical device. On the contrary, it is a question of being. With this in mind, we can now turn to what our painter considered to be the unequalled standard in this kind of artistic representation of metaphysical reality. It is his painting the Annunciation. The following reflection opens the way to an interpretation: *«The Annunciation forms, with other works, a complete thematic cycle. With bold compositional devices, a characteristic typification of physiognomy, an accentuated language of hands and body positions, in an entirely new spatial conception, France Kralj was looking for an abstract formal scheme, an appropriate pictorial organism in which object, space and time would coincide by means of a mystically religious message»* (Kranjc, 2001).

Other sources, such as exhibition catalogues, also confirm this change of direction: *«After 1921, he turned to figuration, emphasising subjectively experienced religious motifs»*<sup>36</sup>. Art historian Milčec Komelj<sup>37</sup> is even clearer: *“France Kralj fused God and earth in a splendour that cast a bright light on all Slovenian art in the decades before the war, and he was able to do this as an essentially religious mystic, who, from tradition and his own inner self, illuminated his own spirituality, with which he illumine the difficulties of everyday life”* (Komelj, 1995).

If we look at the central image in Kralj's work from this perspective, we need to note a key detail that testifies to the deep rootedness of the canvas in question in its historical context. The Annunciation was painted in 1922, the year of the March on Rome, when Mussolini seized power, setting off a race of totalitarianisms across Europe. It was a veritable Stations of the Cross, whose elements were the partition of Poland and thus the beginnings of the Second World War, the Second World War itself, with all the murder and violence that history has never known on such a scale, then the threat of extermination of the homo sapiens species by thermo-nuclear weapons, and finally the totalitarian dictatorship exercised over Eastern Europe and the Baltic States by the Soviet Union until the fall of the Berlin Wall. In this sense, 1922 was a black year.

France Kralj sensed that the worrying ratchet was beginning to unravel. This is why, within a cycle that reflects his search for a metaphysical formula in the face of the violent contradictions of the times, a work has emerged that represents one of the most original interpretations of the theme of the Annunciation in the history of fine art.

What is it all about? As we know, the Annunciation is the moment when the Archangel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is going to be conceived by the Holy Spirit. In other words, she will give birth to the Saviour of humanity. We learn more about this, for example, in the Gospel of Luke. The text is as follows:

*“In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man of the house of David, named Joseph. The virgin's name was Mary.*

*The angel went in to her and said, «Greetings, you who have been blessed; the Lord is with you.*

*Troubled by these words, Mary wondered what such a greeting could mean.*

*The angel said to her, «Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.*

*And behold, you shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Jesus.*

*He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.*

*He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and his reign will have no end.*

*Mary said to the angel, «How can this be, since I know no man?*

*And the angel said to him, «The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.*

*Therefore, the holy child who will be born to you will be called the Son of God» (Luke 1:26-35).*

## The iconography of the Annunciation in the context of time and space: its literal and anagogical interpretation

The Annunciation is also one of the most prolific motifs in painting. In presenting these paintings, we draw particular attention to the structuring that distinguishes them from the work of France Kralj. In all the other representations, the configuration of Mary and the angel who announces her future destiny is such that they are physically separated. This is odd if we consider the question from a theological point of view, without considering the dialectic of temporal patterns, which is the subject of the next section.

In fact, the conception of Jesus Christ means nothing other than that God has irreversibly drawn closer to man, because he has entered into his existential situation. Through his Son, he has united himself with him. A Christian iconography that takes this into account should be aware that insisting on the distance between the Angel and Mary is hardly in keeping with theological doxa. For God, by entering into our being through his Son, has suspended crucial distinction between himself and the genus homo sapiens.

France Kralj's Annunciation is different, even if we ignore the temporal patterns that separate human time from God's time. We said that the Expressionists took everything personally, including God. When the Angel gets so close to Mary, it is an outward posture that says what's essential: God has irreversibly bound himself

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.gro.sik.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/E-Razstava-France-Kralj-1.pdf> (consulted on 4 September 2024).

<sup>37</sup> Milčec Komelj is also an EASA Class III member.

to man (the notion of the Covenant!), starting with the mother of his Son.

This reflection is not related to the themes we develop in the following paragraphs, because it is so universal. It concerns the highest ontological order, the first truths, as they are called.

If we descend from this height to the level of technical concepts and begin to work with them, we find that the key to explaining temporal relationships in the order of the temporal and in the order of the eternal lies in the ways of interpreting the texts in which these concepts appear. These texts belong to the Old and New Testaments and are the primary messages of the Christian faith. So, we can see that the biblical texts have four modes of interpretation. The conclusion we can draw from this is as follows: the proclamations, with the exception of that of France Kralj, were made in accordance with the literal meaning (this is the first, most direct way of understanding the Bible).

This meaning considers the necessary parameter of the correlation between space and time, which is the dominant determinant of the created world. The philosopher Paul Tillich puts it this way: *«Time and space are the forces of universal existence, including human existence, the human body and the spirit. Time and space go hand in hand: we can only measure time through space and space through time. Movement, the universal character of life, needs time and space. Spirit, which seems to be linked to time, only needs incarnation to come into existence, and therefore it needs space»* (Tillich, 1959). Space follows the logic of space-time in the other pictorial representations of the Annunciation. In the Gospel, we read:

*«The angel said to her, «Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.*

*Behold, you will conceive and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be the Son of the Highest»* (Luke 1, 35).

In three consecutive sentences, we find three temporal spheres: the present, in the reported speech; the past, because the whole scene took place at a precise moment in history, which is now two millennia and a quarter of a century away and the future, because it foreshadows a key event, the birth of Jesus. The analytical distribution of time requires an appropriate distribution of space. We see that, from the point of view of the human factor, the Angel must be in a different «space» from Mary. He must be physically separated from her. It cannot be otherwise. But Paul Tillich is not the only one to have thought in this way. In fact, he followed a line of thinkers on this enigmatic subject which, in the history of philosophy, begins with Zeno's aporias on the concept of space and time.

In this context, we cannot ignore the fact that the essence of the relationship between space and time in the modern era was very aptly explained by the French philosopher and Nobel Prize winner Henri Bergson. With him, the notion of 'space-time', given the renown of his scientific work, permeated the consciousness of people in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. *«We say that our perception of movement is itself immobility, if by immobility we mean the absence of change: but then we take a change from outside, a relative change, and the time we distinguish from space is in reality a space-time»* (Bergson, 1970).

Taking the above quotation into account, we can once again pick up the thread of our reflection and conclude as follows: given the separation of the temporal spheres - from the point of view of the linearity of time unfolding in space, as Bergson says - the Angel and Mary cannot appear other than dissociated.

In the tradition of the visual arts, the theme of the Annunciation is therefore presented according to the logic of human

time, where space and time are correlative: it is based on a linear respect for the temporal parameters given by the Holy Scriptures. All the spheres of time are distinct from one another, hence the separate space of the two supra-mundane beings, as we have seen. There is practically no contact between one and the other: time, once it has entered space, heads towards the future, irreversibly leaving behind the past and the present. This is the perspective from which the most famous painters saw the scene. They used their own language to communicate the great event, in a linear time and space that was also the site of their experience of the crucial moment. It could not have been otherwise in the order of objective (linear) time.

The resulting works constitute one of the essential axes of European painting. The Florentine school, especially during the Italian Renaissance, was particularly brilliant in implementing this concept. Florentine artists such as Fra Angelico, Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci produced some of the most famous representations of this theme.

Among them was Fra Angelico, a Dominican painter renowned for his spiritual and extremely delicate depictions of Christian themes. One of his most famous Annunciations is a fresco he painted for the monastery of San Marco in Florence<sup>38</sup>. It is a serene and spiritual work, with a remarkable sense of light and space, considering the subtle architectural perspective.

Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci also contributed to this subject with innovative techniques of perspective and detail that redefined the way in which the Annunciation was presented. Botticelli's version of the Annunciation, painted for the convent of Cestello, shows the Virgin Mary bending over the angel Gabriel with the elegance characteristic of Botticelli's figurative motifs<sup>39</sup>. The work is known for its masterful use of line and rhythmic composition, as well as for the soft light that surrounds the two figures.

Leonardo da Vinci's Annunciation is one of his earliest works. In this depiction, he had already demonstrated his mastery of perspective and light, with the scene set in a landscape of realistic detail. The figure of Mary is serene, with a sense of deep introspection, characteristic of Leonardo's attention to emotional complexity.

In addition to the Florentine school, artists from other Italian centres, such as Venice and Rome, also contributed to this iconographic tradition. But the Florentine school, with its techniques of perspective, light and composition, undoubtedly stood out.

After the Renaissance, the Annunciation was the subject of numerous schools and artistic movements, including Baroque, Mannerism and Neoclassicism. The Mannerists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century developed more stylised, elongated figures and more complex compositions compared to the balance of the Renaissance. Important artists from this period include Jacopo Pontormo, whose Annunciation is characterised by its intense colours and dramatic expressions. There is also El Greco, who, although Greek, worked in Spain and created visionary, elongated figures, including a representation of the Annunciation. He used expressive lines and mystical lighting effects. After the Renaissance, the Annunciation was the subject of numerous schools and artistic movements, including Baroque, Mannerism and Neoclassicism. The Mannerists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century developed more

<sup>38</sup> See [http://www.museumsinflorence.com/musei/museum\\_of\\_san\\_marco.html](http://www.museumsinflorence.com/musei/museum_of_san_marco.html) (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>39</sup> See <https://www.uffizi.it/opere/annunciazione-acb97800-abb5-4017-bb7b-62651414e2b4> (consulted on 11 September 2024).

stylised, elongated figures and more complex compositions compared to the balance of the Renaissance<sup>40</sup>.

Important artists from this period include Jacopo Pontormo, whose Annunciation is characterised by its intense colours and dramatic expressions. There is also El Greco, who, although Greek, worked in Spain and created visionary, elongated figures, including a representation of the Annunciation. He used expressive lines and mystical lighting effects<sup>41</sup>.

The Baroque artists of the 17<sup>th</sup> century concentrated on drama, movement, strong contrasts of light and shadow and emotional expression<sup>42</sup>. Among them, Caravaggio stood out for his chiaroscuro technique, which greatly influenced later representations, although he did not produce many works on the subject<sup>43</sup>.

Peter Paul Rubens, with his rich colours and dynamism, contributed to the Baroque drama in his versions of the Annunciation, while Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, the Spanish Baroque painter known for his tender, almost sentimental depictions of biblical themes, depicted the same motif with warmth and light<sup>44</sup>.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Neoclassical artists returned to clear lines and calm compositions, emphasising coherence and idealised beauty, as in the Renaissance. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, although best known for his portraits, sometimes painted religious subjects in his classical style<sup>45</sup>.

In the nineteenth century, Romantic and Realist artists depicted religious themes with greater emotional force or social realism. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, an artist of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, treated the Annunciation with medieval and symbolic elements<sup>46</sup>, while Jean-François Millet, a realist who treated mainly rural scenes, brought a stronger social context to his works on religious themes<sup>47</sup>.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religious themes became rarer in contemporary art, but some artists still created innovative interpretations. Marc Chagall incorporated mystical and surrealist elements into his Annunciations, often mixed with Jewish and Christian motifs, giving religious themes emotional depth and a universal spiritual note. Henry Ossawa Tanner, an American painter, used realistic and impressionist techniques in his Annunciation, the version of which is set in a simple setting with a marked contrast of light and shadow<sup>48</sup>.

As a Surrealist artist, Salvador Dalí created various religious scenes, including the Annunciation, full of symbolism and Surrealist techniques that challenged traditional representations<sup>49</sup>. René Magritte, the Belgian Surrealist, also often treated religious themes with an ironic and symbolic approach, bringing a new aspect of interpretation to questions of faith and miracles<sup>50</sup>.

There are many more pictorial (or sculptural) representations of the Annunciation than those mentioned in the paragraphs above. These works, created in different centuries and from different artistic periods, from the Italian Renaissance through Mannerism to Surrealism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nevertheless have one recognisable point in common. Their narrative is linked to dynamics, as expressed in space-time syntax, i.e. linear time defined by space.

## Pictorial motifs designed to bridge the gap between human and divine time: the dove and the ray

And yet, even if the fusion of the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary is not as structured as in France Kralj's Annunciation, there is a continuity of visual connection between the two figures

in these paintings that brings them closer together than might be expected. This means that an additional perspective is considered, one that does not see events in space and time in isolation, but follows a synchronous logic, such as that which characterises time in the being of God. This can be seen in the fact that many of these works are reinforced by compositional lines, gestures or halos of light that represent divine interaction. This phenomenon is particularly marked in Carlo Crivelli's depiction of the Annunciation in 1486<sup>51</sup>.

We have not mentioned it before because it deserves a special place in this analysis. We would like to point out that in his vision, a ray of light descends from heaven and passes through the window<sup>52</sup> before touching the Virgin Mary. This light may symbolise the divine bond that unites them. Even if there is no physical fusion, the line of the ray is so intense that it suggests ipso facto fusion. Of course, an additional hermeneutic logic is needed to understand Crivelli's painting in this way. This paper is merely an attempt to interpret the painting from that perspective.

Sometimes, the mediator between Gabriel and Mary is the Holy Spirit, represented in the form of a dove. He «brings together» their interaction and represents the moment when Mary is overwhelmed by divine grace. In the Bible, the Annunciation can be understood as a moment of «spiritual fusion» between humanity (Mary) and divinity (the divine mission transmitted by the angel Gabriel). In the visual arts, however, this moment often remains abstract or symbolic rather than physical.

It is the use of these abstract symbols (the ray and the dove) that compensates for the linear time in which the action takes place and complements it with a synchronic perspective. This perspective highlights the fact that time begins to appear as belonging to transcendence or to the divine being. Indeed,

<sup>40</sup> See <https://www.flickr.com/photos/profzucker/50360552883> (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>41</sup> See <https://www.mfab.hu/artworks/8732/> (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>42</sup> See <https://www.arte.it/opera/annunciazione-4565> (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>43</sup> See <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/37788084346144215/> (consulted in September 2024).

<sup>44</sup> See <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-annunciation-209697> (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>45</sup> See <https://www.artnet.com/artists/jean-auguste-dominique-ingres/study-for-an-annunciation-d-tnOuW3n5fxY6HT5cxKxA2> (consulted on 11 September 2024). This is a study in the form of a drawing.

<sup>46</sup> See [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Dante-Gabriel-Rossetti-Ecce-Ancilla-Domini-1849-50-oil-on-canvas-724-429-cm\\_fig3\\_333598540](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Dante-Gabriel-Rossetti-Ecce-Ancilla-Domini-1849-50-oil-on-canvas-724-429-cm_fig3_333598540) (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>47</sup> See <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/langelus-345> (consulted on 11 September 2024). A man and a woman recite the Angelus, a prayer commemorating the announcement made to Mary by the angel Gabriel.

<sup>48</sup> See <https://philamuseum.org/collection/object/104384> (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>49</sup> See <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/salvador-dali-mariae-annunciato-the-annunciation-of-mary-la-bibla-sacra-number-80> (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>50</sup> See <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/magritte-the-annunciation-t04367> (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>51</sup> See <https://smarthistory.org/crivelli-annunciation/> (consulted on 12 September 2024).

<sup>52</sup> This is the frontier that separates the beyond from the human universe.



both<sup>53</sup> are transcendent elements, stemming from the very being of God.

The dove is one of the most important representations of the Holy Spirit in Christian symbolism. In its act of proclamation, it recalls the Holy Spirit, who represents the power and presence of God in the world. According to biblical teaching, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and the dove is therefore represented as a sign that Mary receives God into her arms through her will. The dove appears in Christian iconography, where it is mentioned at the baptism of Jesus. The Holy Spirit came upon him in its form. It heralds peace, purity, holiness and the presence of God.

The ray is just as important, if not more so, symbolically. In the Annunciation, it usually comes to Mary from heaven, often accompanied by a dove. It embodies the grace of God sent to Mary to become the mother of God. It is a symbol of the Covenant, showing God's intervention in the human world. In the iconography of the Annunciation, the ray often descends towards Mary from a heavenly source, indicating the moment when the Word of God becomes flesh. The ray thus underlines divine intervention and the mystery of the Incarnation. A ray is light, and this was known in the Middle Ages, although its structure (the visible spectrum) was discovered much later. At that time (and during the Renaissance), it was also thought that light travelled instantaneously. In this sense, the ray was an appropriate analogy for God's time, since it symbolises the synchronous perspective. In God, the three temporal parameters conditioned by space are notably abolished, or rather transmuted into what is technically called ubiquity: the property of God's being to be present simultaneously in all spatio-temporal spheres. The philosopher C.S. Lewis explains it as follows: *«If you picture time as a straight line along which we must travel, then you must picture God as the whole page on which the line is drawn. We arrive at the parts of the line one at a time: we have to leave A behind before we arrive at B, and we can't reach C until we leave B behind. God, from above or without or all around, contains the whole line, and sees all»* (Lewis, 1960).

Later, this analogy was no longer entirely applicable. In 1676, while observing the moons of Jupiter, the Danish astronomer Ole Rømer noted that the time taken for an eclipse of the moon Io to occur varied according to the closeness of the Earth to Jupiter. On the basis of these observations, Rømer calculated that light travels at a finite speed. His calculation was not entirely accurate by today's standards, but it was an important step towards understanding that light does not travel instantaneously (i.e., it is in a different place in an instant (ubiquity)).

But the ray has remained one of the most revealing symbols of time in God. Many of the painters whose annunciations we have analysed used it often in combination with a dove. For example, El Greco, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and Peter Rubens all use one or the other. It goes without saying that we have not been able to list all the painters whose work includes the Annunciation. It would have been too digressive.

All these painters obviously had an inkling of the difference between linear time and synchronous time, between human per-

ception of this given and time as revealed in God. It is probably for this reason that they brought these two elements to their canvases. Of course, this assertion remains no more than a hypothesis, since there is no empirical proof.

## The iconographic independence of France Kralj's work of art. The anagogical and literal interpretations of the bible are revealed to be correlative to the relationship between human time and God's time

France Kralj's Annunciation would, however, differ from representations of the subject in question. Specific otherness, or iconographic independence as we have defined it more precisely, would refer to the exclusivity of the iconographic content of this work of art. Iconographic independence would mean that the Annunciation carries its own interpretation, characteristic of France Kralj's artistic expression.

In order to establish this hypothesis, we systematically reviewed the history of painting, looking for a configuration similar to that of France Kralj. We also turned to university professors and experts in (Christian) iconography to find out whether anything similar existed in the arts. The answer was the same as during our survey of media libraries that hold reproductions of works with this motif, i.e. negative.

In the end, we consulted the AI and the GPT 4 Chat and asked him the following question: *«Is there a work in the history of art depicting the Annunciation where Mary and the Angel merge?»*<sup>54</sup>. The answer was again negative: *«In the history of art, there is no major or famous work explicitly representing the Annunciation where Mary and the Angel Gabriel physically merge. The angel Gabriel, as a divine messenger, is seen as a separate figure from Mary, who is human, although she was chosen for a sacred mission»*<sup>55</sup>.

We should also note that, even if there were another work in the history of art in which Mary and the Angel are represented synchronously, i.e. in the same artistic layer, this would give new impetus to our hypothesis. In particular, it would reinforce the typology that divides pictorial representations into those that follow a linear time delimited by space and those that, for some universal reason, do not obey this human logic. This typology has already been established ipso facto in this article, since the Annunciation by France Kralj embodies in all its characteristics the opposite of what we have called the literal interpretation of biblical texts.

But there are other interpretations, as we have indicated. In addition to moral and allegorical interpretation, there is anagogical interpretation. This interpretation seeks a meaning that goes beyond the literal and moral meanings and focuses on the spiritual and eschatological dimension of the biblical texts<sup>56</sup>. In the context of anagogical interpretation, individual stories are often understood as symbols of heavenly realities or spiritual truths relating to man's final destiny.

It follows that moral and allegorical interpretations are of little use in our case. The anagogical method is the ideal method for France Kralj's hermeneutic of the Annunciation, because it is a way of reading and understanding the Bible that emphasises the spiritual and eschatological aspects of the text. It is a search for deeper, transcendent meanings that relate to ultimate truths. This includes the Annunciation, which means ipso facto that it can only be understood metaphysically, considering the tran-

<sup>53</sup> The ray and the dove as symbols of the reality they denote.

<sup>54</sup> Source: Chat GPT 4 (consulted on 11 September 2024).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> That means one dimension that is spiritual and eschatological at the same time.

scendent coordinates in which it takes place. For the essence of the Annunciation is inexpressible within the parameters of human time and space. This is what France Kralj understood *in primis*, hence his work.

So, to fully understand the individuality of his Annunciation, we need to understand the difference between the anagogical interpretation and the literal interpretation of the Bible, which amounts to understanding the difference between human time or space and that of God.

What is one and what is the other? Following the principle of Socratic maieutic, let's start with the simplest and focus on the first. Literary hermeneutics will find it hard to deny that it is in the poetry of Paul Valéry, and more specifically in *Le Cimetière marin* (Valéry, 1917) that we find the best presentation of the notion of linear time. Valéry is in fact a powerful genius of the word who, in his greatest works, has brought it closer to eschatological questions, i.e. time, nothingness, death and what there should be after it, if there is anything behind it.

Paul Valéry's answer to this question was negation: a convinced atheist, he perceived as nothingness everything outside the time and space that man can discern. It is for this reason that the poet is a welcome addition to our analysis: in particular, his theses make even more evident the ontological dynamics that govern synchronic time, like those that are specific to the events of God's being. For being shines more brightly when it is opposed to its opposite, non-being, nothingness. With this sentence, we are simply stating an elementary (philosophical) fact, without any implication as to the implicit quality of Valéry's work of art. We recognise - as does the whole of literary history - the highest degree of artistic virtuosity. We stress only that it is not artistic virtuosity that we are seeking in this paper.

The dialectic of linear time versus nothingness is thus explored in detail in *Le Cimetière marin*. Literary history would be unanimous in endorsing the judgement expressed by Robert Monestier, a great connoisseur of Valéry, in the following words: «*The most beautiful poem by Valéry, not only because of its sensitive richness, the brilliance of its images, the evocative value of each detail, but also because it touches on the most serious problems of human destiny. It is a meditation on life and death, whose epigraph, borrowed from Pindar, indicates the main theme: «O my dear soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the field of the possible.»*» (Monestier, 1975).

Although implicit throughout the poem, the question of time crystallises in the final stanzas, beginning with the puzzle known as Zeno's aporias. These evoke the fact that movement is only apparent, but in reality, non-existent, because space cannot in fact act autonomously in relation to time. So, in the last four stanzas of the poem, Valéry explores the human being by juxtaposing it with the opposition between movement and immobility, underlining man's link with linear time. This same contrast is found in Henri Bergson. Since it is complementary to Valéry's conception of time, let us quote him again: «*We say that our perception of movement is itself immobility, if by immobility we mean the absence of change: but then we take a change from outside, a relative change, and the time we distinguish from space is in reality a space-time...*» (Bergson, 1970).

The conclusion is that, as in Valéry's philosophy, there is a tension in Bergson's philosophy between immobility, which would be the total absence of movement (the idea of death, of eternal rest), and time as constant movement (the movement of the waves, of the wind, of a world that is constantly turning). It is immobility, the total absence of movement, which in itself implies death, that underpins the development of the thesis of the linearity

of movement in the final stanzas of the poem. There are analogies with elements evoked by Henri Bergson (waves, wind and other elements).

In *Le Cimetière marin*, Paul Valéry explores questions of time and immobility, although his approach is more poetic and philosophical than Bergson's, which is more specifically metaphysical. Valéry expresses the tension between the apparent immobility of the cemetery under the Mediterranean sun and the reality of the constant changes that permeate the living world, even if they are imperceptible at first glance.

Immobility is also, understandably, the immobility of time: the nothingness hidden by death. No time, no life. The opposite - in the human realm, of course, in the other world - is movement, which itself implies time. This time is a succession of instants that man experiences one after the other, with no possibility of return. We have said that on a straight line, we slide forward, from the past to the present, and beyond to the future. Evolution in this sense is irreversible. We can also see that this vision of time is deeply rooted in human immanence: life only exists within a flow of time that inevitably leads to death. In contrast to linear time, another perspective is opened up by the concept of divine time. God, in particular, is not subject to a succession of instants, but encompasses all time simultaneously.

## Linear time and divine time: Paul Valéry and Saint Augustine. The analogy between divine time and novelistic creativity

Valéry describes linear time as that in which each instant of life disappears forever. The line «*Non, non! debout dans l'ère successive*» (Valéry, 1957)<sup>57</sup> reflects this condition: «*l'ère successive*» is a series of moments that unfold continuously without return. Each moment is experienced in isolation, and once it has passed, it is lost forever. This linear flow is irreversible: each moment brings us closer to the end. Mobility becomes a symbol of human time, a constant movement that leads us towards death, with no promise of transcendence. The immobility of the tombs, in contrast to the movement of the sea and the light, symbolises the end of this flow: death is the end of time for the individual, eternal immobility.

We take it for granted that this linear time - this sequence of past, present and future - is the reality of everything in the universe created by and for God. But there is another perspective that is different. From this perspective, God is not a prisoner of the flow of linear time, of a «*l'ère successive*» (Valéry, 1957) of instants, as are other living beings, in particular the species *homo sapiens*. Unlike human life, which unfolds moment by moment, God sees all time at once<sup>58</sup>. Whereas we are forced to live each moment individually, God can, from his point of view, see the whole line at once, without being limited by a sequence of temporal entities.

<sup>57</sup> We keep the Valéry's text in French. The reason is that the English translation could not be of much use. It is namely not very accurate, for it does not express the same idea as the original: "No, no! Arise! The future years unfold" [https://www.babelmatrix.org/works/fr/Val%C3%A9ry,\\_Paul-1871/Le\\_cimetiere%C3%A8re\\_marin/en/62005-The\\_Graveyard\\_By\\_The\\_Sea](https://www.babelmatrix.org/works/fr/Val%C3%A9ry,_Paul-1871/Le_cimetiere%C3%A8re_marin/en/62005-The_Graveyard_By_The_Sea) (consulted on 12 September 2024).

<sup>58</sup> It would be more accurate to say: God would see, because there is and can be no empirical evidence for this claim. Note the same thing below.

In the history of philosophy and theology, Saint Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus) was one of the first to emphasise this in the Confessions (Solignac, 1962). The essence of his conception of time, as presented in Book XI of the Confessions, is based on several key ideas. Time is God's creation. God is eternal and timeless, and time only came into being with the creation of the world. Time is therefore an integral part of God's creation and does not exist in its own right. What is crucial about Augustine's conception of time is what distinguishes it from the concept we read about in *Le Cimetière marin*. He recognises the linearity of human time as a reality: we are creatures who live and evolve in a time bound by space. But this reality is fundamentally different from the eternity of God's existence.

Augustine draws a clear distinction between the way we humans perceive time and the way God experiences it. Human time is linear: it runs from the past through the present to the future. This linearity means that humans experience time as a continuous sequence of events, where each moment is irreversibly closed to the past and the future is uncertain and unknown. Each moment in time follows the previous one and is separate from it. This sequence is immutable for man, since his existence is situated in a continuous forward movement. This is what Valéry expresses in the decasyllable *«Non, non debout dans l'ère successive.»*

God, on the other hand, experiences time differently. According to Augustine, he sees time not as a sequence of events, but as an eternal present in which all moments - past, present and future - are present simultaneously. God sees time as a whole, in which there is no before and after, but in which everything is present simultaneously<sup>59</sup>. And it is precisely this kind of time that we find in France Kralj's Annunciation, as we have already seen in part. God's eternity is timeless and infinite, which means that God is not limited by the succession of time as we experience it as humans. While we travel through time as passengers, God sees time as a complete and total reality where there is no distance between moments.

Fast forward several centuries from Augustine and we can turn to the French writer Gustave Flaubert to explain the difference in the concept of time. He made an illuminating comparison between the time in which God creates and the time in which a novel is written. In his famous letter to Louise Colet dated 9 December 1852, Gustave Flaubert made the following statement: *«The author, in his work, must be like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere. Art being a second nature, the creator of that nature must act by analogical processes»*<sup>60</sup>.

C. S. Lewis is even more comprehensive. He offers an analogy that illustrates once again how God's time (the time of God's being) differs from linearity as we perceive it as humans. There is no need to open a new chapter here, because he remains thematically there, like Flaubert, with the novel. Thus: *«Suppose I am writing a novel. I write 'Mary puts down her work; the next moment there's a knock at the door! For Mary, who has to live in the imaginary time of my story, there is no interval between the moment she puts down her work and the moment she hears the knock at the door. But I could sit for three hours and think about Mary regularly. I could think of Mary as if she were the only character in the book and for as long as I wanted, and the hours I spent doing so would not appear at all in Mary's time (the time within the story)»* (Lewis, 1960).

The author also says: *«It's not the perfect illustration, but it can give a glimpse of what I believe to be the truth. God is no more pressed for time in this universe than the author is in the imaginary time of his own novel. He has infinite attention to devote to each and every one of us. He doesn't have to take care of*

*us in the mass. You are as alone with Him as if you were the only being He has ever created.»* And let us quote a schematic summary of the analogy between novel authorship and God's creation: *«God doesn't live in a time series at all. His life does not unfold day by day like ours: with him, it is, so to speak, always 1920 and already 1960. For his life is himself»* (Lewis, 1960).

The contrast between the two visions of time is striking. In *Le Cimetière marin*, Valéry shows a man trapped in a linear time where successive moments lead ineluctably to death. Mobility, a symbol of life, is also a sign of ephemerality: each movement brings us closer to final immobility. This temporal limitation marks immanence: man cannot escape this linearity, and his life is imbued with an inevitable struggle against time.

On the other hand, the synchronous perspective transcends linear time. God, beyond or above the timeline, sees every moment simultaneously, without limitation of sequence. Human time, with its ceaseless passing, is only a fragment of the total reality that God sees in its entirety. This idea challenges our understanding of temporality and underlines the fundamental difference between the human experience of time and divine eternity.

In the poem, Paul Valéry confronts man with the reality of linear time, where each moment is lived and then lost forever. Mobility, the symbol of this time, represents both vitality and transience, which inevitably leads to the immobility of death. In contrast, the second perspective proposes that God, outside linear time, sees all of temporal reality at once, without the constraints of a succession of moments. This contrast reveals a tension in our perception of time: while man is limited by linear time, God transcends this limitation, offering a promise of eternity that Valéry, as an atheist, could never accept.

This dynamic explains the relationship between the majority iconography of the Annunciation, as found in European painting, and that produced by France Kralj. Here, the Angel and Mary are united because they are represented according to the ontological relevance of an event that does not belong to the order of this world. The moment when the angel speaks to her in the future tense is a moment that has already happened: *«Behold, you will conceive...»* (Luke 1:26-27). In the order of human time, Mary is still awaiting conception, but with God, in whom all the temporal orders coincide, she is already carrying the Saviour<sup>61</sup>. This is also the central idea of the Annunciation.

But this is nothing new: at the beginning of our discussion,

<sup>59</sup> In this context, we must of course be aware of a fact that is a priori to any thinking on this subject: God does not exist within time, because everything in Him is the absolute of being.

<sup>60</sup> <https://journals.openedition.org/flaubert/2203?lang=en> (consulted on 10 September 2024).

<sup>61</sup> Another interesting fact: Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, in his famous homily on the Annunciation, called for linear time to be shortened or merged with eternity. These are familiar words to say that humanity is impatiently awaiting Mary's «yes». How could it be otherwise, since the fate of the world depends on it? In his Christmas Eve sermon, he vividly imagines how physical and metaphysical creation awaits Mary's response. Bernard exclaims: *«The whole world awaits your response, O Mary! You are called to give a word of consolation to the unfortunate, the prisoners, those condemned to eternal death.... Answer quickly, O Virgin! Respond quickly to the angel, or rather, through the angel, to the Lord. Say your word and receive the Word; say it! Hold and conceive the divine! Say the word that passes and embrace the eternal Word!»* (Bernard, 2007). Saint Bernard presents himself here as a bridge between linear time and divine time: he calls on Mary to make her «yes» synchronous, so to speak, with the Angel's announcement.

we cited two sources that place the work in a context where, in the face of a «mystic-religious framework», space and time are reified to such an extent that the object (in concrete terms, the iconography of the Angel and the Virgin Mary) can coincide with them as it coincides with itself. The Angel is united with the Virgin Mary, since the Annunciation is an event that, belonging to the realm of God, transcends linear time, merely human time. It is a synchronous event, by definition.

Thus, «*The Annunciation forms, with other works, a complete thematic cycle. With bold compositional procedures, a characteristic typification of physiognomy, an accentuated language of hands and body positions in an entirely new spatial conception, France Kralj was looking for an abstract formal scheme, an appropriate pictorial organism in which object, space and time would coincide by means of a mystically religious message*» (Kranjc, 2001).

The art historian Milček Komelj also has the same logic in mind when he says: «*France Kralj fused God and earth in a radiance that cast a bright light over all Slovenian art in the decades before the war, and he was able to do this as an essentially religious mystic who, from tradition and his own inner self, ignited his own spirituality, with which he illuminated the difficulties of everyday life*» (Komelj, 1995). Everything can be found in nuce in the work of art discussed here.

## The Annunciation and the serpentine figure

A closer look at the canvas reveals that it is in fact suspended between heaven and earth, with all the consequences that entails. Other elements, less indirect and more figurative, bear witness to this, in addition to the analysis of the temporal parameter in which it is represented.

First of all, there are the serpentine forms with which France Kralj became familiar in Italy, where he often travelled and whose culture he knew well. We mentioned El Greco in this connection, but there is also Tuscan mannerism. It is a representation of spiritual sublimity through the human form. The serpentine figure, as an artistic concept, is closely linked to the effort to show the movement, complexity and vitality of the human body reaching towards heaven, more precisely towards God.

The dynamic torsion of the serpentine figure thus attempts to capture the inner movement of the soul or the divine. The idea of showing man in movement, beyond the fixed poses of classical art, can be understood as an attempt to capture the vitality and spiritual energy that animate the human and celestial world.

In the Annunciation by France Kralj, the linear forms move like candle flames, imitating either the movement of a snake or the stature of the letter S.

Here, it is not only the body of the Angel that imitates the line of agitation to a significant degree, but also the background, which is intoned in this way. The reason for this is that strictly vertical lines would attenuate, if not completely neutralise, the impression of an upward wave-like oscillation. Marie's own body is very clearly S-shaped, not least because of the pronounced torsion of the head. However, the body is intensely bent from the left half of the canvas to the right, creating a serpentine image. The same applies to the Virgin's arms. The angel is stylised in a similar way: you only have to look at his legs or his left hand to see this.

Art history generally proposes four conditions that a depicted object must meet to qualify as a serpentine figure. These are the twisting of the body around a central axis, the dynamism and sense of movement, and the complexity of the postures, with the

body in less natural but more dramatic poses. The composition is often asymmetrical, defying the rigidity of classical balance<sup>62</sup>. It is easy to see that all four of these distinctive criteria are present in the Annunciation we're talking about. From this and given that we have anchored the conception of this technique in a metaphysical framework, it follows that the work in question is holistically oriented towards spirituality and the higher forms of being.

## The Annunciation and the Cubist deconstruction of linear time conceived in space

But the serpentine figure is not the only method by which France Kralj brings his Annunciation closer to the high places of Christian spirituality. There is also Cubism. A very superficial look can only place the latter among the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century that sought to break with the conception of man as a spiritual being, and to write off this kind of art for the same reason. It is true that Christian spirituality is not a central or explicit theme in most of the works associated with this artistic movement of Cubist painting.

Cubism, the avant-garde artistic movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century founded by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, was primarily concerned with formal issues such as the fragmentation of space, the abstraction of form and the exploration of perception, rather than with traditional religious or spiritual themes. However, Christian spirituality generally appears implicitly or explicitly in Cubism. By analogy with Annunciation by France Kralj, let us cite a few examples.

First there were the founders of the movement, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. Braque painted L'Église de Carrières-Saint-Denis in 1909. The first of his works included religious themes or depicted sacred objects. The fragmentation of the church's architecture suggests a more abstract spirituality, where religion is broken down into more basic, universal elements.

In Picasso's work -albeit in his last period- the Passion cycle comes to the fore. The crucifix, although often dismantled and fragmented, remains a strong reference to Christianity. Albert Gleizes, another pioneer of Cubism, was also interested in religious issues. Although he did not explicitly outline Christian themes in some of his works, his theoretical writings on art depict his reflections on transcendence and spirituality. His approach to Cubism aimed to reveal the spiritual dimension behind visible forms, inspired by the search for universal truth, a theme that can enter into dialogue with Christian thought. Finally, there is Jean Metzinger. He conducted research in an area that is of great relevance to an understanding of France Kralj's work. As a theoretician of Cubism, he studied concepts linked to the perception of time and space, concepts that can be interpreted in a spiritual or religious way. This is precisely what we have been considering so far in this article. Like Gleizes, Metzinger understood Cubism as a deeper exploration of invisible realities that may be akin to spiritual dimensions, whether Christian or not.

Cubism is therefore a deconstruction of material reality, i.e. of space and time. It can be understood as a search for a deeper,

<sup>62</sup> Heinrich Wölfflin discusses this in his Principles of the History of Art: the problem of the development of style in later art (Wölfflin, 1952).

invisible or transcendent reality. Although he did not seek to express religious themes directly, his desire to transcend visible phenomena can be interpreted *sine ira et studio* as a spiritual quest, an attempt to understand dimensions of reality that escape the strictly materialistic vision of the world.

This is also the path followed by France Kralj in the Annunciation. Cubism is the decomposition of space and time, which corresponds perfectly to the task the painter set himself in this work. According to the principle *Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui* (Jn 3:30), time is revealed in God's being with all the more fullness the less sensitive man is to his own linear flow of events that concern him. Kralj's affinity with Cubism, particularly in the case of the Annunciation, is confirmed by the following observation by his connoisseur: «*In the painting of the Annunciation, Cubism is a form of expression of the human spirit. The space is geometrically cubist in a way, and in any case differs from reality. There are several reasons for this. By reducing colour, Kralj emphasises form as an expressive element. He constructs the composition vertically, 'with the black angel' at the top, which, unlike Marie seen in profile, appears painted in the upper part as if it were a bird's-eye view*» (Kranjc, 1995).

The work is depicted in a cubist perspective to further emphasise the verticality of the single artistic panel, which conveys the absolute synchronicity of the event, with the disintegration of the other parameters of space and time. It's no secret that Cubism is really about time. Indeed, the deconstruction of space and time plays a fundamental role in Cubism, as it allows for a multidimensional representation of reality while abandoning the traditional conventions of linear perspective.

The decomposition of time in Cubism proposes a new perception that moves away from the traditional idea of sequences of moments. Artists no longer depict a single moment but attempt to capture a reality beyond the usual coordinates of time and space. In Cubism, fragmentation and reconstruction not only dismantle the universe of apprehensible phenomena, but also structure a new way of perceiving and understanding it. The viewer is invited to mentally construct an object or scene from the spatial and temporal fragments presented, reflecting the idea that reality cannot be perceived directly, but is made up of multiple perceptions and experiences. Ordinary space and time are not enough for the Cubist artist, and this is how the theories outlined here might be summed up. By representing different angles and moments simultaneously in the same painting, Cubism offers a more global and synthetic vision of reality. It breaks with the traditional idea of painting as a simple window on the world and transforms it into a tool for contemplating the complexity of the human experience from the perspective of transcendence.

The disintegration of space and time in Cubism implies a revolutionary attempt to represent the complexity of perception, allowing artists to go beyond naturalistic conventions and explore a reality where time and space are dismantled and transformed into higher entities<sup>63</sup>.

If we examine these theoretical postulates carefully, we can only conclude that, in his intention to present a type of artwork that is constructed from a transcendent time, France Kralj must have been guided by the idea of incorporating cubism, as a deconstruction of linear spatio-temporal parameters, into his work as a necessary creative method. It was simply not possible to do otherwise. If he wanted to satisfy his aspiration to replace linear time with that dominated by the synchronicity of God's being, he had to go through cubism. The Annunciation itself bears witness to the fact that this contact was more than successful, with its panoply of mysterious, more or less unexpected elements.

## What is the final message of the Annunciation? France Kralj and the tradition of councils: defining the identity of Christ

We agree without reservation that the Annunciation by France Kralj is a religious text in its narrative. It carries a message that is not formal, but concerns the content of the people depicted, even if they are not visible on the canvas. By this we mean Jesus Christ, who, at the moment of his representation, is already embarking on his earthly journey. Mary is not about to conceive, but she has already conceived, because with God time is synchronous, encompassing all the layers of time (past, present, future) in a single vision. The Annunciation is therefore an explicit history of the Saviour Jesus Christ, even if, from the point of view of ordinary logic (i.e. linear time linked to space), such a thing hardly seems possible.

To understand this again, we need to ask ourselves what Jesus Christ is, or rather who he is. This was one of the key questions facing the world at the beginning of the Christian era. There were many heresies, each with its own interpretation. The consequence was that, just as there was a multitude of sects, there was also a multitude of "Christs".

But given the nature of this article, the situation is even more complicated. It is not just a matter of answering the question of who Jesus Christ is, but also the correlative question of who Jesus Christ is in the Annunciation, how he is present, and what parallels, if any, there are between the one and the other.

Paradoxically, they are revealed when we look at the definition of the Son of Man as elaborated by one of the most outstanding Councils in the history of Christianity, the one that suspended the ambiguities (Arianism, Nestorianism, Docetism, etc.). Through this event, Christ was able to become a force, transforming history and - in a more relative way - also our present. Obviously, this is not to say that the Council formed Christ, but only that the intelligence, in the etymological sense of the term<sup>64</sup>, of the fathers of this Council came so close to the question of the nature of Christ that they were able to give the most optimal definition of the second person of God. This approach was maintained right up to the moment when we copied the above-mentioned Council text.

It reads as follows: «*We therefore teach by common consent through the holy Fathers that we confess one and the same Son,*

<sup>63</sup> This summary is based on the work of the most renowned authors in the field. Rosalind E. Krauss and her book *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Krauss, 1985); then Douglas Cooper and his book *The Cubist Epoch* (Cooper, 1970); and finally, John Golding and his book *Cubism: A History and an Analysis, 1907-1914* (Golding, 1959).

<sup>64</sup> Intelligence is closely linked to the Latin verb «*interlegere*», which is its origin. The verb is made up of two parts: «*inter*», meaning «*between*», and «*legere*», meaning «*to choose*» or «*to read*». Thus, «*interlegere*» literally translates as «*to choose between*» or «*to make a choice between several things*». This idea of discernment, of the ability to distinguish and select between different options, is at the heart of what we mean by 'intelligence'. Intelligence, in its etymological sense, refers to the ability to understand, to perceive differences, to compare and to make informed decisions on the basis of available information. In short, intelligence, according to its etymological origin, is the faculty of discerning and understanding by choosing from among several options, which reflects the ability to link concepts, ideas or information to derive meaning.

our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and the same perfect in humanity, the same true God and the same true man (composed of) a rational soul and body, who is related to the Father in divinity and to us in humanity, like us in everything except sin, begotten of the Father in divinity before the world began, and in the last days the same (begotten) for us and our salvation of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God in humanity. He is one and the same Christ, the Son, the Lord, the only begotten, recognised in two natures, without substitution, without change, without division and without separation, the difference of natures not being in any way removed by the union, but the property of one nature and of the other being preserved and brought to the one person and to the one hypostasis, the one Christ. He is neither divided nor bifurcated into two persons, but is one and the same Son, uniquely begotten by God» (Camelot, 1962).

In formulating a hypothesis that links the meaning of the Annunciation to the identity of the historical Christ, we must first ask ourselves a question that goes without saying. Was the painter aware of all these connotations? Or rather: was his knowledge of the theological field such as to enable him to think speculatively in such a lofty manner, or to put them into practice as a painter? The answer would be yes. The period in which France Kralj lived and worked was permeated by what might be called Christian topology. In particular, Christianity, with its symbols, was much more present in society than it is today. The Christian tradition was particularly close to painters, simply because it existed in the countless representations of the masters they drew inspiration from. France Kralj, who reacted to the totalitarianisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with profound theological reflection, should have had no problem with his knowledge of Christianity. When he designed Christ the Preacher<sup>65</sup>, The Descent from the Cross<sup>66</sup>, the Pietà<sup>67</sup>, etc., he must also have given a great deal of thought to the same thing as the Council of Chalcedon: the identity of the person he represented.

The unique visual surface in which the Angel and the Virgin Mary coincide not only corresponds to the notion of synchronicity derived from the being of God but is also easily identified with the definition of Jesus Christ as provided by the Council of Chalcedon, however paradoxical this may seem.

This is not unrelated to what we observed earlier about the Expressionist heritage, which conformed the painter to an ever-personal understanding of the concepts and phenomena. He experiences everything through himself. We can use a convenient analogy here, an example, and say the following. Thus, when God wished to enter the flesh of man, he could only do so personally. He became a person, he merged with his creation. More precisely, with the one who was destined to bear the Saviour of the world, Mary. In this sense, Mary and the one entrusted with God's mission, the angel Gabriel, became an indissoluble unity: God took on the identity of man: the angel merged with Mary, so that they literally became one body, one identity. Hence the faceless angel, a surprising detail, unique in the history of painting. Mary is the only one who raises her face. It is not by chance: the future mother of God is now taking on the greatest responsibility of her life. With her hands as a sign of abandonment, she expresses a high degree of surrender in expectation. She has grasped the essence of humanity, which is to say that God is now close to man: by even becoming one with him, the most personal act imaginable, whether we take it from the angle of expressionist inspiration or more broadly.

This also confirms post festum that such action is not possible in linear time, but only under conditions of divine synchronisation. We have already discussed this point and, to illustrate

it further, we turn to the Letter of Leo I, also known as the Tomus Leonis Papae. What role did it play in the Council? An essential one. Thus: «*The Council of Chalcedon unanimously accepted it as soon as it was read and approved it as a rule of faith (regula fidei)*» (Strle, 1977). We quote a passage that is essential for understanding that the Annunciation cannot take place in human linear time, but only in the fusion of the temporal lobes as conceived by the transcendent divine Being: «*Believing in God the Father almighty, we see that his Son is co-eternal with him, differing in nothing from the Father; being God from God, almighty from almighty, co-eternally begotten from the eternal, neither later in time, nor inferior in power, nor different in glory, nor separate in essence. And this same only-begotten and eternal Son of the eternal Father is begotten of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary. This temporal birth took nothing away from this divine and eternal birth (begetting), but neither did it add anything to it. The only eternal Son's sole aim was therefore the salvation of deceived man, over whom death had dominion: he wanted to conquer death and, by his power, conquer the spirit of evil which dominated death.*

*But this unique and marvellous birth must not be understood as if the uniqueness of the human race were eliminated by the novelty of creation. The virgin was indeed given birth to by the Holy Spirit, but by default, the true body emerged from the womb*» (Camelot, 1962).

And if we follow this quotation further, in the sense it suggests? Christ was therefore a perfect man (well, in the sense of the definition of homo sapiens sapiens). We do not need councils to convince us of this, because the Gospels are quite explicit on the subject. In Luke, for example, we read: «*The Son of Man has come; he eats and drinks, and they say, 'Behold a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners'*» (Lk 7:19). In the light of this quotation, the direct humanity of Christ should not be doubted.

## The subtle eroticism of the Annunciation

But here we need to go further, by referring to the definition of the Council of Chalcedon. We must therefore ask ourselves what the essence of humanity is. The answer is not difficult, as we have illustrated in the Annunciation. It is as much as conception. God becomes man by entering into the order of human reproduction, the most elementary mechanism by which we are what we are. Without it, there would be no humanity, that is an elementary fact. And what is the essential occasion for conception? It is subtle eroticism, as the table of the Annunciation shows<sup>68</sup>. It can not be any other way: just look at Mary's face as she accepts God's will and unites herself with the Angel. Strange, even heretical, as such a statement may seem, it is entirely logical. Moreover, it cannot be otherwise.

Only subtle eroticism should be considered without prejudice and above all with the meaning it has in the Bible. We start from

<sup>65</sup> See <https://museu.ms/collection/object/10377/snemanje-s-kriza-descent-from-the-cross> (consulted on 17 September 2024).

<sup>66</sup> See <https://museums.eu/collection/object/232357/kristus-pridigar-christ-the-preacher> (consulted on 6 September 2024).

<sup>67</sup> See <https://www.yumpu.com/xx/document/read/26449593/f-rance-kralj-pieta-1923-souvislosti> (consulted on 17 September 2024).

<sup>68</sup> See the reproduction of the canvas at the very beginning of this article.

the fact that Christ was God and man in the same person, as the Council says, and we must remember that the concept of the «Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary» does not refer to the conception of Jesus, but goes back a generation, to Mary. She was conceived immaculately, i.e. without original sin, but this in no way refers to the integrity of her biological functionality, of which subtle eroticism is once again an integral part.

The same applies to his son. If Christ was human, he was also erotically human. Jesus' teaching contains no indication that sexuality in itself is sinful. He saw it in the wider context of love, considering that sin does not lie in sexuality itself, but in its improper use, which can be a source of harm to the individual or the community.

Let us examine the following passage in the light of this perspective, understanding it in the simplicity of its words: «*Turning to the woman, he said to Simon, «Do you see this woman? I came into your house, and you gave me no water for my feet, but she sprinkled tears on my feet and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has been kissing my feet ever since I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with perfume. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little loves little*» (Luke 7, 44-47).

Jesus sums up the essence of the parable with this central phrase: «*Her many sins are forgiven her, for she has loved much.*» What does this mean? If her sins are forgiven because she has loved much, this love, unacceptable in the eyes of society, was considered sinful. At the time, it could only have been adultery. This woman probably committed many adulteries, which is why she is forgiven so much. Moreover, adultery is absolved of all guilt here, because it is associated with love, especially carnal love. To emphasise this point, Jesus adds: «*But he who is forgiven little loves little.*» This is not to be interpreted as a compliment, but rather as a subtle reproach, because the emphasis is on quantity: you love little, so you are forgiven little. Jesus literally disapproves of anyone in his life who has not dared to let himself be carried away by the impulses of love, whatever the consequences.

Another point is just as striking: Jesus allows this sinner to perform gestures on him that have an implicit erotic-sensual dimension, reflecting feelings of profound devotion. However, far from rejecting her, Jesus accepts this demonstration, and it is precisely in this context of barely concealed erotic play that he utters these beautiful words about the need to love fully.

The Council of Chalcedon was therefore right to emphasise the human nature of Jesus Christ, coexisting with his divine nature. Christ was fully man as well as God. However, subtle eroti-

cism and sexuality do not belong to the sphere of sin, otherwise the Council of Chalcedon's definition simply does not hold. If subtle eroticism is a sin, then Christ was either a sinner or he was not a man. We have proposed an explanation for this latent paradox, based on the Kralj's Annunciation.

Jumping over the hurdle, we could see that - as with every human being - it all began at conception, except that here, for the first and last time in human history, the immediacy of a parent has disappeared. But everything else was the same. France Kralj was once again aware of the latter, *in primis*, when he designed his canvas. Without this awareness, the image of the Virgin merging with the Angel would simply not exist.

When God created man, he created him (also) as an erotic being. It's a question of ontology: in the blissful state of paradise, he was naked. Adam and Eve were completely open to their eroticism, even if they didn't abuse it. Right up until the temptation to become like God, they lived in nudity, which is the most explicit form of eroticism, without any difficulty, enjoying perfect innocence.

In the biblical context of the Garden of Eden, the eroticism between Adam and Eve is in fact something very natural and pure. It is not explicitly mentioned in the early books of the Old Testament, but the fact that they were both naked and unashamed suggests that their physical and emotional union was accepted without shame or sin.

The absence of shame and the natural bond are emphasised in Creation: «*Adam and his wife were naked and were not ashamed of it*» (Gen 2:25), which indicates that, in their minds, they did not associate nudity or physical intimacy with sin or negative connotations. Eroticism, in this sense, was not linked to seduction or lust, but existed as an expression of pure love and covenant as part of the divine plan.

In the story of Adam and Eve, therefore, the sin did not stem from their eroticism or their nakedness, but from their decision to ignore God's command. After breaking his commandment, their eyes were opened, they became aware of their nakedness and began to feel ashamed. This is where the association of nudity and eroticism with shame and sin begins, in stark contrast to their previous state of innocence and acceptance.

Thus, we can understand that in the Garden of Eden, the eroticism between Adam and Eve was positive, natural and free from stigma. But after the fall, it became something that had to be covered up and embarrassed them. So, shame came with death.

Yet Mary and Jesus never died, as the Gospels and the dogma of the Assumption testify.<sup>69</sup> The Angel, being an immaterial creature, is immortal by definition. Whether we take all this in terms of a literal or anagogical interpretation, the fact is that it has nothing to do with the Annunciation. There, both of them, through the Angel, live in a state of primordial innocence that implies subtle eroticism first and foremost. This apparent paradox, which we admire in this work of art, is also one of the greatest challenges of the religion that began with the Annunciation.

## References

- Bergson H (1970). *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. Paris, Presses universitaires de France.
- Bernard (2007). *St. Bernard's Sermons for Advent and Christmas* (translated by Lewis Thorp). Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications.
- Camelot P-Th (1962). *Éphèse et Chalcédoine*. Paris, Édition de l'Orante.

<sup>69</sup> The dogma of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, proclaimed by the Catholic Church, teaches that the Virgin Mary was taken up to heaven, body and soul, at the end of her earthly life. This dogma was defined by Pope Pius XII on 1 November 1950 in the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*. The official text states: «*We proclaim, declare and define as a divinely revealed dogma that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was raised in body and soul to heavenly glory*». The Virgin Mary was therefore dead for only a few moments, if we take the text quoted literally. We could also say that her death, given that it was immediately cancelled, was only an apparent event. At last, but not at least: this dogma means that Mary did not experience the corruption of the body after her death, because of her unique role in salvation history, notably as the mother of Christ and as a person preserved from original sin.

- Cooper D (1970). *The Cubist Era*. London, Phaidon Press.
- Golding J (1959). *Cubism: A history and an analysis, 1907-1914*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Jančar D, Simoniti V (1998). *The dark side of the Moon - a short history of totalitarianism in Slovenia (1945-1990)*. Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga.
- Komelj M (1995). *The Kralj's kingdom between heaven and earth, France Kralj*. Ljubljana, Moderna galerija.
- Koršič Zorn V (2018). *Tone Kralj - Church paintings in the region of Trieste, Gorizia and the Kanal valley*. Gorizia, Goriška Mohorjeva.
- Kralj F (1996). *Memoirs of a Slovenian Artist*. Ljubljana, Nova revija.
- Kranjc I (1995). *France Kralj, personality and creativity put to the test, France Kralj*. Ljubljana, National Gallery.
- Kranjc I (2001). *France Kralj*. Ljubljana, Slovenska Matica.
- Kranjc I (2022). *Brothers Kralj*. Grosuplje, Mestna knjižnica.
- Krauss RE (1985). *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, MIT Press.
- Monestier R (1975). *Paul Valéry, Charmes*. Paris, Larousse.
- Solignac A (1962). *Saint Augustin, Les Confessions. Livres I-VII. Texte de l'édition de M. Skutella. Introduction et Notes par A. Solignac. Traduction de E. Tréhorel et G. Bouissou*. Paris, Desclée de Brouwer.
- Stele F (1925). *Fran and Tone Kralj*. Ljubljana, Mladinski klub.
- Strle A (1977). *The Faith of the Church*. Celje, Mohorjeva.
- Tillich P (1959). *Theology of Culture*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Valéry P (1957). *Œuvres I*. Paris, Gallimard.
- Wölfflin H (1952). *Principles of art history: the problem of the development of style in later art*. New York, Dover Publications.