



The Work of Cláudio Pastro in the Context of Sacred Art After the Second Vatican Council

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Abstract: A fundamental aspect of the Second Vatican Council is the novelty of the literary genre of its documents and its configuration as an event of language, which demonstrates its profound affinity with symbolic and artistic language, even though the theme of art does not occupy many lines of its texts. From this perspective, the importance of the reception of Vatican II in subsequent artistic production becomes clear. This article focuses on the work of the Brazilian artist Cláudio Pastro (1948–2016). Subject of growing research over the last three decades, his work has been identified as a model of art for worship in line with Vatican II, capable of clearly and powerfully embodying its theological, ecclesiological, liturgical, and anthropological principles. In this article, we seek to consolidate these recent acquisitions in Brazilian academic production, highlighting the relationship between Pastro's work and Vatican II and situating it within the scope of international research. To this end, we shall first outline certain aspects of his trajectory, his formation, and the sensibility that characterized him, and then present and comment on a few selected works within his extensive artistic output. Finally, we will address the reception of his work in the ecclesiastical, academic, and artistic spheres, highlighting it as a model for the reception of Vatican II and a space for its fruitful and creative assimilation in our communities today.

Keywords: contemporary sacred art, art for worship, Latin American art, history of the Catholic Church in Latin America, *ressourcement*

The Second Vatican Council took shape as an event of language (O'Malley 2010), attentive, as John XXIII (1962) indicated in his opening address, to the importance of form and to the careful elaboration of statements. In the very documents issued by the Council, we notice a return to the biblical and patristic tradition, in continuity with the biblical, liturgical, and patristic movements; the wording of these documents, in general, is generous with symbolic language (Codina 1986, 161). In this sense, the very conciliar textual genre represents a novelty: its dynamics resemble those of a work of art or of literature, which offers itself to contemplation or meditation and, precisely in this way, addresses the experiences of life (Rush 1997, 178). Similar to biblical and patristic language, the conciliar corpus is open and structurally oriented toward dialogue (Theobald 2012, 221–22). The texts of Vatican II thus appear as performative language, and the faith that emerges

from this contemplative and dialogical process as creative apprehension (Villas Boas 2015, 401–2).

For all these reasons, the theme of artistic language is deeply connected to the Second Vatican Council. The renewal that the council demands of ecclesial communities cannot fail to involve openness to a new sensibility, expressed both as symbolic–ritual language and as poetic–artistic language (Koller and Fernandes 2024, 610–11). Even so, when considering the dissemination and development of the renewing forces of Vatican II, it is common to highlight the role of bishops and theologians, placing artists, at best, in the background (Fernandes 2015, 797). Yet, given these considerations regarding the Council’s linguistic choices, it is, in fact, artists who should be regarded as its privileged recipients and amplifiers. At the same time, sacred art would constitute an important field for verifying the assimilation of Vatican II, precisely because of the depth characteristic of cultural processes, which artistic expression captures with peculiar subtlety.

However, identifying a given artistic production with the perspectives of Vatican II—highlighting it as representative of an art imbued with the principles of conciliar renewal—is a complex task. This is because the Council documents devote few lines to the subject of art; there are significant but fleeting references in *Gaudium et spes* (nos. 7, 36, 53, 57, 59, 61, and especially no. 62) and moral concerns in *Inter mirifica* (nos. 6 and 14–15). At the same time, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* addresses music and sacred art in two rather brief chapters (VI and VII) (Second Vatican Council 1963a, 1963b, 1965). This requires that the comparison between artistic production and the principles of Vatican II, rather than being drawn directly, must be mediated by the identification of the Council’s major themes, its style, and its concerns.

The work of Brazilian artist Cláudio Pastro—one of the most prolific and renowned sacred artists of the post-conciliar period—has been identified as a model of art for worship in line with Vatican II, capable of clearly and powerfully embodying its theological, ecclesiological, liturgical, and anthropological principles. Over the past thirty years, a number of academic studies at master’s and doctoral levels have focused on his work, consistently recognizing in it an artistic translation of the vision of the Second Vatican Council (de Aquino and Sanchez 2025). In this article, we seek to consolidate these recent acquisitions of Brazilian academic production, highlighting the relationship between Pastro’s work and Vatican II and presenting the artist and his work within the scope of international research.

To this end, we will first outline certain aspects of his trajectory, his formation, and sensibility, and then present and comment on a few selected works from his extensive artistic output. Finally, we will address the reception of his work in the ecclesiastical, academic, and artistic spheres, highlighting it as a model for the Second Vatican Council’s reception.

1. A Biographical Profile

Cláudio Pastro was born in São Paulo on October 16, 1948. He drew from an early age, encouraged by his mother, a dressmaker who sketched patterns freehand, which amazed him. He would also develop this skill, as Elisabeth Prégardier (2009, 81) observes: “We were impressed by the confidence and speed with which he drew and colored the immense panel from a small sketch.”

It was through contact with Benedictine communities that the impulse to pursue his artistic vocation developed (Fernandes 2015, 800). The artist declared himself self-taught, as he had not studied fine arts because his family could not afford the costs of such training. Michael Brücker (2009, 77) writes about this: “The path to artistic Olympus for Cláudio ... was anything but easy. Since he could not afford to attend the School of Fine Arts, he opted to study Social Sciences.” It was in this field that he graduated from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) in 1972.

It was the era of the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985). Feeling the oppression of the regime and unhappy with the political and ecclesial climate, with its divergent currents of thought in the 1970s, he was encouraged by friends to leave for Europe (Brücker 2009, 77; Fernandes 2021, 298).

In Europe, Pastro not only attended several courses in Italy—at the Pontifical Athenaeum of Saint Anselm in Rome and the Academy of Arts in Viterbo—but also in Spain—at the National Art Museum of Catalonia in Barcelona—and in France—at the Abbey of Notre-Dame de Tournai. He also visited museums and churches, especially those from the first millennium, which aroused his interest and, guided by his monk and nun friends, prompted him to return to the sources at the heart of Vatican II (Fernandes 2021, 298).

Pastro also traveled to Israel, and from one of his observations, it can be inferred that he visited Egypt as well: “Throughout the Mediterranean, I discovered Romanesque and Byzantine art. In Israel, Egypt, and Ethiopia, Coptic art. In Brazil, Indigenous and black art. We have much to learn from the primitives.” (Pastro 1986, 52) He had been introduced to the thought of the Eastern Churches through French worker priests residing in Brazil (Pastro 2001). In his words, it was in these “Eastern roots, with the Hebrew spirit and orthodoxy,” that he came to know “the origins of the Gospel.” (Pastro 2001, 17) They recommended to him the writings of Paul Evdokimov and Olivier Clément, as well as the work of theologian and iconographer Egon Sendler.

It should also be noted that in 1967, Pastro traveled to Senegal, where he stayed at the Abbey of Keur Moussa, whose church has rich iconography and inculturated music that strongly impacted him. César Augusto Sartorelli (2013, 18–19) reports that in that monastery, “there was a church with frescoes ... characterized by an aesthetic of reinterpretation of African primitivism.... They are a major reference for the first phase of Pastro’s work.”

Pastro was interested in the peoples who shaped Brazil and Latin America: Indigenous, African, and European. In Rome, at the Sant'Anselmo Institute, he studied with Mexican architect and Benedictine monk Gabriel Chávez de La Mora, and in 1986, he went to the Tepeyac Monastery in Mexico City for a seminar led by Chávez; he even made a processional cross for the Abbey of Our Lady of Guadalupe. That same year, he traveled to that city as a special guest at the IV Latin American Monastic Encounter. On both occasions, he was able to closely observe the cultures and artistic and artisanal expressions of the country's indigenous peoples.

It is also known that he taught an extension course at the Catholic University of Asunción, Paraguay, in 1983–1984, and that he then visited the Guarani Missions, closely observing their inculturated art. Finally, researching the artist's personal archives, we found evidence that he was in Chile and painted a mural in a church in the capital, Santiago, and in Colombia, where he participated in a meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council (CELAM), becoming acquainted with the art and crafts of the Andean peoples. This visual heritage of cultures originating from Africa and Latin America, combined with the Paleo-Christian iconography of the Mediterranean—southern Europe, the Holy Land, and perhaps Egypt and even Ethiopia—constitutes the iconographic archive that Pastro would draw upon throughout his life.

His proximity to the Benedictines not only guided his artistic vocation but also shaped his thinking and work. Pastro (2001, 7) stated that it was the Benedictine monks and nuns who instilled in him “a taste for bold, strong, and contemporary art, leaving aside the mere copying of ‘holy cards’ of dubious taste that still linger around and call into question the Christian faith.” In Brazil, he was particularly close to the monks of the Monastery of the Annunciation in Piraquara, closed under the atmosphere of persecution of the military dictatorship, with the monks relocating to Goiás, the nuns of the Monastery of the Encounter, first based in Curitiba and then in Mandirituba, and those of the Abbey of Our Lady of Peace in Itapeverica da Serra, where he became an oblate in 2004. He is buried there, following his death on October 19, 2016, in São Paulo, after 41 years devoted almost entirely to working with works of art for the liturgical space (Fernandes 2015, 800–801; 2021, 298; de Aquino and Sanchez 2025, 278; Souto 2022).

Despite his notoriety, with more than 300 works in Brazil and abroad, Pastro remained remarkably simple and humble, perhaps influenced by Benedictine thought and his vision of himself as a servant of the Church and of God. He himself stated that “the Christian artist is one among many ministers in the sacred liturgy and is at the service of the Church.” (Pastro 1986, 8) Brücker visited him at his residence and wrote about the sobriety he found there:

The reception is ... unpretentious, no ostentatious or exaggerated gestures, let alone the familiar mannerisms of an artist; instead, a brief word of welcome and a warm embrace. Cláudio Pastro is not a man who speaks loudly. Genuine cordiality instead of staged

joviality. This first impression is reinforced when we see the interior of his home, furnished with surprising simplicity... The Spartan decoration seems to enlarge the rooms, making them more airy and fresh. (Brücker 2009, 75)

One of the artist's defining traits is the clarity of his work, which mirrors that of his thinking. "In Cláudio Pastro's world, everything seems to obey a profound inner order. His phrases are simple and refined at the same time. His gaze is as serious as it is frank, and his voice, balanced and calm." (Brücker 2009, 75) In fact, from the monastic tradition, Pastro learns that "the creative act of art has nothing to do with inspiration, but requires a human attitude of contemplation, silence, and self-emptying." (Fernandes 2021, 298)

It was in this spirit of service, seeing his contribution as a ministry—he liked to compare himself to the *fossores*, those responsible for excavating the catacombs but also for producing the art found there, whom early Christian literature attests to have been true ministers of the Church—that Pastro devoted his entire life to sacred art, always attentive to the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council; he called himself a post-conciliar artist. João Paulo Berto writes about the importance of his works:

His recognition by the Church as one of the most important sacred artists, justified by the consonance of his ideas with those of the institution, gave his career a major boost, leading him to produce works all over the world. (Berto 2012, 279)

Sartorelli (2013) highlights another of his defining traits—that of an artist who works with the concept of "total art" (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), a term coined in the 19th century by Richard Wagner, which implies organizing the arts into a single harmonious whole. Márcio Luiz Fernandes refers to Pastro as "a complete artist":

The complex scope of his work ranged from the creation of pictorial murals to the architectural design of buildings and objects conceived to occupy the space of worship: from sculpture to illustration; from murals to stained glass windows and liturgical articles. (Fernandes 2021, 301)

When reflecting on the celebratory space, it is Pastro himself who teaches:

Therefore, from the walls to the paintings, from the liturgical articles to the vestments, from the flooring to the altar (and ambo, cathedra, and baptistery), from the images to our posture (body-image), everything comprises the iconographic program. If what we celebrate is Christ, *everything* must reveal Christ within us. (Pastro 2018, 75)

In this sense, he adapted churches to the liturgy proposed by the Second Vatican Council, designed the interiors of others, conceived the iconography of cathedrals and oratories, designed liturgical poles and stained glass windows, illustrated books,

painted murals, modeled in ceramics, created liturgical articles and vestments, and developed liturgical vessels, including for Popes Benedict XVI and Francis on the occasion of their visits to Brazil. He experimented with all materials and techniques, blending Amerindian, African, and Iberian imagery with Romanesque, Byzantine, and Coptic traditions.

Reflecting on his work, Pastro (1986, 52–53) analyzes:

My lines, my pure, flat colors are a continuation of the Sacred Text. My language is symbolic and not realistic—I want to go beyond the real and the copy.... I use the same elements of creation: clay, the figure, colors, light.

He summarizes:

The image, poor matter, is the loving language that the Creator chose to communicate.

His absorption of the principles of Vatican II was not at a distance. Pastro connects directly with that generation which, especially in Europe, actively followed the movements that culminated in Vatican II, as well as its realization and implementation. He found the spirit of returning to the sources and conciliar renewal very much alive in people such as, among others, Philippe Leddet, from the Monastery of the Annunciation, Chantal Modoux and Anne Farcy, from the Monastery of the Encounter, Michel Cüenot and Jomar Vigneron, from the worker priests, Doroteia Rondon Amarante and Mônica Castanheira, from the Abbey of Our Lady of Peace, and Martinho Michler, from the Monastery of Saint Benedict in Rio de Janeiro, the pioneer of the liturgical movement in Brazil, from whom Pastro borrowed his oblate name. He himself would write:

My vocation, gift, and charism lie at the root of my story. There is a single guiding thread in my life, with people, names, and places that are protagonists of the Spirit that keeps me alive. Through these people, the Spirit came to me and gave me the treasure of faith, beauty, and a zest for life. (Pastro 2001, 16)

2. An Introduction to His Works

Pastro's artistic output is vast, encompassing works across diverse media and purposes. Seeking to provide an introduction to his work, we present here a selection of works that aims to represent, in a very limited way, this variety, as well as the four decades over which his activity extends. There are seven works: illustrations for a book published in Italy and a mural in a church in São Paulo, works from the 1980s; a panel for a chapel in Germany and a piece commissioned by the Vatican, created in the 1990s; and three works produced after 2000: the stained glass windows of a monastery in Paraná, an oratory aimed at children, and the design of the

liturgical space and iconographic project for the great National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida.

At the beginning of his career, and for about two decades, Pastro worked on book illustrations and produced postcards with Christmas, Easter, and other themes. “His work as a graphic and visual artist was carried out in parallel, in order to supplement his income and serve as a means of promoting his iconographic repertoire,” notes Sartorelli (2013, 37).

For *Perché a te, Antonio?* [Why to You, Anthony?], written by Davide Maria Turoldo in commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the death of Saint Anthony of Padua, published in Italy in 1981, Pastro painted forty gouaches. The iconography is typical of his early phase, with Coptic inspiration, as Alberico Sala notes (Turoldo 1981, back cover): “An Eastern and African wind blows through Pastro’s paintings: many of the figures have attitudes and rhythms typical of Coptic devotional painting.” The critic also observes the arrangement of the figures, a typical feature of works from this period: “And the framing is constantly closed, to suggest the idea of a small panel” (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Illustration from the book *Perché a te, Antonio?* (Turoldo 1981, 71).

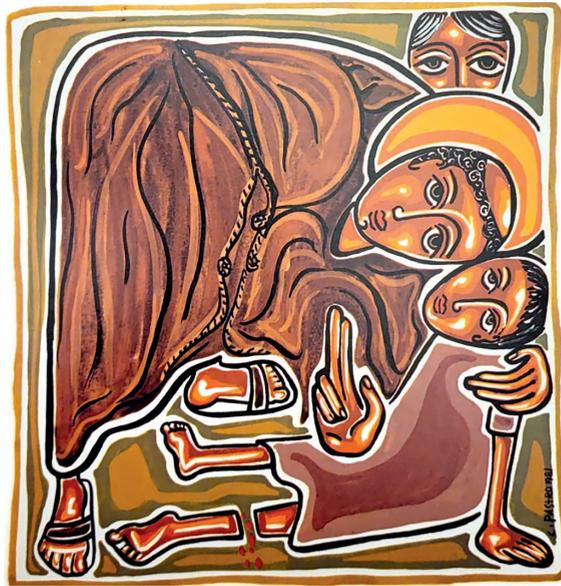


Figure 2. Illustration from the book *Perché a te, Antonio?* (Turoldo 1981, 137).

One can observe the earthy tones, the strong black lines, the absence of linear perspective, the images that are too large for the available surface, and therefore “fitted” into a frame of fine lines, circumscribing them. The iconography is symbolic, with dark-skinned figures, elongated noses, large open eyes that stare at the reader,

and small, closed mouths; the draperies are voluminous, without outlining the bodies: only feet and hands are visible. Everything is curved, sinuous, and each iconography is presented as if it were an element of a comic book, in line with *biblia pauperum*, a term Saint Gregory the Great used to refer to the role of art in communicating the biblical message to those who cannot read the sacred text.

The following year, 1982, Pastro completed the mural painting of the presbytery of the Church of Saint Benedict of Morumbi, in São Paulo (Figure 3). It is his first large panel. The colors and style are the same as those seen in the iconography of Saint Anthony. Note also the liturgical poles in solid stone and their arrangement, the floor raised by a few steps and made of the same stone as the poles, all conceived and designed by Pastro.

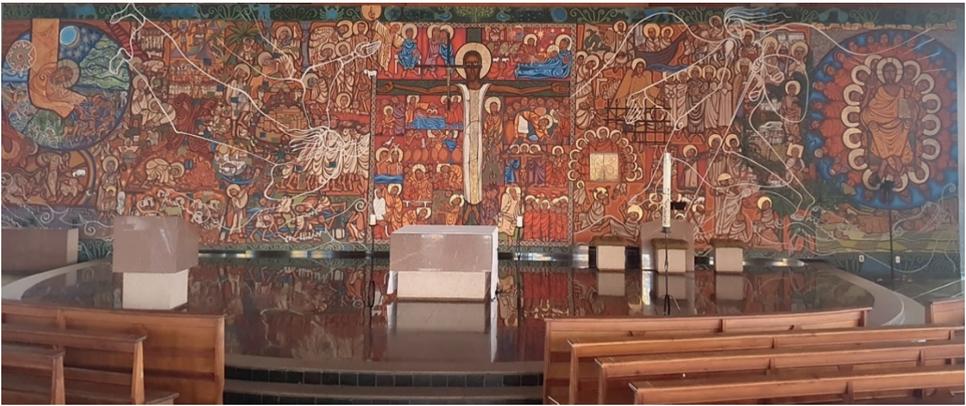


Figure 3. Presbytery and mural, Church of Saint Benedict of Morumbi, São Paulo, 1982.
Photo: Christiane Meier.

The 150 m² panel (30 meters long by 5 meters high) was painted in acrylic on plaster (Pastro 1986) and depicts the story of salvation, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, with Christ at the center: it is from him that the narrative is observed. To the left of the viewer is the First Testament, and to the right, the Second.

Here, too, earthy, dark colors prevail, reminiscent of the clay found in Brazil, dark and reddish; it is the raw material used by God in creation. Drawn with fine white lines, two large angels can be seen on the panel: on the left, the Angel of Promise, who leads the People of God in the Old Testament up to the advent of Jesus; and on the right, the Angel of Memory, who leads the congregation to heavenly Jerusalem, keeping the memory of Jesus alive. Both move toward the center, toward the risen Christ, Pantocrator and Chronocrator—the Lord of the universe and of time.

The images condense and recapitulate the life of Christ and the History of Salvation. There is a reinterpretation of the Old Testament that leads to Christ. And finally, the theological

center of all liturgical action is visualized in space: the iconography of Christ in glory, of Christ the Judge and Redeemer, affirming not a human ideology, but his Divine nature. (Pastro 2006, 41)

Therefore, the great Christ at the center is the *axis mundi* as mentioned by Mircea Eliade, an author whom Pastro studied intensively. He is the one who connects time, from creation to the end of days and the final establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth; and, by entering the dwelling of the dead, from which he rescues all, he unites earth with Heaven. Indeed, in the artist's own words, "the sacred space is not just any space. It is heaven on earth." (Pastro 1986, 8)

In sacred art, "there are no boundaries, no space, no limit of time, language or culture," explains Pastro (1986, 4). He further clarifies what can be observed in the panel, that is,

Time for God and man has:

- **beginning: Creation**, beautiful yet corrupted;
- **center: the Birth, Death, and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus**, toward which everything prior converged and now converges;
- **end: the New Creation**. The Creator intervenes in time and establishes in Jesus a New Creation and New Time. Time belongs to God.

THE DAY OF THE LORD = SUNDAY. (Pastro 1999, 29)

It is also worth noting the alignment of the altar and Christ, in the same line, since "the liturgical center is the basic sense of orientation of the celebratory space. The axis of all action is Christ, and physically, the altar and the ambo are expressions of one and the same Paschal mystery or Eucharist." (Pastro 2006, 38)

In this panel, there is a heavy stroke, a fusion style of the various cultures of the artist's interest. We also note that Pastro is a skilled storyteller and, in this sense, we emphasize his concern with initiation into the faith. He acknowledges this characteristic: "Artists developed a taste for storytelling, illustrating walls, Evangeliaries, Codices... thus developing the *BIBLIA PAUPERUM*, the Word in form and color, which began in the first century in the catacombs." (Pastro 2006, 40 [ellipsis and capitalization in the original])

This panel captivated Prégardier, then administrator of Adveniat, the German episcopate's initiative for Latin America, which she saw during a visit to São Paulo in 1989. Pastro was then invited to submit a proposal for a chapel that would include an iconographic program for the institution's administrative headquarters. The work was subsequently completed in 1995 (Figure 4).

It can be observed that in this work, the earthy tones of Pastro's earlier pieces do not predominate, nor does the sinuous style; the colors are intense, and the

images are less curved and constricted. However, it is divided into modules that give rhythm and dynamics to the composition, which is, in principle, rather static, as can be seen in the image of the woman in the foreground, on the yellow disc in the background, and in the white angel above, who floats motionless. It is a denser angel, more full-bodied than the previous two, from Morumbi, which have only white outlines. It is worth noting that this angel is the only figure painted in this color.

These changes represent the transition from the first to the second phase of his career. The first phase, marked by the appropriation of the “primitive,” heavier, and more chromatic, gave way in the 1990s to a more essential, sober, and highly stylized style (Sartorelli 2013).



Figure 4. *Flow of Life* panel, Adveniat Chapel, Essen, Germany.
Photo: Christiane Meier.

The panel portrays the peoples of Latin America and their evangelization. It begins on the right, at the entrance to the chapel, with the apparition of the Mother of God to a young indigenous man, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, in 16th-century Mexico. The narrative of the apparition involves the image of the Virgin imprinted on Juan Diego’s cloak, as a sign before the local bishop. This iconography, “not made by human hands,” became known as the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is in the foreground of the panel. Beside her is her crown in the shape of a quarter of a headdress typical of the indigenous peoples of Brazil; thus, the artist indicates that she is the Mother and Queen of the New World.

However, it is worth remembering that the Virgin of Guadalupe is also the woman described in chapter 12 of the Apocalypse, clothed with the sun and standing

on the moon. She does not have a crown with twelve stars, since her crown is indigenous, made of feathers, yet the stars are on her mantle, in great number, the moon under her feet, and her mandorla is solar.

Mary stands with her hands joined before her womb, in prayer and contemplation of what is at the other end of the panel—God. Therefore, she is not a deity, but an example of faith, obedience, and life for every Christian. It is not her we should worship, but God, as she does and teaches us. At the other end, we see a large sun, the god of many American peoples, here in its Aztec representation. In a Christian, inculturated context, it represents the Light of the world, Jesus.

Below, a red stripe runs across the entire panel, symbolizing blood: both that shed in the wars of conquest and that which gives and sustains life. Thus, this flow of blood recalls that the encounter between the indigenous peoples and the Christian missionaries was not without problems and had its dark moments.

It should be emphasized that Pastro designed the ambo, the altar, the tabernacle, and the pews of the chapel, as well as specified the color of the walls, the carpet, and the fabrics for the curtains, upholstery, and coverings of the liturgical poles. For these, he chose the best that Latin America has to offer: silk weaving from Guatemala.

While he was in Essen completing the chapel in May 1995, he received a phone call from the secretary general of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, Cipriano Calderón Polo, inviting him to Rome before returning to Brazil. The monsignor informed him that he would like to discuss the creation of “a Christ for the turn of the millennium, which would represent, for the Vatican, the figure of Christ after two thousand years of Christianity.” (Lima Torres 2007, 151) Pastro recounts: “I didn’t give it much importance because there are a thousand European artists far superior to me.” (Lima Torres 2007, 98) In Rome, he was informed that it was not a competition, but that he had already been chosen to develop the iconography. The work should express the ecumenical spirit of the new millennium and correspond to the faith professed by Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox Christians, in short, all Christian denominations.

Pastro then reasoned that, to meet the expectations of the Orthodox, it could not be a sculpture, since they do not use them; for Protestants, the Word holds central importance, so Christ should somehow refer to the Word. He could not be suffering or dead, as none of the Eastern Churches favors his presentation in this form. He would therefore have to be a Christ in glory, apocalyptic, referring to the final condition of humanity and the cosmos, a Christ known to the one Church of the first millennium.

The artist’s choice fell upon a Pantocrator, engraved on a round copper plate covered with gold, measuring 0.9 meters in circumference, set on a square base of black-lacquered wood with a 1-meter edge (Figure 5). The golden color symbolizes the glory of Christ, the transfiguration with the luminosity reported by the disciples on Mount Tabor; the black, in turn, symbolizes the absence of light, the world that

has fallen into sin and knows death. The circle is the perfect shape, denoting the divinity of Jesus, and the square represents the earth with its four corners, the human nature of the Savior. The golden disc upon the black square: the Light that bursts forth upon the world, Emmanuel, God among us.



Figure 5. Christ of the Third Millennium, 1997 (Pastro 2001, 171).

Behind Christ, one can see a cross composed of grooves. It reminds us that Jesus had to experience the cross, overcome death to rise again on the third day, enter into glory, and sit at the right hand of the Father. The work is on display at the Vatican.

Pastro designs stained glass windows for almost all the chapels and churches he works on, yet he does not write about them. There is practically nothing in his texts concerning stained glass, even though light is one of his concerns; his only recommendation is that, where there is figurative painting, only abstract stained glass windows should be used.

As the church of the Monastery of the Encounter, in Mandirituba, Paraná, built in 2008, has no iconography on its walls, he designed a set of predominantly figurative

stained glass windows, a true altarpiece of light, emulating the gilded wooden altarpieces placed at the back of Baroque presbytery, for instance. Pastro took part in the entire conception of the space, including the design of the whole monastery building. Beyond the church, we will focus on the stained glass windows.

At the center (Figure 6), Mary presents Jesus in the temple and is approached by Simeon (Luke 2:22–38). To the left of the viewer is Joseph, and to the right, the prophetess Anna; this triptych of light, marked by an eruption of warm colors amidst the omnipresence of blue, is at the back of the presbytery. Flanking it are three more glass elements on each side. On the left is Saint Benedict, the founder of the order; on the right, Saint Scholastica, his sister, both framed by two abstract elements (Figures 7 and 8).

Shades of blue predominate in the stained glass window, with a yellow and orange center marking the Baby Jesus, the Light of the world, enclosed within a circle, thus referring to the sun. We find ourselves, therefore, before Christ as Light that knows no setting. Luminous rays radiate from the Child and illuminate the Virgin, Simeon, Joseph, Anna, and those present in the church. Pastro makes those in the space partake of the scene and receive the glory of Christ.



Figure 6. Detail of the central part of the stained glass window ensemble, Monastery of the Encounter, Paraná, 2008. Photo: Christiane Meier.



Figure 7. Saint Benedict,
Monastery of the Encounter, Paraná, 2008.
Photo: Christiane Meier.



Figure 8. Saint Scholastica,
Monastery of the Encounter, Paraná, 2008.
Photo: Christiane Meier.

Although all the images are elongated, hieratic, and even sublime, there is movement in the ensemble, caused by the rays of light radiating from the center and by the crackling of the images with various elements of colored glass. The sunlight, filtered and softened by the stained glass, produces a pleasant, welcoming luminosity inside the ecclesiastical building.

Having observed a private chapel (Germany) and two churches linked to Benedictine monasteries, one male (São Paulo) and one female (Paraná), and before we turn to his last and greatest work, we would like to present a delicate chapel designed for young children aged 3 to 7.

It is worth recalling that Pastro was interested in the integral formation of the human being and delved deeply into this subject. He thus focused on the writings of Héléne Lubienska de Lenval (1895–1972), a Belgian–Polish educator. In line with his teaching philosophy, Pastro develops a religious space for children who have not yet received their first communion. We draw attention to the fact that it is not a liturgical space per se, since there are no liturgical centers, given that the Eucharist is not celebrated here. The Little Ones’ Chapel is located in the early childhood education wing of Santo André School, in São José do Rio Preto, Brazil (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Little Ones' Chapel, Santo André School, São José do Rio Preto, Brazil.

Photo: Christiane Meier.

Note that the story of salvation is displayed on the wall at children's eye level; an adult needs to look down to see the scenes. Pastro is careful not to use a single strip for the narration, as this would be boring for a child; thus, he places the scenes at different heights, in rectangles and frames of varying sizes and colors, forming an interesting rhythmic pattern for the little ones.

The center of the space is marked by ceramic elements arranged in different ways; around it are small, lightweight stools that the children themselves can move as they work. In the background, Jesus, as teacher, welcomes two children, a boy and a girl. Painted with white lines on a blue background, it resembles a chalk figure drawn on a blackboard in a classroom, thus establishing a dialogue with and including the space in the rest of the school. Jesus is tall, reminding the adults present that he is the Educator; the children, on the other hand, are the same size as those who come here, allowing each one to feel equally welcomed by him.

Next to it, a stained glass window features a large yellow cross with five red dots: the wounds of Jesus. This stained glass window has a minimalist composition of

colors and shapes, almost a geometric abstraction, which does not interfere with the mural's iconography and, at the same time, filters sunlight and indicates that Jesus is the Light of the world.

If the chapel is delicate and small, suitable for children undergoing religious initiation, Pastro's last and most monumental work was undoubtedly the design of the interior of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, the largest Marian church in the world. We move from the minimalist to the monumental scale, yet in both cases, Pastro shows his mystagogical sensitivity, and Fernandes (2021, 304) recalls precisely this aspect: "The Christian artist is a mystagogue."

"His second artistic homeland is Aparecida. In this place of pilgrimage, ... stands the second largest basilica in the world." (Brücker 2009, 77) Fernandes adds:

The iconographic program of the church building of the National Basilica of Our Lady of Aparecida is undoubtedly the mature expression of Cláudio Pastro's conception of sacred space.... In particular, it is from the physical and symbolic center of the Basilica, which is the Altar and the Cross, that Pastro manifests all his liturgical, biblical, and theological concerns. (Fernandes 2021, 305)

To give an idea of the building's dimensions and its significance for the faithful, Jorge Sampaio provides the following details:

The largest Catholic evangelization center in Brazil mirrors the popular devotion of Brazilians and foreigners alike to the Queen and Patroness of Brazil, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of Aparecida. To welcome nearly 12 million pilgrims each year, the National Shrine offers devotees an area of over 1.3 million square meters, with nearly 143,000 square meters of built area. The specific area of the Basilica of Aparecida itself covers almost 72,000 m² ... which can accommodate up to 30,000 devotees around the Central Altar; for outdoor celebrations, the capacity is 300,000. (Sampaio 2017, 163–64)

The current basilica was built between the 1940s and 1980s, as the number of pilgrims visiting the site each year had grown enormously and the existing structures were no longer adequate to receive them. However, it was not until the 2000s that work began on completing the basilica's interior. Pastro took part in the project, which was conceived collaboratively by him and the architects Regina Celi de Albuquerque Machado Steurer and Laíde Sonda. Berto wrote in 2012 (281), during the construction work: "Without a doubt, the Basilica of Aparecida has been his greatest and most important work." Pastro passed away in 2016, before the dome's cladding was completed, which was inaugurated in 2017.

The team designed not only the monumental iconography but also the layout of the sanctuary and its liturgical poles, as well as relocating the image of Brazil's patron

saint from the altar to the side, creating a new niche for it. They designed and built several chapels, including the Baptism Chapel and the Resurrection Chapel.

The execution of Pastro's project began in 2000 with a series of studies for the central Altar, the Presbytery, and the Altarpiece of the image. Based on traditional Portuguese tiles, the unifying element of the space is the image of Heavenly Jerusalem, as the place of the new creation, which descends and settles among the faithful, also drawing inspiration from the Song of Songs, a work that symbolically expresses the ideal relationship between Christ and his Church. (Berto 2012, 281)

When the presbytery is viewed from above, one notices the symmetry of the large 8-meter-high cross, made of corten steel, hanging from the center of the dome above the altar. Berto (2012, 281) explains: "From the central dome, suspended by a large cable, hangs a steel cross with the hollow silhouette of the crucified Christ, the so-called cosmic cross: just an indication of the figure, a symbol of the living and invisible Christ who is present there."

Figures 10 and 11 show details of the interior of the basilica, highlighting, on the left, the iconography of the dome and walls surrounding the sanctuary, a set referred to here as the baldachin, as it mirrors the structure conceived by Christian architecture of the first millennium above the altar, including the large cross above the altar; on the right, the sanctuary seen from the dome, with the cross, the altar, the pews, and the floor, marked by the design of water waves. Note that the artist did not depict the water conventionally, but rather in the style of Brazilian indigenous peoples. Pastro (2013, 8) writes that it is the breath of the Spirit that stirs the waters. "The entire floor, inside and outside . . . , bears the movement of water, which indicates to us the presence of the Holy Spirit (the breath of the Risen One) in this place."

The walls, arches, and large dome of the basilica's central part form the Garden of Eden, with the Tree of Life depicted in Italian mosaics above—the stem is the cross that descends from the dome to the altar—and the surrounding garden flowing down the walls. We have the fauna and flora of Brazil, cultural elements from various regions, all around the altar, an apocalyptic plaza with the Lamb at its center. A heavenly Jerusalem that descends upon the sanctuary and encompasses the entire assembly.

As in all liturgical adaptations made by Pastro, the first step is to clear the presbytery, leaving only Christ there. The image of the Patroness is also removed and taken to a specially designed niche so that the faithful have easy access to it. Our Lady of Aparecida has always drawn thousands of faithful, and accessibility was a key consideration in the adaptation work. There is a wide ramp that allows people on foot and in wheelchairs to approach the saint's feet.

In 2004, one of the most important works was delivered, revitalized in 2011: the altarpiece/throne of the Image. It features a large central gold band containing, in the middle,

on a white band, three archangels in golden lines: Raphael at the top, Michael in the middle, and Gabriel below. Each figure is six meters high, corresponding to Jacob's ladder, on which the angels descend and ascend, bringing graces and carrying the requests of the faithful. At the base is the niche of the image, made of silver and brilliants, surrounded by a large sun that corresponds to the woman clothed with the sun of the Apocalypse. On each side, there are large panels in shades of ultramarine blue, turquoise blue, lilac, white, and gold, depicting 12 women from the Old Testament who prefigured the Virgin. (Berto 2012, 282)

Since for Catholics, the Virgin is an intercessor, in the present symbolism, the supplications addressed to the Mother of God are also identified as being carried by the three archangels to the merciful Son.

In the four naves of the great basilica, Pastro depicts in tiles, a hallmark of Portuguese tradition, the following cycles:

- a) to the south: Incarnation and Childhood of Jesus;
- b) to the north: Public Life of the Savior;
- c) to the west: Passion and Death of Jesus;
- d) to the east: Resurrection of the Lord.

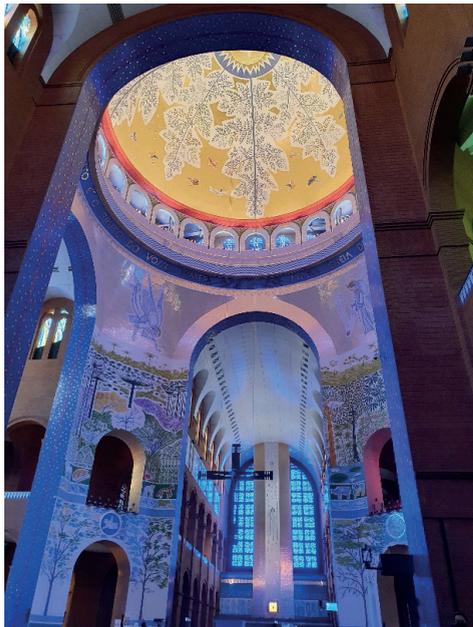


Figure 10. Detail of the basilica's interior.
Photo: Christiane Meier.



Figure 11. View of the sanctuary from the basilica's dome.
Photo: Christiane Meier.

It is a complete *biblia pauperum*, which forms a set with three large panels occupying the space that in the south nave is reserved for the Patroness's niche, dedicated to the great patriarchs and prophets of the First Testament and the apostles (east nave), the women in the history of the Church (north nave), and the evangelization of Brazil (west nave).

The National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida is Pastro's best-known and most remembered work, given its monumentality and centrality in the faith of Brazilian Catholics.

3. The Reception of His Work

The visibility of Pastro's work, along with its distinctive artistic and theological qualities, makes him an unavoidable figure in Brazilian liturgical art and architecture. Pastro was a pioneer in the effort to introduce post-conciliar sacred art and architecture in Brazil. He discussed his pioneering role and the state of the Catholic Church in his time with interlocutors such as Brücker, when he stated that the Church should place equal emphasis on art as it does on social struggle:

For a long time, sacred art was relegated to the background. I have always drawn attention to this situation and fought against it with my work. Finally, the church is waking up from its cultural stupor. Everywhere working groups are springing up, diocesan commissions are emerging, and courses in sacred art are being offered at theological colleges. If I take pride in anything, it is in this. (Brücker 2009, 78)

Pastro argued that the absence of courses on sacred art and architecture in seminaries, combined with the scarcity of publications on the fundamentals of the organization and setting of liturgical spaces and iconographic programs, led to a lack of good examples of post-conciliar churches in Brazil. Thus, the artist himself took on the task, teaching classes, writing books, and encouraging the translation of works such as the important document *Via pulchritudinis*, from the Pontifical Council for Culture, and *The Mystery of Worship in Christianity*, by Odo Casel, a landmark of the liturgical movement.

Post-conciliar authors limited themselves to presenting systematic theological content related to liturgy and ecclesiology, but lacked the initiative to link this theological content to its practical repercussions in relation, for example, to the celebratory space. This delicate and difficult task was undertaken by Cláudio Pastro through the publication of books in which we can find discussions on the fundamentals of sacred art, language, symbolism, beauty, and, above all, engage with projects and practical suggestions for the

organization of space and setting in accordance with the spirit of what it means to build churches today. (Fernandes 2021, 304)

In this regard, it is interesting to note the testimony of architect Sartorelli concerning his choice of a research subject for his master's degree. He states:

This research began accidentally, when I first came into contact with Cláudio's work during my mother's graduation ceremony and mass in Theology at the Cathedral of São Miguel Paulista, a peripheral neighborhood of the city of São Paulo. The interior of this cathedral made a strong impression on me, where several frescoes on the walls illustrated biblical scenes, reminiscent of primitive, naïve art, yet at the same time full of symbolism, in a contemporary style. They possessed a level of sophistication that I never imagined I would find in a church on the outskirts of the city. (Sartorelli 2013, 11)

In fact, Pastro's work, especially in the last twenty years, has repeatedly been the subject of academic research. The earliest study dates back to 1995, but it was mainly from the 2000s onwards, when Pastro began working at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, that research on his work began to multiply. From 2005 to 2024, eleven academic works were published: four doctoral theses and seven master's dissertations (de Aquino and Sanchez 2025; Borges 2024). We are aware of at least two additional doctorates currently in progress. We can therefore infer that research on his work is increasingly present at universities and in art research groups, or specifically in sacred art and architecture research groups.

The first work is Vera M. J. Villela's master's dissertation in Urban and Regional Planning, entitled "Arquitetura e pintura na concepção de Cláudio Pastro" [Architecture and Painting in the Conception of Cláudio Pastro], which focuses on the chapel of Santo André School in São José do Rio Preto (Villela 1995). It was defended at the São Paulo State University (UNESP) in 1995. In 2005, we have two dissertations, one by Sartorelli on "O espaço sagrado e o religioso na obra de Cláudio Pastro" [The Sacred and the Religious Space in the Work of Cláudio Pastro], defended in the Graduate Program in Religious Studies at PUC-SP, later published as a book (2013), and the other by Alfredo C. Veiga, entitled "Cláudio Pastro: arte como veículo do sagrado" [Cláudio Pastro: Art as a Vehicle of the Sacred], defended in the Aesthetics and Art History Program at the University of São Paulo (USP) (Veiga 2005).

In the following years, we have two dissertations on works that are quite representative of Pastro's career: one by Marília M. M. S. Lima Torres, on "O Cristo do terceiro milênio" [The Christ of the Third Millennium], defended in 2007 for a master's degree in Arts at UNESP, and one by Egidio S. Toda, on "A arte sacra de Cláudio Pastro na Basílica de Aparecida e sua contemporaneidade" [The Sacred Art of Cláudio Pastro in the Basilica of Aparecida and Its Contemporaneity], defended in 2013 in the Master's in Art and Cultural History at Mackenzie Presbyterian University.

In the same year, we have the first doctoral thesis, by Wilma S. De Tommaso in the Graduate Program in Religious Studies at PUC-SP, on “O Pantocrator de Cláudio Pastro” [The Pantocrator by Cláudio Pastro] (De Tommaso 2013).

In 2015, Claudinéia C. Genoveze defended her master’s degree in Religious Studies at the Methodist University of São Paulo, addressing “Os painéis de azulejos sobre José de Anchieta no Pátio do Colégio concebidos por Cláudio Pastro, interpretados em três perspectivas: do artista, do espaço e do observador” [The Tile Panels Depicting José de Anchieta in the Pátio do Colégio, Designed by Cláudio Pastro, Interpreted from Three Perspectives: That of the Artist, the Space, and the Observer]. It was the last academic paper produced before Pastro’s death in October 2016.

After his death, two other master’s dissertations were completed: Richard G. da Silva’s “A iconografia da arte sacra de Cláudio Pastro na Basílica Nacional de Aparecida” [The Iconography of Cláudio Pastro’s Sacred Art in the National Basilica of Aparecida], defended in 2019 in the Master of Arts program at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) (da Silva 2019), and Silvana Borges’s dissertation entitled “Espaço litúrgico ontem e hoje: tradição e modernidade na arte e na arquitetura sacras cristãs na obra de Cláudio Pastro” [Liturgical Space Yesterday and Today: Tradition and Modernity in Christian Sacred Art and Architecture in the Work of Cláudio Pastro], defended in 2024 in the Master’s in Architecture program at the Belas Artes Faculty of São Paulo.

There were also three doctoral theses: Taciane T. Jaluska addressed “A educação patrimonial no espaço sagrado: o potencial educativo nas obras de Cláudio Pastro na ambientação do Santuário de Aparecida/SP segundo as percepções de visitantes e turistas” [Heritage Education in the Sacred Space: The Educational Potential of Cláudio Pastro’s Works in the Setting of the Aparecida Shrine According to the Perceptions of Visitors and Tourists] in a thesis defended in 2018 in the Graduate Program in Theology at the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná (PUCPR); Toda continued his research with a PhD in Education, Art, and Cultural History at Mackenzie Presbyterian University, defending in 2019 a thesis entitled “A universalidade da mulher que se tornou Nossa Senhora e sua relação primitiva-contemporânea na história, arte, religião e semiótica” [The Universality of the Woman Who Became Our Lady and Her Primitive-Contemporary Relationship in History, Art, Religion, and Semiotics] (Toda 2019); and Hilda T. S. Souto focused on “Processos de criação na obra de Cláudio Pastro: uma investigação estético-teológica no acervo em papel do Mosteiro Nossa Senhora da Paz” [The Creative Processes in the Work of Cláudio Pastro: An Aesthetic–Theological Investigation of the Paper Collection of the Our Lady of Peace Monastery], completing her Doctorate in Theology at PUCPR in 2022.

It should also be emphasized that, on the occasion of Pastro’s 75th birthday in October 2023, special events were held to celebrate his birth at the Catholic University of Pernambuco (Unicap) and at the São Bento College in São Paulo, illustrating

the interest in his biography and work on the part of researchers and university professors, as well as the general public.

Artists and architects currently active in Brazil cannot be indifferent to his work, whether by drawing on his influence or openly opposing it. Many leading figures in this field follow the paths opened by Pastro, and often it is precisely contact with his work that marks the beginning of their careers. This is the case with Ruberval Monteiro. In an informal conversation in his studio in Rome in February 2025, he told us that he began painting by copying Pastro and was intrigued that his work never looked quite the same until he realized he was not Pastro. From then on, he no longer copied but was inspired and set out on his own iconographic path, as shown in Figure 12.



Figure 12. Pantocrator, Ruberval Monteiro, church of Cela São José, Itapetcerica da Serra (SP), 1998. Photo: Christiane Meier.

Alongside Monteiro, we can mention Romolo Picoli Ronchetti, Anselmo José Frugério, Guto Godoy, Laíde Sonda, Antonio Batista, Marcelo Molinero, and Maria Fonseca as contemporary Brazilian sacred artists influenced by Pastro. Pastro's work set a precedent and paved the way for the reception of the Second Vatican Council in Brazil, especially within the artistic and liturgical spheres.

Conclusions

During the years of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI (1964) emphasized that if the ministry of preaching lacked the contribution of artists, that ministry would find it necessary to become artistic itself, since it is the task and mission of art to “clothe in words, forms, colors, accessibility” the “world of the spirit, of the invisible, of the ineffable, of God.” The *Message to Artists*, delivered at the end of Vatican II in 1965, goes in the same direction: “Today, as yesterday, the Church needs you and turns to you. And she says to you through our voice: do not allow a fruitful alliance between all to be broken.... The world in which we live needs beauty in order not to fall into despair.” (Paul VI 1965).

“In some ways, Vatican II could be considered ‘too little, too late’ for sacred art. In others, it could be a classic example of institutions catching up with what is now called ‘best practice’ and making its protocols officially recognized,” stated Inge Linder-Gaillard (2021). Pastro followed the Council's path not only by faithfully adhering to its guidelines, but also by familiarizing himself with the entire flow of creativity and rootedness in tradition that characterized the movements preceding Vatican II. This intimacy with the theological, cultural, and spiritual sensibilities of the liturgical, biblical, patristic, and ecumenical movements, among others, was a fundamental component of the maturity of his artistic output.

At the same time, and precisely in line with the appreciation of local culture and the episcopal collegiality typical of Vatican II, Pastro listened to the documents of the Church in Latin America. He understood what the bishops' conference in Medellín (1968) stated about the place of artists and writers as interpreters of the anxieties and hopes of the Latin American peoples, what the conference in Puebla (1979) affirmed about their role as promoters of their dignity and voice, and what was emphasized in Santo Domingo (1992) about the importance of art in the assimilation of liturgical renewal and in the processes of inculturation of faith (Fernandes 2021, 301).

In fact, academic research on Pastro's work has highlighted some features that identify it as being characteristically inspired by the Second Vatican Council (de Aquino and Sanchez 2025): researchers have emphasized the Christocentric emphasis of his architectural and iconographic projects (Lima Torres 2007; Jaluška 2018); his unreserved affiliation with the conciliar liturgical reform (Toda 2013;

Jaluska 2018); his sensitivity to the inculturation of the Gospel (Sartorelli 2013; Souto 2022); his ecumenical perspective and his grounding in a return to the sources (Genoveze 2015). These traits run through all his work, in an intimate relationship between its content and form.

In the liturgical spaces he designed, in the iconographic projects he drew, and in the pieces he modeled, Pastro always kept before him the assembly that celebrates as a priestly people, united in the common dignity of baptism, in fruitful interaction with the local culture, deeply rooted in its identity as a sacrament of union with God and of the unity of all humanity, recognized through listening to the Word of God. His work is not only a model of post-conciliar sacred art but also a space for fruitful and creative assimilation of the Second Vatican Council for our communities today.

Translated by Rebeca Pinheiro Queluz

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Márcio Luiz Fernandes: Conceptualization, Methodology, Review & editing, Supervision | **Felipe Sérgio Koller:** Methodology, Review & editing | **Christiane Meier:** Writing original draft, Bibliography search.

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