

Resurrecting Liturgical Art:
Function, Theology, and Aesthetics in Art for the Modern Church

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The world that the contemporary Christian artist faces is one that is still suffering aesthetically and philosophically from the iconoclastic effects of Modernism. Austerity, minimalism, and utilitarianism have found their way into a church that was once resplendent with artistic beauty. This thesis is an investigation into the development of artwork within the Christian church, and how theology and liturgical function shaped its outward aesthetic. By peeling back layers of history, and by becoming familiar with the many factors that shaped liturgical art, we may discover why it has declined—and more importantly, how to revive it. Criteria must be established in order to distinguish good liturgical art from the bad; that which is found to be worthy needs to be held up as an example. The thesis concludes with a proposal in which the author plans, designs, and pitches an altar painting to the congregation of a local church.

Preface

The study of Christian worship and practice always comes with risks and difficulties, perhaps the foremost of which is making generalizations about eras, locations, or church bodies. This is regrettable, but unavoidable. Christian worship, even as it pertains only to liturgical art, covers such vast chronological, geographical, and theological terrain that it could never be summed up completely in a single work. The disparity of Christian church bodies in the modern age makes generalizations especially inaccurate. While in its youth one could make relatively confident statements regarding Christian theology or practice, it now becomes difficult to make such statements about even narrow slices of Christianity, e.g. Confessional Lutherans or Southern Baptists. But despite these difficulties, we keep writing about the Church and its development. It should be obvious that if it occupies the minds of so many people, it must be an important element of our past as well as our present, and thus be worthy of further study.

A second difficulty with regard to this thesis will be the usage of the term *Modernism*. It is perhaps one of the most complex “isms” in the history of art. The word encompasses a plethora of distinct styles and media that span the better part of a century, as well as the philosophical and social tendencies that accompanied it. What may add to the confusion is the unfortunate coinciding of two religious movements or tendencies with the same name—one within Catholicism, and the other within Protestantism. Therefore, in order to avoid confusion, I must clarify my usage of the word. *Modernism*, when appearing with the initial capital letter, refers to the distinct break from representational art that occurred in the twentieth century.

One further clarification is necessary for my usage of the word *Church*. When used with the initial capital letter, *Church* refers to the body of all believers, the “Communion of Saints,” which

crosses all barriers, real and imagined. When referring to the Church thus, the word takes the feminine pronoun, representing her role as the Bride of Christ.

The scope of this thesis is to examine the history and trajectory of Christian worship and practice in relation to liturgical art through the centuries. This survey will be far from exhaustive, but will be adequate to expose Modernism's effect on that trajectory. After the Reformation, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to follow any particular thread up to the present, let alone give them all due scrutiny. Therefore I have attempted to limit my speculations to those churches and examples within my immediate experience, and to those notable cases that my research grants access to. My sole experience growing up in the Midwestern United States has been with a small sampling of confessional Lutheran churches, but my interest has also been drawn to Catholic churches, for historical and aesthetic reasons. Since Lutheranism and Catholicism stand as symbols of that 500-year-old split, it seems appropriate to limit the research to those two particular groups, and to include other examples only as necessary. I believe that such an approach will make it possible to address the universal need found throughout the Christian Church, regardless of denominational or geographic boundaries.

Introduction

There is a practical view of artwork that sees it primarily as a tool of communication, rather than one of pure expression or pure form. John Newport states, “An artist is a communicator who captures a small part of human experience in an attempt to express the greater part.”¹ As an illustrator, I tend to relate to this viewpoint more easily than to others. While expressionism and formalism have their merits in the narrative of art, the works that affect our being most deeply are those that stimulate a dialogue with truth, that is, that bridge the visible to the invisible. This has been the goal of sacred art for as long as art has existed—to provide a glimpse of divine truth. As a Christian, I find in much ecumenical art the answers to questions that other great artists have only dared to ask. If an illustrator—or any artist—was to aspire to real greatness, he might consider attempting to communicate the grandest, most awe-inspiring, divine truths that mankind can be even dimly aware of.

That worthy territory has been charted by innumerable artists. A casual overview of the history of art in Western culture will doubtless reveal so much sacred art that one could easily imagine that Christianity has always had a symbiotic relationship with art—and moreover, that it always will. But such is not the case. There were periods in the Church’s history when art was to a great extent limited to scratching on walls; at other times, art within the church faced removal or destruction by zealous Iconoclasts. Even now, if one were to visit at random a dozen churches built in the United States within the last sixty years, it might be tempting to draw the conclusion that we can get along just fine without art in our churches. Such contrasts between artistic affluence and

¹ John P. Newport, *Theology and Contemporary Art Forms* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1971), 14.

visual poverty beg the question, “Does the Church need artwork?” Ultimately, we realize that artwork in the Church is not necessary, in the same way that the liturgy and a worship structure are not necessary. But there is a theological sense in which they are necessary. We recognize from Scripture that good works are not necessary for salvation,² and yet without them faith is dead.³ Is it possible that artwork in the church is like those “fruits” of faith—at once unnecessary and yet vitally necessary? But there are still other views brought into the discussion. The command, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth”⁴ appears, in some translations, to forbid representational art of any kind. In contrast, God directly instructed the use of decorative, symbolic, and functional artwork in his tabernacle and later in Solomon’s temple.⁵ There is also the argument that Jesus spoke in parables—that is, in “picture” language—which suggests that earthly pictures can help us to understand things of a spiritual nature. If Jesus thought that parables were necessary for teaching his disciples in a primarily oral culture, it would appear that in an increasingly visual culture, sacred artwork would be a necessity.

But this discussion, enacted throughout history, is made moot by the fact that every person living in the United States today has grown up in an environment overshadowed by Modernism. We often admit to hating it, but we know little else beside it. Even though Modernism as an artistic movement became extinct more than four decades ago, its aesthetic has certainly not died—it was only assimilated into the Postmodern. Modernism still surrounds us entirely, and will likely continue to do so for many decades to come. According to Marshall McLuhan, the nature of environments is that they are invisible to those who are living in it—in the same way that a fish

² Rom. 4:4-6 (NIV). All following biblical citations are in NIV 1984 unless otherwise noted.

³ James 2:17; Matt. 7:19.

⁴ Exod. 20:4 (NKJV).

⁵ Exod. 25:1 ff.; 1 Chron. 28:11-12.

does not perceive water until it is beached.⁶ Therefore, I could not become fully aware of the bleakness of my liturgical surroundings each Sunday until I had been removed from my environment. After a survey of art history class thrust me bodily into the cathedrals of Italy, an overwhelming lack was revealed in the churches of my youth.

Further study revealed that this lack extends throughout Western culture. Not only has Modernism inspired the construction of new churches of remarkable sterility and ugliness, but it has also seen fit to remodel churches from centuries past. More often than not, the clergy have been complacent (even enthusiastic) about the new regime in artistic taste, and the laity often follow. Modernism thus imposes its aesthetic on our architecture, art, and even our subconscious by saturating our environment with its forms. Historically, Christian liturgical art has been rooted in a rich and meaningful tradition. But the Modernist movement in art has not only resulted in an unprecedented secular iconoclasm, but has also created an environment that is aesthetically and philosophically resistant to the creation of liturgical artwork in any traditional sense. If Christian clergy and laymen are not educated as to the function and value of good liturgical art, and do not facilitate its revival, it may soon disappear from our places of worship. Therefore, in addition to showing that Modernism has damaged liturgical art, I intend to suggest the means to repair it. This thesis will support such a revival in two ways: first, by establishing criteria by which good liturgical art may be distinguished from bad art; second, by setting an example. This entails an experiment on my part—to plan, design, and propose an altar painting to the congregation of a local church.

⁶ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore. *War and Peace in the Global Village* (Corte Madera, CA: Ginko Press, 2001), 175.

Art Rooted in Liturgy

Before thoroughly examining liturgical art, we must first know what it is. In a broad sense, *liturgical* refers to anything pertaining to the rite of worship. This may include the architecture of the church itself, its ornamentation, altar, vestments, candles, incense, tapestries, and other objects—all of which play some role in the divine worship service.⁷ Because the function of Christian liturgical art is directly tied to divine worship, it therefore shares in the same high purpose—that is, to focus the worshipper on God’s gracious interaction with mankind.⁸ Liturgical art also draws on the same vast history of Christian worship for its aesthetic and significance. It is therefore fitting to examine the traditions and theologies that played a role in the formation of liturgical art. It is also necessary that a discussion on liturgical art be informed by its past, since we must be able to determine the trajectory it has taken to the present in order to judge its validity today.

In its infancy, Christian worship in the first century would have been similar in many ways to that of its Hebrew counterpart, and would have entailed reading from the Scriptures, singing psalms, and praying.⁹ We know from the New Testament that many of the first Christians gathered and taught in the Jewish synagogues, as was Jesus’s custom. When hostility toward the Christians finally forced them out of the synagogues, they gathered in the homes of those who had rooms large enough to host a gathering. The act of worship in the first and second centuries did not follow any particular form or liturgy, but was highly participatory and intimate—akin to a family

⁷ This is not to say that all works of liturgical art are of equal importance. The role of certain objects in the liturgy is unmistakably greater than that of others; for the purposes of this paper, attention will be given to the works of most importance.

⁸ Anton Henze and Theodor Filthaut, *Contemporary Church Art* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956), 50.

⁹ Allan Doig, *Liturgy and Architecture: The Early Church to the Middle Ages* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 2.

gathering.¹⁰ Artwork in the apostolic period was sparse or non-existent. In contrast to the opulent visual culture of the pagan deities, the first Christians were conscious to avoid imagery¹¹ (although it was not forbidden). And since these same Christians were living in constant expectation of the Second Coming, they must have considered artistic endeavors somewhat empty.¹² Eventually some of the house-churches were internally modified into more permanent worship facilities, but there was no architectural form, as such.¹³ By the time the Christian Church was large enough to merit the construction of its own worship facilities, state persecutions drove it into secrecy. The oldest surviving Christian artwork dates to the third century. An excellent example is the baptistry in the house-church at Dura Europos, which portrays biblical scenes such as the fall into sin, David and Goliath, and Jesus as the Good Shepherd, as well as representations of the sacraments (fig. 1). Allan Doig notes that the frescoes were not mere decorations—but were symbolically related to the rite of baptism that would have processed through the modified house.¹⁴ The frescos naturally may have served as a kind of “visual catechism.” Thus we see that art in the early Church planted its roots in the rite of worship.

By the fourth century, artwork and architecture in the church grew to proliferation. Constantine’s sanction of Christianity brought worship back into the open. The newly affluent Church patronized the arts, supporting its growth within the church. Narrative scenes from Jesus’s life decorated the walls of churches and baptisteries (but with the notable absence of the crucifixion, until the fifth century). Art was occasionally employed to teach correct doctrine and combat heresy. The Orthodox Baptistry in Ravenna contains a mosaic of the baptism of Christ in which the figure of

¹⁰ Doig, 4.

¹¹ Walter Nathan, *Art and the Message of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 45.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Doig, 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., 13-15.

Christ is depicted nude and haloed (fig. 2). This was a conscious attempt to portray Jesus as true God and true man, as confessed in the Nicene Creed, and in contrast to Gnostic teaching.¹⁵ In architecture, the plan of the church took on two major forms: the rectangular basilica in the West, and the central plan (often domed) church in the East. The basilica consisted of a long nave, two side aisles, and an apse—where the single altar was located. In churches that did not have a separate baptistry, the font was most often found at the entrance to the nave, retaining the Roman tradition of keeping the water source in the atrium of the house—but also symbolizing the believer’s entrance into God’s family through baptism. Meanwhile, the iconography of the church was actively growing. Sometimes borrowing from New Testament imagery and sometimes from Greek and Roman mythology, symbols like the lamb, the *alpha* and *omega*, the *chi-rho*, and the phoenix and peacock appeared in church decoration.¹⁶ These symbols represented Christ’s sacrifice, his godhead, his kingship, and his resurrection, respectively. It is thus apparent that art in the church quickly surpassed mere decoration (if it was ever viewed as such) and became a tool for meaningful communication.

Dissenting Views: The Iconoclasts

While historically the Church has nurtured a high respect for art within her worship spaces, there existed periods of time when the believer’s relationship with sacred images was so reverent as to resemble idolatry. In such cases, the iconoclasts saw it as their duty to rid the Church of anything that would distract the believer from the only thing deserving of their devotion—that is, God

¹⁵ Gnostics believed, among other things, that Jesus was not a flesh-and-blood human being, but was a phantasm (the Apostle Paul addressed this heresy in Phil. 2:5-11). Depicting Jesus nude was a simple way of showing his humanity.

¹⁶ R. Kevin Seasoltz, *A Sense of the Sacred: Theological Foundations of Christian Architecture and Art* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 112.

himself. Throughout history, we see something like a huge pendulum slowly swinging between artistic excess and extreme lack. In keeping with Paul's admonition about Christian freedom,¹⁷ the Church should attempt to steer a course of moderation between the two—promoting those things that are spiritually constructive and avoiding those that are superfluous, distracting, or idolatrous. But the action-reaction nature of history often prevents this approach from seeing due success.

The first notable instance of image destruction was the Byzantine Iconoclasm, which had wide-ranging and long-lasting effects. The issue centered on the treatment of religious images, and was partially fueled by a Western misunderstanding of practice in the Eastern Church.¹⁸ The controversy first manifested in 726, when the Byzantine emperor Leo III ordered the removal of prominent images of Christ, and later forbade the veneration of any sacred images. Leo's successors maintained this period of iconoclasm until late in the eighth century, despite popular opposition. The Eastern Church was mainly concerned about the correct representation of God; the Iconoclasts claimed that any depiction of Christ could only show one of his natures (human or divine), but not both, and were thus blasphemous. Other Iconoclasts simply saw icons as idolatrous violations of the Second Commandment. The Iconophiles (or Iconodules) held the opposite view—that anything that showed the likeness of the subject shared in the very substance of the subject.¹⁹ The Iconophiles therefore believed that any honor given an image of Christ was received by the prototype—that is, Christ himself—and not the image. In the West, some understood this to mean that worshipping an image was the same as worshipping God, and so the controversy took on many complex facets. The

¹⁷ "Everything is permissible—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive" (1 Cor. 10:23).

¹⁸ Anne McClanan and Jeff Johnson, eds., *Negating the Image: Case Studies in Iconoclasm*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 98.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

Iconophiles, however, maintained that images were not only allowable, but were even necessary.

The *Horos* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Second Council of Nicaea) states,

We preserve all the traditions of the Church, which for our sake have been decreed in written or unwritten form, without introducing an innovation. One of these traditions is the making of iconographic representations—being in accordance with the proclamation of the gospel—for the purpose of ascertaining the incarnation of God the Word ... and for being of an equal benefit to us as the gospel narrative. For those which point mutually to each other undoubtedly mutually signify each other.²⁰

It is noteworthy that the Council placed images based on God's Word on a plane of equal benefit with the Word itself.²¹ After a brief restoration of images under the empress Eirene in 787, a second period of iconoclasm followed. The matter was finally resolved in 843, after nearly 120 years of conflict, when the empress Theodora allowed images to resume their role in worship.

Building Liturgical Spaces

The Romanesque period brought a notable change in architecture from the early medieval times: a transept was often added to the simple rectangle of the basilica, forming a cross-shaped floor plan. Judging alone by the arrangement of side rooms and chapels often found clustered on the exterior of the churches, it is clear that architectural changes were dictated by interior worship needs, and not necessarily by external aesthetics. For instance, the transept supplied a permanent location for the choir, whose role in the rite of worship was becoming increasingly vital. The church building itself had become more robust and castle-like, acting as a metaphorical fortress against the evils of the world. Its round arches and barrel vaults called to mind the order and authority of Rome; it conveyed a message that there was no salvation outside of the Catholic Church. A moralizing

²⁰ *Horos* of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, quoted in McClanan and Johnson, 100.

²¹ While this is a significant development regarding liturgical artwork, it is not necessarily Scriptural. Moreover, Theodulf of Orleans argued that language can express in words what painters cannot. It is logical, however, that an image that references God's Word is therefore more effective than an image that does not.

theology dominated much of the supporting artwork; the tympanum over the church doors often depicted Christ as Judge bringing the righteous to paradise, while the wicked were cast into the jaws of eternal torment. The tympanum at the Abbey of Sainte-Foy, Conques (fig. 3), also calls the worshipper to make prayers to the saint in order to be released from one's sins.²² The radiating side chapels in many Romanesque churches that were dedicated to saints and martyrs housed their relics and encouraged pilgrimage and veneration. But amidst depictions of pious saints and wrathful judgment there were delightful glimpses of artistic and spiritual insight in which scenes from the Old Testament are juxtaposed against those of the New Testament, such that both take on new meaning.²³ By these examples and numerous others, we can see that the artwork of the church was involved in actively promoting its theology.

If the architecture of the Romanesque sought to realize its theology in terms of an aesthetic, then Gothic architecture achieved this to the fullest. Rather than focus on the power of the church, the Gothic intended to lift the gaze upward to heaven. The spirit of Gothic art might best be described as a contemplation of the otherness of God. Particularly in France, where the style was born, its pointed arches and spires accomplished this other-worldliness, as well as did its use of high, open spaces. Light was utilized as a metaphor for the divine,²⁴ and churches such as Gloucester Cathedral, England, made abundant use of it (fig. 4). Flying buttresses eliminated the need for solid, heavy walls, while providing further elements that pointed skyward. These changes, of course, were not brought about by changes in the liturgy, but by the church's theology and its vision of heavenly beauty.²⁵ The ritual of Mass was becoming an increasingly visual—and

²² Doig, 163.

²³ Seasoltz, 134.

²⁴ Doig, 172.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

decreasingly participatory—experience that centered almost entirely on viewing the Host.²⁶ The congregation was unfortunately rarely made privy to this experience; a carved screen often separated the chancel and choir from the nave. Large, painted crucifixes were suspended in the front of the nave or over the altar, serving as a constant reminder of Christ’s sacrifice. Bishop Durandus of Mende noted, “All things associated with the services, furnishings and vestments of the Church are full of signs and symbols of the divine, and they all overflow with a celestial sweetness by a diligent observer.”²⁷ The whole worship experience, from the architecture to the elaborate priestly vestments and the liturgy itself, conveyed that God was indeed present on earth.

A Liturgical Renaissance

At the turn of the fifteenth century, the quantity of artwork being produced for the church was staggering. Sculptures and paintings filled every niche and corner of the European churches. In Italy, artists were looking back at classical Greek sculpture and architecture in order to reinterpret its language into Christian forms. The Italian Renaissance concerned itself with humanist philosophy over and above theology—and because of this, some of its masterpieces suffer from a lack of genuine spirituality. As Walter Nathan writes, “A realistic style has to be handled with great care or it will diminish the spiritual message of a work of art.”²⁸ He continues, “Enough great examples of the realistic style exist ... to prove that not style or technique alone but the depth and sincerity of the artist’s vision are the decisive factors.”²⁹ Michelangelo’s frescoes in the Sistine Chapel certainly radiate a divine presence, but the scale of the work and the beauty and skill of its execution

²⁶ Seasoltz, 140.

²⁷ Durandus, *Rationale for the Divine Offices* (c. 1292-96), quoted in Doig, 186.

²⁸ Nathan, 85.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 87.

undoubtedly contribute to this presence far more than does any attempt to reveal divine truths. Because of the prevailing humanist and philosophical emphases of the Italian Renaissance, only a fraction of the religious work produced in Italy during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries could be referred to as liturgical.

The Renaissance had an altogether different effect in other parts of Europe, however. While Florence and Rome busied their artists with feats of engineering, divine ratios, and perspective, miracles of liturgical artwork were happening in northern Europe. In the hands of masters like Rogier van der Wyden and Hans Memling, the relatively new liturgical medium of altar painting evolved quickly into a beautiful and effective liturgical tool. Jan van Eyck's altarpiece in Ghent, Belgium is one such example (fig. 5). Christ is enthroned between the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist, and beneath them, martyrs, saints, and peoples from all nations adore the Lamb from Revelation. On the side panels, van Eyck depicts a nude Adam and Eve covering themselves in shame. When the wings are closed, the back of the altarpiece reveals the angel's annunciation to the Virgin Mary, framed by onlooking prophets and the patrons of the work. The panels together tell the whole story of salvation, from the fall of man to final glory in heaven. Triptychs and polyptychs such as this played an important part in worship—not only did they communicate biblical truths in visual terms, but they could be changed for different festivals or seasons of the church year. In this way, supplemented by the liturgy, the life of Christ would be 'reenacted' like a slow-motion drama throughout the year.³⁰

Another notable masterpiece of this variety is Matthias Grünewald's triptych for the monastery of St. Anthony in Isenheim, France (fig. 6). Where van Eyck portrayed regal, pristine beauty, Grünewald gave a shockingly brutal depiction of the crucifixion. Jesus's body is stretched over inky blackness, distorted in agony, and covered with painful wounds. John the Baptist stands

³⁰ Doig, 170; Nathan, 135.

to the right of the cross, pointing to Jesus and saying, "*Illum oportet crescere, me autem minui.*"³¹ Beneath the triptych is a predella showing the burial of Jesus. When the outer panels are opened, they reveal the second set of paintings: the Annunciation, Mary with the infant Jesus attended by angels, and the dramatic resurrection of Jesus, clothed with the sun.

The Reformation Age

In 1517, concern over Roman Catholic doctrine and practice caused a German monk named Martin Luther to call for an open discussion on 95 key talking points, or theses. This small spark set in motion changes that would eventually split the church in half. Built onto the issue of indulgences³² were accusations that the church's veneration of saints and relics was idolatrous. Luther's writings were widely circulated, and soon all of Europe was polarized in theological debate. When it became clear that what he intended as a reform would result in a schism, the issue that concerned Luther primarily was bringing God's Word back to God's people. Over the centuries, the liturgy had evolved into a sacrificial pageant that was enacted by the clergy. The services were conducted in Latin and were unintelligible to the unschooled laity. But the origin of Christian worship and the liturgy had been one of full participation, to ensure that its meaning would be felt by the hearts and minds of the congregation. Christian worship, which was intended to be sacramental, i.e., "God in the service of mankind," had become sacrificial, i.e., "mankind in the service of God."³³ Luther intended to remedy this in several ways: by performing the entire service

³¹ "He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:30).

³² Indulgences were documents that claimed to forgive any and all sins and to grant any soul immediate access to heaven. The documents were sold to fund the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

³³ It is important to note that both of these concepts are essential to Christianity. However, it is made clear in the Bible that while our whole lives are to be enacted as living sacrifices for God (Rom. 12:1), the worship service itself has a *sacramental* focus—through the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, it strengthens faith and grants the forgiveness of sins (Is. 55:10-11, Acts 2:38, Mat. 26:28).

in the vernacular, by removing the portion of the Mass that “smacks of sacrifice,”³⁴ and by involving the congregation in the singing of the liturgy and hymns. This refocusing of the liturgy had a direct effect on liturgical artwork; statues of saints, peripheral altars, and relics were removed from the church—leaving only a single altar to Christ—while crucifixes, clerical vesture, stained glass, and the organ were usually retained. It also called for new, Lutheran artwork to be made. Late medieval churches, which were often compartmentalized, had to be remodeled to fit the new worship needs of the Protestants.³⁵

While some reformers wanted to do away with all things they perceived as being Catholic or papistic, the conservative Protestants maintained an artistic tradition focused on grace and the sacraments. Lucas Cranach the Elder, a close friend of Luther, produced several altar paintings for the Lutheran churches. His triptych for the Wittenberg church shows the Last Supper in the center, framed by an infant Baptism on the left and a confession on the right. Beneath the central panel, the predella shows Luther preaching a sermon and pointing to a crucified Christ. According to Nathan, Cranach’s desire to depict biblical doctrines was so strong that he sometimes cluttered the picture plane with allegorical imagery, compromising clarity and unity for the sake of sermonizing.³⁶ However, Seasoltz makes note of the Protestant understanding that imagery must always be supplemented with verbal instruction, in contrast to earlier medieval practice.³⁷ Thus, artwork became the natural supplement to Christian instruction and worship—rather than a substitute for it.

During the early years of the Lutheran Reformation, there was a second wave of iconoclasm similar to the first—only this time occurring in the Western Church. While Luther personally

³⁴ Timothy F. Lull, ed., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 303.

³⁵ Seasoltz, 173.

³⁶ Nathan, 93-94.

³⁷ Seasoltz, 174.

supported the arts as a worthy means of instructing believers, Andreas Karlstadt, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, and others took a more radical approach. They saw the liturgical trappings of the Church as signs of papistic decadence, invoking the Second Commandment as cause enough for their removal. While the removal of artwork in Protestant provinces was generally carried out peacefully, destructive riots occasionally ensued across Europe between 1523 and 1566. These actions were strongly opposed by the conservative Protestants, who felt that the radical reformers were replacing the oppression of Rome with an equally strict oppression of the opposite persuasion. Luther wrote at length on the topic of Christian freedom, arguing from Scripture that the conscience should not be burdened by a fellow believer's laws and unyielding traditions. "Ceremonies," wrote Luther, "are to be given the same place in the life of a Christian as models and plans have among builders and artisans. They are prepared, not as a permanent structure, but because without them nothing could be built or made."³⁸ But Luther's quarrel with the iconoclasts did not stop at Christian freedom. On the matter of liturgical artwork he wrote,

I know for certain that God desires that one should hear and read his work, and especially the passion of Christ. But if I am to hear and think, then it is impossible for me not to make images of this within my heart, for whether I want to or not, when I hear the word of Christ, there delineates itself in my heart the picture of a man hanging on the cross, just as my face naturally delineates itself on the water when I look into it. If it is not a sin, but a good thing, that I have Christ's image in my heart, why then should it be sinful to have it before my eyes?³⁹

Thus, for Luther, artwork in the Church was not only allowable on the grounds of Christian freedom, but was a good and desirable thing. But sadly, in perhaps the majority of Protestant churches, their focus on the spiritual equality of all believers soon led to a whitewashed aesthetic intended to reflect a church without hierarchy.⁴⁰

³⁸ Lull, 410.

³⁹ Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds., *Iconoclasm: The Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: ZKM Center for Art and Media, 2002), 205.

⁴⁰ Seasoltz, 177.

While the general effect of the Reformation seemed to be a decrease in the quantity of artwork produced in Protestant churches, the Catholic Church intensified its artistic efforts after the Council of Trent in 1563. Michelangelo Caravaggio of Italy was doubtless the most influential painter of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, almost single-handedly inspiring the Baroque style. He brought to ecclesiastical art both a dramatic realism and an intense spirituality that can be attributed to few other artists (although El Greco's paintings were equally spiritual). *The Calling of St. Matthew* in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome, is one of his most famous paintings (fig. 7). In it, Caravaggio shows us the highly charged moment when Jesus calls Levi (Matthew) to be his disciple. Jesus, distinguished only by a tiny sliver of halo, points at Levi as he is counting tax money. Jesus's gaze is traced by the beam of light coming from the window behind him, which draws a line straight to Levi's expression of incredulity. The Savior's pointing hand unmistakably brings to mind Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam" in the Sistine Chapel—announcing with quiet subtlety Jesus's divinity. Above Jesus's head is a window whose cross-braces ominously foreshadow the Lord's crucifixion and Matthew's eventual martyrdom. Like many other works of the period informally known as the Counter-reformation, the St. Matthew sequence focuses on the lives of the saints and establishes Catholicism as the continuation of the grace and authority wielded by the Apostles.

The Birth of the Modern Age

The eighteenth century saw an explosion of diversity within the Christian Church, characterized by the Enlightenment (Rationalism) and the great awakenings that followed it. Influential thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and Thomas Jefferson had reduced the Bible to a series of moral instructions. Their insistence on a separation of church and state also provided the beginnings of a distinctly secular society. However, the promise of religious freedom in America

brought dozens of religious groups, most fleeing oppression by European theocracies. The Methodists, Puritans, Nonconformists, and Reformed were among those emigrants. Some groups, such as the Baptists and Quakers, strictly opposed imagery; their meeting houses were typically plain, whitewashed structures lacking any liturgical furnishings, such as an altar or pulpit. Lutherans, by contrast, typically utilized the contemporary style, but with less ornament and a modified interior space. Since the sermon was usually the focus of the Lutheran service, the pulpit took a prominent position. The baptismal font was moved from its traditional place at the back of the nave to the front, near the altar, so that baptisms could be viewed by the congregation as part of the liturgy.⁴¹ In the early days of religious settlements in America, church architecture was limited to simple designs and local materials, contributing to a modest style. But as the United States grew more prosperous, many churches would reflect that change in their construction.

By the nineteenth century, industrialization on a large scale was beginning to have a polarizing effect on religion. While Anton Henze characterizes the century as one of superficiality, Edward Norman finds “genuine religious fervor,” evidenced by the great number of churches built during that century, as well as its “vigorous missionary activity.”⁴² It is likely that both were present. The moralizing rationalism of the Enlightenment, scientific criticism, and an increasingly horrific industrial landscape drove many Christians to find comfort in an attractive alternative—Romanticism.⁴³ The deep spirituality of sacred art was frequently replaced by biblical sentimentality, which many found in the Nazarene painters and their successors. Lithograph prints proved to be a commercially lucrative endeavor as enamored Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox churches supplied

⁴¹ Seasoltz, 182.

⁴² Henze and Filthaut, 15; Edward Norman, *The House of God: Church Architecture, Style, and History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 252.

⁴³ John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art, and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 63; Norman, 252.

a steady demand for them. In opposition to the romanticism of the Nazarenes, the Neoclassicists were breeding a new strain of secular philosopher-artists totally uninterested in the Church and her edification. Historicism took the place of the living tradition, exemplified in Greek and especially Gothic Revival architecture in Europe and North America. In addition, liturgical painting and sculpture ceased to make any significant advances; in fact, it became increasingly scarce, and what remained regressed into spiritual stagnation and kitsch.⁴⁴

It is vital to note that the abandonment of liturgical art most often went hand-in-hand with the trend away from liturgical worship. Thus, while there were still artists making Christian artwork of quality (Holman-Hunt, Delacroix, Daumier), the church was generally not interested in encouraging them or commissioning art for worship.⁴⁵ Non-liturgical churches saw no need for art. Furthermore, the church could no longer trust artists who had an increasingly secular agenda. The gap between the church and artist grew wider as its perceived needs for artwork lessened. By the end of the nineteenth century, Impressionism had finally broken the cycle of stagnant repetition—but unfortunately the torch that had been dropped by the church was picked up by artists who were interested only in “art for art’s sake.”

The New Iconoclasm

Once the world had gotten over the initial shock of Impressionist painting, its freshness whetted the appetites of the avant-garde for undiscovered territories. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Cubists advanced the geometric qualities they found in Cézannes’ work until the subject became so fragmented that it was unrecognizable as such. Barely a decade after

⁴⁴ Nathan, 113.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 115.

Cézanne, painters and critics were already declaring “the end of painting.”⁴⁶ But others went further still. Dadaists, Futurists, minimalists, and abstract expressionists each shared a role in redefining art as a reaction against representationalism. Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto, while extreme, reveals the iconoclastic impulses lurking at the core of Modernism: “Come on! Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums! ... Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discoloured and shredded! ... Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!”⁴⁷ But rather than encouraging a literal destruction of past works, other Modernists were more subtle. In his controversial essay, “Modernist Painting,” Clement Greenberg argued that the only way for art to prove its worth was to rid itself of the subject; it could no longer rely on anything outside of itself for justification.⁴⁸ If true, this would obviously negate the validity of any kind of sacred or liturgical art.

But the subject was not the only casualty of Modernist art. The concept of art as communication was consciously abandoned in favor of art as experience—the experience of the viewer coming into contact with the work of art. Ornament also fell by the wayside; the Bauhaus school accomplished in architecture what minimalism had done to painting and sculpture. The International Style reduced structure to the terms of its function; decoration was prohibited, and aesthetics gave way to a cold, geometric utilitarianism. Modernism set itself up as the counter-religion, replacing images of the divine with the artist’s psyche, and faith with “transcendence.”⁴⁹ As Barnett Newman writes, “Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or *life*, we are making

⁴⁶ Latour and Weibel, 611.

⁴⁷ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909), quoted in Michael Darling, *Target Practice: Painting Under Attack, 1949-78* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2009), 130.

⁴⁸ Clement Greenberg, *Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 87.

⁴⁹ Sigurd Bergmann, *Architecture, Aesth/ethics & Religion* (London: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2005), 35.

them out of ourselves, out of our own feelings.”⁵⁰ Greenberg, like many other Modernist critics, saw religion as a relic of the past. “We know what has happened to an activity like religion, which could not avail itself of Kantian, immanent, criticism in order to justify itself.”⁵¹ Religion, which had been the primary creative force in art for millennia, was ignored by the Modernists as something that was already in its death throes.

This new breed of narcissistic, self-reflexive, self-critiquing art had rid itself of a connection to its artistic past, and therefore, of standards of beauty or meaningfulness. It had replaced the subject with the medium itself, reducing “beauty of form” to formalism. Without context against which one could measure a work’s value or success, art was bound to collapse on itself, causing many critics to throw up their hands and announce “the end of art.”⁵² Peter Weibel more accurately describes it as “the suicide of art”—the death of art that the artists themselves called for.⁵³ An iconoclasm of this nature was completely unprecedented in the history of art, and it had drastic effects on the church.

Modernism and the Church in the Twentieth Century

Contrary to Greenberg’s apparent belief that religion would soon go the way of the dinosaur, Christianity lived on. Its liturgical art, on the other hand, had been limping along since the nineteenth century. Henze points to the failure of nineteenth century church architecture to utilize contemporary materials—iron, concrete, and glass—as a failure to engage in a dialogue with the

⁵⁰ Barnett Newman, “The Sublime is Now,” *Tiger’s Eye*, No. 6 (December 1948): 52-53, quoted in Latour and Weibel, 414.

⁵¹ Greenberg, 85.

⁵² Diarmuid Costello and Jonathan Vickery, eds., *Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Berg, 2007), 115.

⁵³ Latour and Weibel, 611.

modern times.⁵⁴ But this can only get us so far; the message conveyed has always been more important than the medium that conveys it. Furthermore, past works of sacred art were not considered great because they were supremely contemporary (and they often were), but because they surpassed their immediate context to become universal. And since the gospel has not changed in the slightest since the moment it was first uttered (nor is the human condition fundamentally different), there is no reason to suppose that the collapse of ecumenical art began in something so trivial as building materials or outward aesthetic. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) pointed to a mutual divorce of culture from faith as the cause of the present lack in sacred art:

Contemporary culture turned away from the faith and trod another path, so that faith took flight in historicism, the copying of the past, or else attempted to compromise or lost itself in resignation and cultural abstinence. The last of these led to a new iconoclasm... The destruction of images, the first signs of which reach back to the 1920s, eliminated a lot of kitsch and unworthy art, but ultimately it left a void, the wretchedness of which we are now experiencing in a truly acute way.⁵⁵

Opinions as to whether Modernist structures, paintings, and sculpture have artistic or aesthetic merit vary to any degree, but within the Church the question takes on a significance that supercedes matters of taste. Can Modernism serve the liturgy? Henze believes that it can—after all, “past ages always built their churches in the style of their own time. ... They developed organically out of the forms that preceded them, according to the laws valid at any period.”⁵⁶ He argues that since church art has always been “modern,” it should not recoil from the aesthetic presented by Modernism. While this is partly true, Henze’s position ignores an important fact: before the modern era, the church had developed its own architecture and artistic styles according to its internal worship needs. There was no real distinction between church and state, sacred and secular, in the

⁵⁴ Henze and Filthaut, 42.

⁵⁵ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Translated by John Saward (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2000), 130.

⁵⁶ Henze and Filthaut, 42.

lives of late medieval Christians. But in the twentieth century, the church found itself in an altogether unique situation—that of choosing between a secular artwork that was not its own, and recycling. The third choice, reforging its own aesthetic, either did not occur to anyone or the church did not have the motivation to carry it out. Regardless, many of the churches built in the twentieth century began to adopt the new, secular style in an attempt to fill the needs of a modern culture. Worship had not been conducted in aesthetically “secular” structures since the early days of the Church—and only then because building its own churches was not an option. What was the fundamental difference between the early Church and the church of the twentieth century? Artist James Langley sees the church’s outward aesthetic as a reflection of an inward, spiritual crisis: “The artless and utilitarian character of objects associated with worship ... not only reflects poorly upon the willingness of [Christians] to form culture in a manner consistent with the Gospel we preach, but it demonstrates a crisis of faith.”⁵⁷ He further defines this crisis as the inability of “bad art” to “bear full witness to an authentic encounter with Christ.”⁵⁸

In Europe, this crisis of faith would be made apparent as it began to rebuild churches that were destroyed in the Second World War. St. Michael’s Cathedral in Coventry, England is the quintessential example of faith in conflict with aesthetic (fig. 8). The original Gothic cathedral was bombed in 1940, and plans to rebuild it began shortly thereafter. A contest was announced for the design of the new building in 1951, and Basil Spence was subsequently selected to be its architect. After many design changes and substantial controversy, the cathedral was completed in 1962. It was at first hugely popular; the public adored its strikingly modern design and exquisite craftsmanship, as well as its situation among the skeletal ruins of the old cathedral. But by the 1970s, public and

⁵⁷ Benjamin D. Wiker, “The Redemption of Catholic Art,” *Catholic Culture* (November 2005), <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=6853&repos=1&subrepos=0&searchid=443948> (accessed January 16, 2011), under “Salt without savor?”

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, under “How does bad art point to a crisis of faith?”

critical opinion had nearly reversed. It seemed dated, even hideous, to many viewers, while critics dismissed it as anachronistic.⁵⁹ By the 1990s, the new cathedral received fewer visitors than the old ones.⁶⁰ Louise Campbell suggests that part of the cathedral's failure to live up to expectations may be due to its ambivalent status between sacred and secular architecture. "Although a religious building, the cathedral was paid for out of government funds and its design was selected by a panel of laymen, with whose ideas the clergy had to comply. The character of this patronage was to have considerable influence on both the development of the design, and perceptions of its function."⁶¹ A church that serves a confused function obviously risks failure as a worship space, regardless of how well it is planned or crafted. Such was the case with the Coventry Cathedral. In its planning stages, Sir David Eccles wrote,

The Cathedral is not a building that concerns Coventry and Coventry alone. The echo of the bombs which destroyed your city was heard around the world. We cannot tell how many people are waiting in this country and abroad for this church to rise and prove that English traditions live again after the blitz. The threat of far worse destruction is with us today demoralizing and corrupting our thoughts. We have never had a greater need for acts of faith.⁶²

This nostalgic sentiment seems to have outweighed the desire for a functioning space of Christian worship, perhaps evidenced by the bronze phoenix on the high altar in place of a crucifix, or the lump of scrap metal that serves as a cross on the spire. It was as much a national war memorial as it was a church. It thus failed to cultivate the aforementioned "authentic encounter with Christ."

Conflicts of interest were not limited to Coventry Cathedral—they were inherent in Modernist ecumenical architecture. Every church that was built in the Modern style was ostensibly a

⁵⁹ Louise Campbell, *Coventry Cathedral: Art and Architecture in Post-War Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1-2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶² "Coventry Cathedral: Minister's Reasons for Issuing a Building Licence," *Builder* (April 1954): 756, quoted in Campbell, 139.

temple to the artist's ego, as Newman suggested.⁶³ After all, how could a secular artist ever have the spiritual well-being of the body of believers at heart? To an artist who has not tasted the crushing bitterness of the law and the sweetness of the saving gospel, there exists nothing more sublime than his own fleeting emotions. Furthermore, how could a style intent on overwriting past conceptions of art and spirituality ever produce artwork that glorifies God? And finally, should we ignore the many Christians who are offended by the ugliness embraced by so many churches? These sorts of universal and controversial questions were the focus of Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Mediator Dei*, published in 1947:

Recent works of art which lend themselves to the materials of modern composition should not be universally despised and rejected through prejudice. Modern art should be given free scope in the due and reverent service of the church and the sacred rites, provided that they preserve a correct balance between styles tending neither to extreme realism nor to excessive symbolism, and that the needs of the Christian community are taken into consideration, rather than the particular taste or talent of the individual artist. ... Nevertheless, in keeping with the duties of our office, we cannot help deploring and condemning those works of art, recently introduced by some, which seem to be a distortion and perversion of true art and which at times openly shock Christian taste, modesty and devotion, and shamefully offend true religious sense. These must be entirely excluded and banished from our churches, like anything else that is not in keeping with the sanctity of the place.⁶⁴

This bears similarities to Luther's admonitions in regard to Christian freedom and the Protestant Iconoclasm of four centuries before—namely, that Christian freedom should be allowed its course, but that a path of moderation should always be preferred in order to avoid offending the faith of others.⁶⁵ The key issue is that liturgical art must be placed in the service of the Church, keeping in mind the needs of the Christian community. But as we have already seen, Modernism does not appear to have been capable of doing this; the artist cannot serve his own internal tastes and the needs of the Communion of Saints at the same time.

⁶³ Latour and Weibel, 414.

⁶⁴ Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, (1947), quoted in Henze and Filthaut, 12.

⁶⁵ Lull, 409.

But some would argue that focusing only on the theological issues oversimplifies the matter. Increased construction costs and wages are at least partially to blame for the modern preference for “pure design” when constructing churches.⁶⁶ Art is costly, after all, and ultimately unnecessary. Does it not make more sense that we therefore spend our resources on more important ends, like outreach and mission work? Art and beauty are therefore delegated to the realm of luxury.⁶⁷ Langley addresses this viewpoint by alluding to an analogous account from the gospels:

Adding to this is a kind of ingrained cultural utilitarianism that is offended—much like Judas!—by what it perceives as the “conspicuous waste” represented by the investment in a higher standard of sacred art for the Church. They believe they are taking the moral high road by saying, “It could have been spent on the needy!” We must never forget that [Christian] art, architecture, and music are all, in their own way, that precious perfume poured out by Mary, sister of Lazarus, upon the head of Jesus.⁶⁸

That “ingrained cultural utilitarianism,” compounded with a miserly attitude towards the arts makes the future of liturgical art an uncertain one. Lavanoux warns, “The danger now lies in the fact that certain clichés of the present may take the place of the imitations of recent decades. The architects who liberated us from the shackles of past aberrations have now acquired their imitators among those who chronically imitate—owing to lack of ability, timidity and want of conviction—and never themselves invent.”⁶⁹ The implication is that unless we set forth good examples of new liturgical art, we can expect more of the same sterility for decades to come. But Lavanoux offers an additional suggestion: “Instead of inveighing against the hopes of artists who wish for nothing more than to devote their God-given talents to the creation of that beauty which we all wish to see in the

⁶⁶ Henze and Filthaut, 9.

⁶⁷ Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *The New Tower of Babel: Modern Man’s Flight from God* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1994), 160.

⁶⁸ Wiker, under “Salt without savor?”

⁶⁹ Henze and Filthaut, 11.

House of God, it might be wiser to concentrate our efforts on the elimination of the trash that clutters so many of our churches.”⁷⁰

Making Proper Distinctions

If this “cleansing of the temple” is to be accomplished, then the first task at hand is to properly distinguish between what is “trash” and what is good and wholesome liturgical artwork. In the Church, this distinction cannot be delegated to personal tastes—rather, the Church should lay out guidelines for that art that may best suit its purposes. These should not be viewed as unbending laws, but as a litmus test to judge the quality of artwork in the church. In order to judge the worth of a church or any structure, one should consider three main aspects: its foundation, its purpose, and its standard of beauty. We can likewise examine any work of liturgical art by the same three criteria. The foundation is the first consideration; it determines to a great extent the strength and permanence of a work of art. The second consideration, purpose, determines whether the work can perform its intended role in the rite of worship. And finally, considering the beauty of a work will determine whether or not it is worthy of its role in divine worship.

We must be clear, however, that *beauty* here does not refer to a subjective response to a work of art (which allows even garbage to be considered beautiful by someone), but rather an objective “beauty of form” as perceived by the senses and as realized by the soul.⁷¹ This beauty does not reside in sensory data, but in the object itself, reflecting the genius and care of its creator.⁷² Thus, something that is beautiful is not just lovely to behold (or to hear), but provides a glimpse of the Creator. But because this beauty is realized inwardly, there exists the possibility that a painting or

⁷⁰ Henze and Filthaut, 11-12.

⁷¹ Von Hildebrand, 159-60, 165; Wiker, under “What criteria should guide the artist in this task?”

⁷² Von Hildebrand, 166.

work of art may possess a concealed beauty that is apparent to the soul, but not to the eye. Matthias Grünewald's triptych in Isenheim could be such an example. Though horrific to behold, it derives its beauty from the message of the gospel. As John De Gruchy writes, "There can be no redemption without beauty's descent into hell."⁷³ Thus, the ugliness of Christ's suffering and death becomes all the more beautiful in light of the redemption and Resurrection. Such beauty realizes its sacramental purpose—to reflect the salvation of man enacted in history.⁷⁴ A more in-depth dialogue on beauty is not within the scope of this paper, but this glimpse at the complexity of beauty will hopefully suffice to dissolve shallow conceptions of beauty as a matter of subjective opinion.

Since it is necessary to level the derelict ruins before a new structure can be built in its place, let us first examine the "bad" art. Let us apply the aforementioned criteria, beginning with the foundation. For reasons previously mentioned, liturgical art that comes out of the Modernist tradition (if the reader will forgive an oxymoron) has no foundation to speak of. Its tendency toward abstraction and "purity" unwittingly participates in the new iconoclasm, distancing itself from a wealth of past sacred art.⁷⁵ It seeks to root itself in a self-defined aesthetic—an internal integrity—apart from tradition.⁷⁶ It is therefore no surprise that without a foundation, liturgical works of a distinctly Modern ilk have the same tendency to fall quickly out of style as the secular works they imitate. It is not a matter of coincidence that Sant'Apollinare in Classe, Italy, is still as pleasing now

⁷³ De Gruchy, 101.

⁷⁴ Ratzinger, 132.

⁷⁵ Some may claim that because Modern liturgical art employs traditional artistic vehicles (a worship structure, sculpture, painting, vestments, etc.), it is therefore rooted in the same liturgical tradition. But if that was true, then Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* would belong to the same tradition as Caravaggio's *Supper at Emmaus*, since both utilize oil paint on a rectangular canvas. But the clear iconoclastic message of *Black Square* prohibits us from making such a naïve assumption.

⁷⁶ Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, Translated by Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 344.

as it was almost 1,500 years ago (fig. 9); or that Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, France appears so distasteful after little more than 50 years (fig. 10).

As for the purpose of Modern liturgical works, Massimiliano Fuksas's church in Foligno, Italy, exemplifies a typical conflict of purpose, though more blatant than most in its manifestation (fig. 11). The experimentation that contemporary designers often encourage is always conducted at the cost of the congregation.⁷⁷ For such designers, art is typically independent of any moral force or higher purpose.⁷⁸ Thus, the artist's ego or vision tends to have a larger hand in the final product than does the clergy or congregation, and as a result, the work draws attention to the uniqueness of its design rather than to God. Such was also the case with St. Michael's in Coventry. At best, such works suffer from a split-personality syndrome; at worst, they offend the faithful and fail altogether. Furthermore, utilitarianism, a leading influence of the Modern aesthetic, is not in keeping with the spirit of the gospel.⁷⁹ If the purpose of a work of liturgical art is either unclear or exists in clear contradiction with the purpose of worship, it is a failure and should not be utilized by the church.

Finally, we must consider such works against a standard of beauty. Modernist liturgical works fail the beauty test on all but the most primitive levels. Some works may boast of a beauty of simplicity in the same way that a circle is beautiful, but they often hint at nothing beyond themselves, and thus do not fulfill our liturgical standards of beauty.⁸⁰ (Granted, some works of art within the church are better suited to simplistic beauty than others—for instance, candlesticks or the chalice will not significantly suffer from simplicity, whereas an altarpiece or the church as a whole

⁷⁷ A number of churches-in-the-round have been designed in recent decades, claiming to better represent the relationship between God and the community of believers. Whether they accomplish this or not, they fail as worship spaces when the congregation is forced to stare at the clergy's backs.

⁷⁸ De Gruchy, 82, 178. It is true that some contemporary architects see their craft as a medium for moral social change. But because this is not the purpose of Christianity either, it represents further conflicts of interest.

⁷⁹ Von Hildebrand, 161-62.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 166, 168.

require a higher standard of beauty.) The overly symbolic, abstracted nature of many contemporary sacred works compromises beauty of form and reduces their ability to communicate a relationship with the divine. This was demonstrated in Germaine Richier's bronze "crucifix" in Assy (fig. 12), which was removed because of the outcry that it was "monstrous" and "Satanic."⁸¹ Because of its ugliness, it not only failed to communicate its intended message, but repulsed worshippers. Therefore we see that beauty of form is intrinsically linked with the artwork's purpose in the context of the liturgy.

What, then, is the place of the "modern" in liturgical art? The tone of this paper so far might lead the reader to believe that "modern" and "contemporary" are inherently bad when referring to artwork in the church. In truth, if that was the case, then I could not hope for my own artwork to ever find its way into the church—and this thesis would be nothing more than my articulated frustrations. However, the artists of today have every right and responsibility to join their voices "to that wonderful choir of praise to which have contributed, in honor of the [Christian] faith, the greatest artists throughout the centuries," as wrote Pope Pius XII.⁸² In order to do this, the artist must be able to subordinate his vision to the needs of the Church. It is certainly possible for contemporary artists to attain this. But, according to Langley, it should be evident by now "that the possibilities for modernist idioms are extremely limited if not antithetical to faith."⁸³ If a revival of liturgical art is possible, then we must find good art in order to replace the bad.

What is good liturgical art? Following the same criteria as was applied to the bad, good liturgical art must first have a solid foundation. The liturgical tradition is almost as old as Christian worship, and nearly 2,000 years of spiritual insight has helped shape it. But a work of modern vision

⁸¹ Besançon, 272. Richier's atheism was likely another contributing factor to the artworks' initial rejection.

⁸² Pope Pius XII, *Mediator Dei*, (1947), quoted in Henze and Filthaut, 12.

⁸³ Wiker, under "Should the Church then simply reject modern art?"

need not follow, as a template, any of the church's past forms in order to share in their rich worth. Past forms were not meant to be rigid standards. They were, as Lavanoux describes, part of a living tradition of art. He writes, "Our task is not so much to pay homage to a hollow concept of tradition as it is to seek a link with authentic tradition, and that means seeking a living art. Such a point of view implies an art based on universal values; in a way, we can say a *timeless* art."⁸⁴ Thomas Gordon Smith is a modern architect seeking to reestablish a link with that living Christian tradition:

We need not passively accept what our recent ancestors have dictated. If we apply what the Roman architect Vitruvius called "lively mental energy," we can innovatively contradict the prevailing orthodoxy of abstraction and revive over two millennia of tradition. ... Since I began to study architecture formally in 1972, and in my professional and academic life since, my objective has been to break through the barriers that have been set up by modernists to make our forebears seem inaccessible.⁸⁵

Smith's design for the Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary in Denton, Nebraska, accomplished this in a fresh interpretation of the Romanesque style (fig 13). The natural value of such a link with tradition is that the worshipper becomes aware of the permanence and continuity of the Christian Church, and recognizes his own place in it.⁸⁶ It connects him to the Christians of ages past, just as singing one of St. Ambrose's hymns connects him to the church of the fourth century.

Good liturgical art, by definition, must be united in purpose with the liturgy. Luther defines the liturgy as almost wholly sacramental, centered on the proclamation of grace through Word and Sacrament.⁸⁷ It would follow, then, that liturgical art should also focus on those means of grace.

Cardinal Ratzinger writes something to the same effect:

⁸⁴ Henze and Filthaut, 10.

⁸⁵ Thomas Gordon Smith, "Reconnecting With Tradition," *Sursum Corda* (Fall 1998), quoted in Denis McNamara, "Lively Mental Energy" *Sacred Architecture* 18 (Fall 2010): 20.

⁸⁶ Nathan, 128.

⁸⁷ Robin A. Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 176.

The images of the history of God in relation to man do not merely illustrate the succession of past events but display the inner unity of God's action. In this way they have a reference to the sacraments, above all, to Baptism and the Eucharist, and, in pointing to the sacraments, they are contained within them. Images thus point to a presence; they are essentially connected with what happens in the liturgy. Now history becomes sacrament in Christ, who is the source of the Sacraments.⁸⁸

Catholics and Protestants alike ostensibly agree that liturgical artwork is not so much a sacrificial act of the artist as a means to communicate God's grace to mankind. We should therefore focus our liturgical artwork on teaching and proclaiming the gospel of Christ. This can be done in painting, sculpture, and even in architecture.

Finally, we must again examine the place of beauty in contemporary liturgical art. If we have decided that minimalistic, abstracted "beauty" does not embody the higher beauty of form we desire in worship, then what does? We have hinted already that beauty in liturgical art is closely tied to the work's purpose, and that the former may magnify the effect of the latter. A beauty of form is transfigured into something higher, something *almost* sacramental, when it draws attention to Christ and the beauty of the redemption—ultimately, it then draws the redeemed closer to God.⁸⁹ Igor Mitoraj created a set of bronze doors for a baptistry in Rome that communicate immense beauty (fig. 14). At once classical and modern, the risen Christ on the door's face bears a void impression of the cross in his body, reminding us that his resurrection gains full significance in his sacrifice on the cross. We understand, again, that not all liturgical works can accomplish a higher kind of theological beauty (if we include the more functional liturgical objects in the discussion). The altar, for instance, probably cannot portray the redemption as explicitly as painting or sculpture can—nor should it, arguably. Each work of liturgical art should strive to cohere to the harmony and beauty of the whole, so that the church becomes greater than the sum of its parts.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ratzinger, 132.

⁸⁹ Von Hildebrand, 172, 174-75.

⁹⁰ Nathan, 127, 134.

Experiments in Liturgical Art

My first introduction to classical liturgical art was in college, in a series of survey of art history classes and a Middle-Age history class. I was hungry for more, though, so I decided to try my hand at making religious paintings. I could not have known that, in a way, I was reenacting a portion of art history. With no concept of a current liturgical style, I began imitating artistic styles as I learned about them in art history—Northern Renaissance, then Baroque—in a kind of one-man neoclassical act. I could not understand why so few artists were painting like Caravaggio anymore. My painting, *Least Among Men*, expressed this, coupled with a desire to communicate a simple, spiritual truth in visual terms (fig. 15). Although I did not conceive of it as a liturgical work, it was an important milestone for me. My last painting completed in college, however, had a clear liturgical intent. After touring Venice, Rome, Florence, Assisi, and other sites in Italy, I knew I wanted to paint something sacred with a commanding presence. *To Prepare a Place for You* was an attempt to convey the scale and iconic presence of a large altarpiece (fig. 16). To my great excitement, the college purchased the painting and gave it a place in the chapel narthex.

After my graduation in 2007, I had the opportunity to illustrate G. F. Handel's famous oratorio, *Messiah*, and this helped me to shed the distinctly Baroque flavor. In many cases, I needed to illustrate a theological expression in simple terms, and with a single image. Because the illustrations would be printed small, they had to convey meaning immediately—thus I could not resort to narrative story telling or sermonizing. I also made a conscious effort to pay homage to the tradition of sacred art and iconography, while still using a fresh visual language (figs. 17-18). The *Messiah* illustrations were intended to serve a devotional purpose, rather than a liturgical one, but I was working out solutions to the same sorts of problems that now face contemporary liturgical artwork.

I had wanted to paint a triptych for some time, but it was only in 2010 that I began to consider making it a reality. I casually proposed the idea to Pastor James Borgwardt of Risen Savior Lutheran Church in Pooler, Georgia, and he seemed very receptive to it. I began brainstorming, sketching up ideas, and making mock-ups. The subject was only partially given; obviously, the central panel would need to be the church's namesake—the risen Savior. The two side panels required more thought. The traditional format of a triptych was often a central crucifixion flanked by patron saints on the left and right. But for many Lutherans, the Reformation has left an ingrained wariness (or hostility) toward depictions of the saints, so I did not consider this an option. Other triptychs depicted the Last Judgment, in which heaven and hell appear to the right and to the left of the enthroned Christ. While it is not inappropriate for a Christian to keep such things in mind, placing it over the altar would inevitably put the focus on the law, rather than on the gospel. I searched for more Christocentric triptychs in the history of the church, and found that they typically showed the crucifixion in the center, the nativity or the annunciation on the left, and the resurrection on the right. They would thus read like a book from left to right, highlighting the important events in Jesus's life: the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the Resurrection. But while this was the most logical choice for a Lutheran church, it would not fit the needs of Risen Savior. Because the resurrection would be depicted in the center, it would scramble the narrative order if the crucifixion were pushed to the right side. I found scant few examples of triptychs that featured the resurrection in the center. The two of greatest note were by Hans Memling and Peter Paul Rubens, but both were flanked by depictions of saints.⁹¹ I needed a unique solution.

⁹¹ Memling's triptych did include the ascension on the right panel; but only Christ's feet were shown.

In the course of illustrating Handel's *Messiah*, I had done a great deal of sketching and brainstorming for the piece, *Since by Man Came Death*.⁹² I thought the best solution would be two illustrations: one showing Adam with the forbidden fruit that brought death, the other showing Christ on the cross with the fountain of life flowing from his pierced side. The duality of St. Paul's description of law and gospel, sin and grace, was so beautiful that it almost pleaded to be depicted as a diptych. But for the purposes of the book, I had to combine the two illustrations into one. When considering subject matter for the triptych, however, the idea to use this passage as "bookends" finally struck me, and I knew I had found the right solution. The visual similarities (color, mood, composition, etc.) between the left and right panels would link the two as a pair, thus clarifying that the triptych was not to be read in the traditional left-to-right chronological manner. To further reinforce the non-narrative approach, I included Mt. Zion running through the background of all three panels, visually tying them together. The resurrected Savior would stand out then as the consummation of Old and New Testament—proof that death had been conquered once and for all.

To plan out the triptych in a short period of time, I modified several of the *Messiah* illustrations and composed them into a digital sketch, which was followed later by color and value studies (figs. 19-20). The sketch was inserted into photographs of the church chancel in order to show what the altarpiece might look like *in situ* (fig. 21). I had the obvious disadvantage of trying to incorporate an artistic focal point into a church that had not been designed with one in mind. The triptych would have to be able to successfully unify with its environment; otherwise, it would appear as an afterthought. The church's liturgical furnishings were relatively minimal. But by designing the

⁹² 1 Cor. 15:21-22 "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (KJV).

altarpiece with a simple frame that would match the color and construction of the altar, I was able to avoid some of the appearance of afterthought.⁹³

Pastor Borgwardt suggested that I pitch the triptych to the Board of Elders. Beyond having a mockup, I knew I would also need a well-written proposal to present. Here, I found that my membership in the congregation would prove to be a great advantage. Going into the project, I had known the members, the Elders, and the pastor for more than a year; I knew fairly well what the major obstacles would be, and I tried to plan in advance of that. Using quotations from the church's constitution, I first outlined that the altarpiece would be in keeping with the mission of the congregation, namely, "To proclaim the law and gospel, to lead sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for life and salvation," to "provide and promote opportunities for Christian education," and to "share the gospel with all people." Since Risen Savior has an unusually high number of small children, I emphasized the importance of sharing the gospel in visual terms. As for my own motivations, I cited Romans 12:6, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them" (NKJV). I also provided a projected timeline, the cost, and notes regarding the frame and hardware (see appendix).

I explained my proposal and showed the initial designs to the Elders in December of 2010. While there were no strong objections to having artwork in the church, I did not find the enthusiasm I had hoped for. Although none of the Elders personally felt this concern, they predicted that some would inevitably consider it "too Catholic." Others commented that it might not fit with the "minimalist aesthetic" of the chancel, and suggested painting something to hang in the narthex instead. But the biggest concern, and the one I most feared, was one of cost. Unfortunately, my proposal came right behind the church's decision to begin planning a full-time grade school. In

⁹³ The only way to avoid *all* appearance of afterthought would be to remodel and refurnish the chancel, but I knew that would be a highly unrealistic scenario in a Lutheran church barely more than four years old.

defense of the altarpiece, I explained that the church should not see it as an either-or situation—that the triptych and the school had the same goal in mind, and should be given equal consideration. Before making a decision, the board was given a month to talk with members of the congregation and find out if there would be support for it. When the Elders met again in January 2011, the atmosphere was much the same; support for the project was tentative. Although at least one board member thought that the implied nudity might be an issue, none of the interviewed members echoed that concern. One or two members did react that a triptych sounded “too Catholic,” but the major concern was one of frugality. In light of the decision to go forward with a grade school, commissioning a triptych would add an unnecessary financial burden. Not wanting to entirely sink the project, however, it was decided that the triptych would go on the church “wish list.” The church will not fund it, but if a donor (or donors) pledge enough to cover the cost, the project will be approved.

Rather than wait for that to happen, I decided to go forward with planning the project. At the very least, I may be able to use preliminary sketches, process work, and models to gather interest for the Risen Savior triptych. If enough laymen are convinced as to the worthiness of its cause, the work of art may yet become a reality.

Restoring a Rich Tradition

The research portion of this thesis has exposed several of the historical causes for the decline of liturgical art. My experience with the Risen Savior triptych has shown that many of those factors are likely still exerting an influence on the church, but it has also posited some potential solutions. The iconoclasm that we are currently experiencing in the church has been well over a century in the making—and it cannot be restored easily or overnight. It will require genuine effort and

perseverance on the part of Christians everywhere. Therefore, I humbly submit the following seven points for the church's consideration—not as an expert, but as a fellow servant of the gospel:

1: Education is of paramount importance. Just as a man cannot yearn for holiness until he is taught to see its absence in himself, the church cannot yearn for sacred art until it is made aware of its absence. Unless the clergy and laity are instructed as to the magnificent artistic legacy that has been handed down to them, they will never see the gift they are neglecting to use or realize its full value.⁹⁴ This instruction needs to be implemented into our schools and seminaries so that our clergymen will not, as Langley states, “undermine their own authority” by “preferring to defer their responsibility to ‘experts’ trained in an anti-transcendent, modern aesthetic.”⁹⁵ It also needs to be passed on to our congregations and laymen, so that they will not become the victims of bad architecture and artwork. The church is for the believers—not the believers for the church.⁹⁶

2: When education has instilled a hunger for liturgical art, reintroduce beauty into the church. Blandness, banality, and kitsch are cheating Christians out of a truly meaningful worship experience. Nothing is so dangerous in the Church as half-heartedness or apathy, as God warns in Revelation: “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness.”⁹⁷ Churches have become comfortable with a lack of beauty in order to reflect the society they exist in. The Church needs zealous artists and heavenly artwork in order not to become too comfortable on earth.

⁹⁴ Nathan, 189-90.

⁹⁵ Wiker, under “To turn back a bit, by criticizing much of contemporary...”

⁹⁶ A paraphrase of Mark 2:27.

⁹⁷ Rev. 3:15-18.

3: Place this heavenly beauty in the service of the liturgy. Art that is only meant to hang on walls and be admired is not the kind of art that belongs in the church. Artwork that possesses true beauty of form stirs within our hearts a desire for God.⁹⁸ Let sacred artwork fulfill its highest calling—that is, to allow the worshipper to see the Invisible in the visible; to see Christ in the liturgy.⁹⁹ Thus, by faith, gazing at Christ’s glory, the believer is “transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”¹⁰⁰ In order to accomplish this, the artist must be both a craftsman and a theologian. As Nathan argues, “He must understand the deeper significance of the text, especially when it is taken from the Bible... He must be willing to subordinate himself to the text instead of interpreting it freely as is the right of the artist working independently.”¹⁰¹

4: Utilize liturgical art for its didactic qualities. Works of art that illustrate Christian truth have an intrinsic teaching value. Paintings and stained glass were used in the Middle Ages as a visual Bible for an illiterate congregation—and to great effect.¹⁰² Our educational institutions are ever stressing multi-modal teaching and the increased benefits it provides to learners. If we are genuinely concerned with bringing up our children in the faith, why not involve them in the liturgy—orally and musically as well as visually? Artwork speaks a universal visual language that is accessible to all ages. It only makes sense that the church should be using every tool at its disposal to bring the gospel to those who thirst for it.

5: Bridge the gap between the church and the artist. The church does not easily trust artists as it once did, and some of this mistrust is well deserved. Society in general and the “art crowd” in particular has grown increasingly secular, even atheistic. In this age, it is a given that artists will

⁹⁸ Von Hildebrand, 170.

⁹⁹ Ratzinger, 133.

¹⁰⁰ 2 Cor. 3:18.

¹⁰¹ Nathan, 195.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 146.

express anger toward politics, the church, or anything vaguely “institutional.” Images such as Serrano’s *Piss Christ* have inflamed relations between the Christian community and the artistic community. In those instances when the church has attempted to bridge the gap by cooperating with secular artists, it has been consistently let down by artists who are clueless as to what worship is really about. As for the Christian artist, he is consistently discouraged by a church that considers his craft to be a luxury. He is therefore forced to pursue commercial, often secular avenues if he is to make a living.¹⁰³ If this widening gap between artist and church is ever to be closed again, the church should first discontinue relationships with secular artists who have proven incapable of fulfilling the church’s most central needs. Second, it should encourage its own artists to put their skills into the service of the church. Many gifted artists exist within the Christian Church in every denomination. These men and women are often moved by a strong desire to bring their gifts as a thank offering to God.¹⁰⁴ But history shows that they will be reluctant to come forward with these until the church begins to value what they offer—and proves its willingness to commission sacred liturgical art.

6: Contemporary liturgical art needs to reestablish its link with the past. Sacred art was derailed from its path not because its aesthetic grew stale, but because faith became hollow. This crisis of faith may be resolved by a return to the spirit of sacred art of the past. From its beginning, liturgical art has been rooted in the rite of worship—which, in turn, was rooted in Christ and the unchanging gospel. The church’s aesthetic sensibilities flowed from the beauty of the gospel it possessed, not from its own artistic genius. Therefore, by allowing our artwork to grow out of the gospel of Christ as heard in Word, Sacrament, and the liturgy, it will return to its rightful place in the history of art and the church. There are signs of a widespread return to liturgical worship, and

¹⁰³ Nathan, 187.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

with it, liturgical art forms. But we must be careful to ensure that the heart of this movement is in the right place. If any liturgical movement is based on a nostalgic yearning for ceremonies and things of the past, rather than on a renewed focus on Christ and the Word, we can expect a repeat of nineteenth century superficiality.

7: Churches and artists need to set good examples to be followed. It would serve no benefit to decry the Modern aesthetic without offering something to replace it; nor would it be of great good to verbally promote a new movement in liturgical art without providing visual examples. As Nathan writes, “We cannot expect to have great Christian art by sitting back and complaining about its scarcity.”¹⁰⁵ If the line between the “living tradition” and historicism is at times difficult to distinguish, it is all the more important that artists and churches be discerning—and that they actively promote what is found to be good and true liturgical art.

Conclusion

In the course of this paper, we have seen that liturgical art developed within a long, rich, and meaningful tradition in the Christian Church. Liturgical works of art were placed in the service of the church and divine worship; images sought to communicate sacred and theological truth. The core tradition of liturgical art has not been one of rigid guidelines or of empty repetition, but of a beauty that sprang naturally from the gospel and evolved according to its internal needs—a living tradition. That tradition was disrupted by the rapid secularization of society, which eventually gave birth to Modernism. Modernism promoted an aggressive, iconoclastic philosophy and aesthetic that stripped the church of much of its beauty and saturated the social environment with abstract and utilitarian forms. Modernists tried to convince the world that airs of spirituality and transcendence

¹⁰⁵ Nathan, 194.

were adequate substitutes for religion. The church's attempts to adapt to or compromise with the Modernist aesthetic have thus resulted in confused and self-conflicting liturgical forms; these bear witness to a crisis of faith. Believers are being deprived the benefit of their rich heritage in the liturgical arts, which most are completely unaware of. There is a universal need in the church that is waiting to be filled—good liturgical art must be resurrected.

In order to accomplish this miraculous feat, the church needs to first educate its clergy and laity on matters of artwork and the liturgy. It needs to reintroduce beauty into the church, and to place that beauty in the service of the liturgy. The church needs to utilize the powerful teaching tool it has in liturgical artwork in order to build up its members. The gap of mistrust that exists between the church and artists must be closed from both ends. Contemporary liturgical art needs to be connected again to its radiant past, so that it may continue to serve the spiritual needs of Christ's body, the Church. And finally, Christian churches and artists must lead by example; they must be discerning in regard to contemporary liturgical art in order to set a high standard that may be achieved—and surpassed—by others.

Whether the Church will soon sense her need for genuine liturgical art and embrace these solutions we cannot tell. But she must be made aware that the question of artwork within her worship spaces is not a trivial concern; like any spiritual matter, it deserves much study, prayer, and dedication. Just as true faith produces good works, a sincere Church will produce works of art that are good and true. It is my hope and prayer that she does so. When the Church is arrayed thus in godly beauty—without as well as within—we may address her with the words of Isaiah, "As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you!"¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Isa. 62:5.

Figures



Figure 1. Reconstruction of Baptistry from Dura Europos, third century, Yale University Art Gallery (ARTstor, <http://www.artstor.org>).



Figure 2. *Baptism of Christ*, fifth century, Orthodox Baptistry, Ravenna (ARTstor, <http://www.artstor.org>).

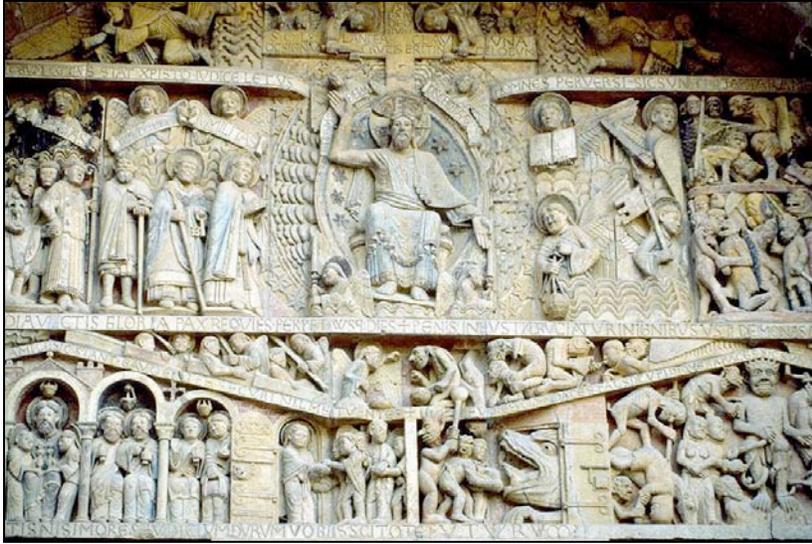


Figure 3. *The Last Judgement*, detail of tympanum above main portals, 1124-1135, Abbey Church of Sainte-Foy, Conques, France (ARTstor, <http://www.artstor.org>).

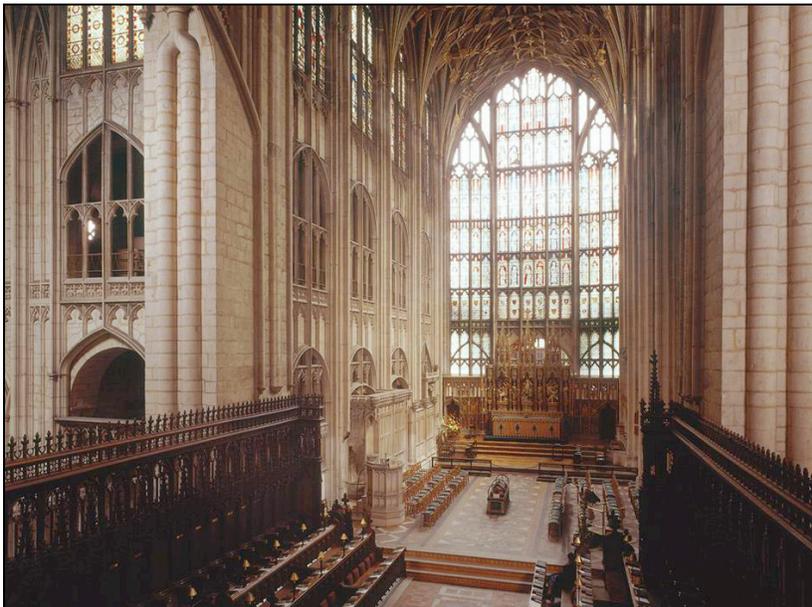


Figure 4. Gloucester Cathedral, interior view toward choir, 1190-1357, Gloucester, England (ARTstor, <http://www.artstor.org>).



Figure 5. Jan van Eyck, *The Lamb of God*, open view, 1432, Saint Bavo Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium (Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org>).

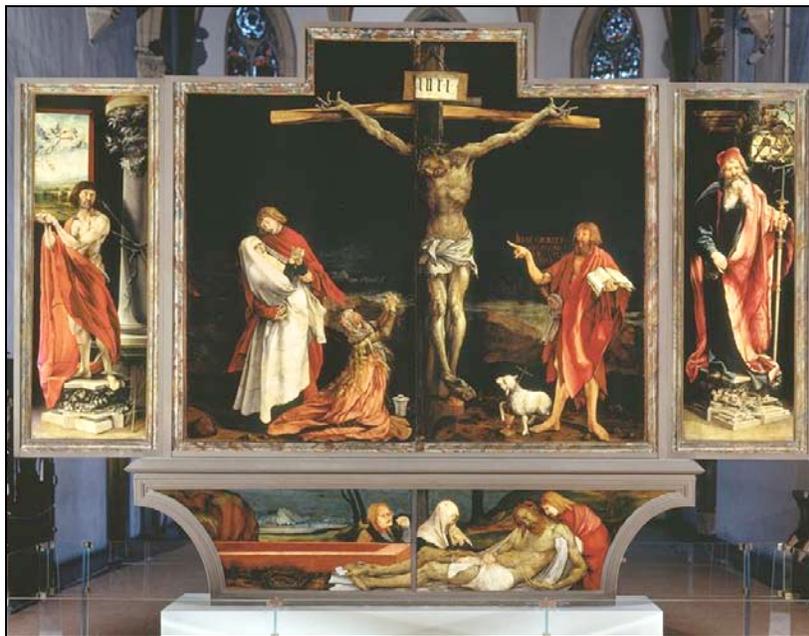


Figure 6. Matthias Grünewald, *Isenheim Altarpiece*, closed view, 1515, Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France (ARTstor, <http://www.artstor.org>).



Figure 7. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, 1600, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome (ARTstor, <http://www.artstor.org>).



Figure 8. Basil Spence, *St. Michael's Cathedral*, 1962, Coventry, England (Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org>)



Figure 9. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare, 549, Classe, Italy (ARTstor, <http://www.artstor.org>)



Figure 10. Le Corbusier, Notre Dame du Haut, 1955, Ronchamp, France (Wikipedia, <http://de.wikipedia.org>)



Figure 11. Massimiliano Fuksas, San Paolo Parish Church, 2009, Foligno, Italy (Sacred Architecture, <http://www.sacredarchitecture.org>).



Figure 12. Germaine Richier, *Crucifix*, 1950, Notre-Dame de Toute Grâce du Plateau, Assy, France (Idle Speculations, <http://idlespeculations-terryprest.blogspot.com>).



Figure 13. Thomas Gordon Smith, Chapel of Saints Peter and Paul, 2010, Denton, Nebraska (Sacred Architecture, <http://www.sacredarchitecture.org>)



Figure 14. Igor Mitoraj, detail of bronze portals, 2001, Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli, Rome (Oratoire du Louvre, <http://oratoiredulouvre.fr>)



Figure 15. *Least Among Men*. Oil on canvas, 2006.



Figure 16. *To Prepare a Place For You*. Oil on canvas, 2007.



Figure 17. *Behold the Lamb of God*. Digital, 2010.

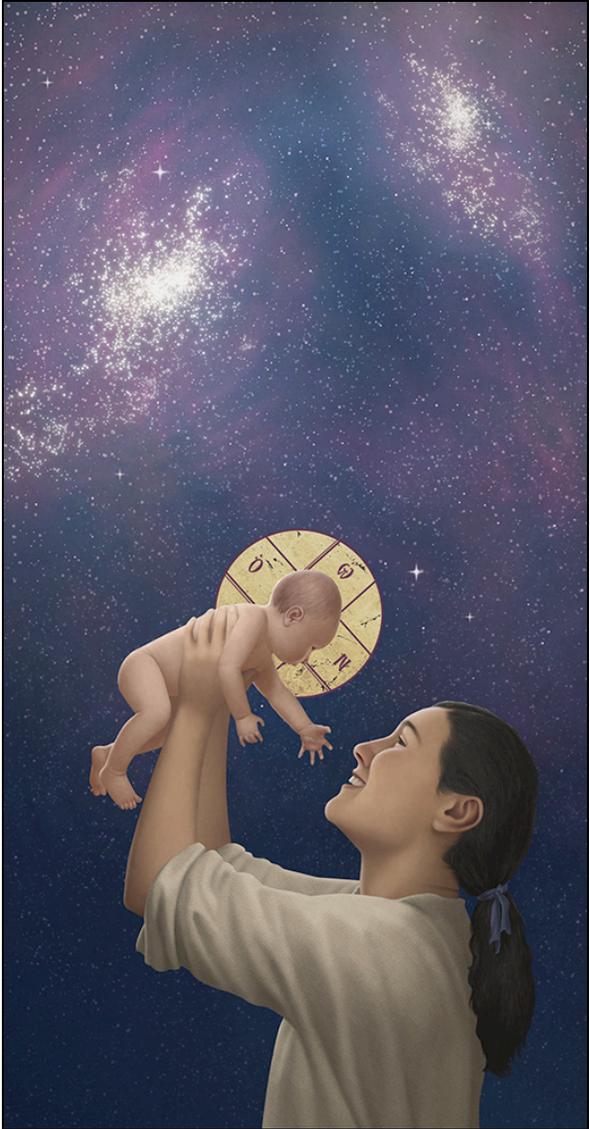


Figure 18. *For Unto Us a Child is Born*. Digital, 2010.

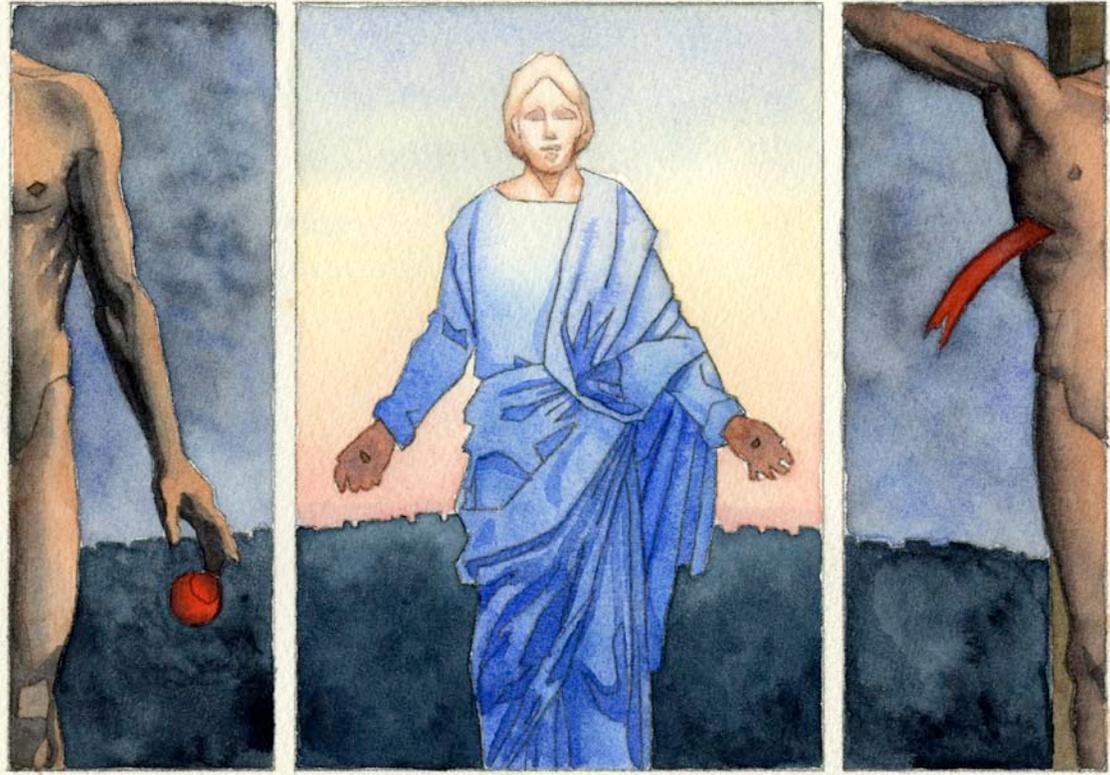


Figure 19. *Study for Risen Savior Triptych*. Watercolor, 2011.

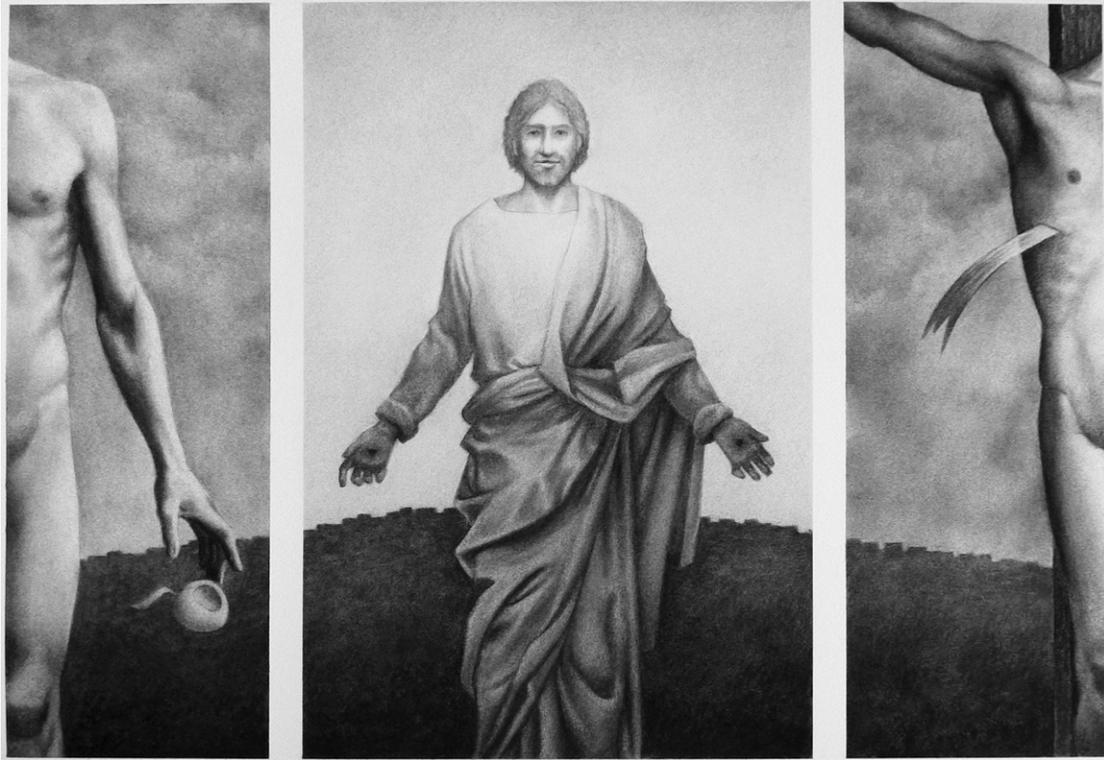


Figure 20. *Study for Risen Savior Triptych*. Charcoal, 2011.



Figure 21. *Mockup for Risen Savior Triptych*. Digital, 2010.

Appendix

Proposal for Risen Savior Altar Painting

From the Constitution and Bylaws of Risen Savior Lutheran Church:

The primary objective of this congregation shall be:

- A. To *proclaim the Law and Gospel*, to lead sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ for life and salvation.
- B. To *strengthen believers in faith* and sanctification through the means of grace.
- C. To equip believers as disciples, stewards, witnesses, and servants to share the gospel of Jesus and live their faith.

Members of His Church will consider it a distinct privilege and a responsibility to:

- A. Hear and receive the Word of God diligently and regularly;
- B. Provide and *promote opportunities for Christian education*;
- C. Bring up their *children* in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;
- D. *Share the gospel* with all people.

Proposal: In order to best fulfill our objectives as a congregation and our responsibilities as Christians, I propose an installation of liturgical artwork. This work will be an artistic representation of 1 Corinthians 15:22-23: "For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." This passage beautifully represents both the law and the gospel in a single statement. The proposed artwork will draw attention to the Word on which it is based.

The installation will be a triptych (three-panel painting) that will be installed in the front of the sanctuary. The paintings proposed are 1) Death through Adam (left), 2) Life through Christ (right), and 3) the Risen Savior (center). The paintings would be about 4 feet tall, and would be placed in a hinged frame finished to match the chancel furnishings.

This installation will enrich the worship experience of the congregation. The panels of the triptych could be closed, for instance, on Good Friday, and be opened again on Easter Sunday, revealing the Risen Savior.

Reasons:

- "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them" (Romans 12:6).
- Liturgical artwork should always glorify God and edify his believers. It is my belief that our present sanctuary does not accomplish this.
- The triptych's intent supports the objectives and responsibilities of the congregation; namely, to proclaim the law and gospel, to strengthen believers, and to instruct our children in the faith.
- Artwork has the advantage of being accessible to all ages, languages, and cultures, and is especially useful for teaching young children.

Timeline: Risen Savior has a narrow window of opportunity for this project to become a reality. Preliminary work should begin immediately, so that I can begin the paintings in June after graduation. I would require at least three months to finish them, assuming no major changes in employment after graduation. The frame for the paintings could be built simultaneously. The triptych should be finished in time to present to Risen Savior for Christmas 2011.

Cost: I cannot complete this project without the support of Risen Savior. Although I would gladly donate my time and talents if I were able, I am compelled to ask for a small compensation of \$x,xxx. This could either be worked into the budget, be funded by a separate stewardship drive, or the cost could be shouldered by several willing donors. The expense of the frame, however, would be separate, and would be set at the discretion of the carpenter.

Glossary

apse. The often rounded recess at the front of a church sometimes containing the altar.

ecclesiastical. Pertaining to the church or the clergy; not secular.

historicism. The placement of excessive emphasis on history and the repetition of past styles of art and architecture.

iconoclasm. The removal or destruction of sacred images, often for religious reasons.

indulgences. *Roman Catholic Church:* Documents that granted full or partial remission of temporal punishment in Purgatory.

liturgy. The formulaic Christian rite of worship; often sung.

nave. The long, rectangular portion of a church generally used by the congregation.

paraments. Ecclesiastical decoration for the chancel, esp. as would be found on the altar, and reflecting the color symbolic of a particular season of the church year.

polyptych. A piece of art, especially a painting, consisting of multiple connected panels.

predella. A long, narrow panel found at the foot of an altarpiece.

sacrament. A rite instituted by Christ for the forgiveness of sins: in Protestant churches – baptism and the Lord's Supper; in Catholic and Orthodox churches – baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, marriage, penance, holy orders, and extreme unction.

transept. A rectangular arm that intersects the nave of the church at a perpendicular angle, forming the entrance to the choir.

triptych. A piece of art, especially a painting, consisting of three connected panels; often the outer panels fold inward to reveal a second phase on the reverse side.

tympanum. A carved, recessed arch most often over the main entrance to a church.

vesture (also **vestments**). The ceremonial garments worn by the priest or clergy during the divine service.

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