CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS

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CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS I

Introduction - Art, Truth, and Beauty

Over the last two thousand years the Church has had a decidedly mixed record with regard to the arts. Some of the greatest art of the Western world has been inspired by the truths of the Bible and the message of the Gospel. Yet while the Church has both produced and inspired much great art, it is also true that Christians have often neglected the arts in recent years, viewing them as unnecessary frills that do nothing to carry out the work of the Great Commission, or looking askance at the corrupt and corrupting uses to which the arts have been put by their most visible practitioners. Scripture, however, does not allow us to relegate the arts to the realm of the non-essential or the hopelessly worldly. Instead, the Bible tells us that art is a necessary part of what it means to be human, and even what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ. It is because of these things that we will devote the next quarter to the study of Christianity and the arts. Today, we begin with a discussion of foundational ideas that will lay the groundwork for our study.

WHAT IS ART? THE CREATOR AND THE CREATIVE GIFT

The first thing the Bible tells us about God is that He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). God, therefore, is the first and greatest Artist. In the art created by God, we see both unity and diversity, simplicity and complexity, and enormous scale combined with incredible detail. We therefore may conclude that art is not merely utilitarian, but is intended to give joy and delight to the beholder. God Himself saw His creation and found delight in it, pronouncing it "good" after each creative endeavor. If God Himself found delight in what He made, we are intended to do the same, and must therefore affirm that the giving of such delight is a legitimate purpose for the creation of art.

Not only is God the great Artist, but He has also made man in His image. Part of what it means to bear the image of God is to possess also the capacity to create. When God placed man in His newly-made world, He gave Him dominion over all He had made - "the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26). He not only gave man dominion over His world, He also endowed man with the capacity to create beautiful things with the raw materials of that world (Exodus 31:1-11).

We must note, of course, that man's creative ability differs from that of his Creator. God created the universe *ex nihilo* - He spoke, and out of nothing the worlds were made. We, as sub-creators made in His image, cannot create out of nothing. We must take what He has made and use the skills He has given to create what is in itself unique and beautiful. We may thus define art, in its broadest sense, as "the use of man's God-given gifts to reorder the elements of His created universe." This definition is obviously exceedingly broad, and incorporates the entirety of what theologians have referred to as the Cultural Mandate - the task of man to exercise dominion over God's world for God's glory. In the broadest sense, then, science and technology are art as much as are painting, music, and architecture. While this is in some senses true, we will be focusing our attention in this course on what are sometimes called the Fine Arts - painting, drawing, sculpture, music, architecture, and literature. We will be examining these aspects of human creativity within the context of history and philosophy in the light of a Christian worldview. Later, we will discuss Christian interaction with the arts - what might be called Art Appreciation (not just high Art, but also

the popular artistic forms of the culture around us), and will finish the course by looking at the question of how Christians should use their artistic talents to impact the world for Christ. But before we get to these things, there are a few more basic ideas we need to consider.

IS BEAUTY IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER?

Most today would argue that the obvious answer to the question that opens this section is "yes." After all, don't personal tastes vary widely, so that what one person thinks is beautiful another may think ugly or tacky (Thomas Kincade or country music come to mind)? Or what about cultural differences? Don't notions of beauty vary widely from one society to the next? No doubt these things are true - after all, even someone who knows nothing about art knows what he likes. But while it may be true that to some extent beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the consequences of taking such a dictum as absolute are unacceptable - when the prestigious Turner Prize for modern art in England is given in 2001 to an empty room (the work was entitled *Lights Going On and Off* and consisted of a completely empty gallery in which the lights occasionally went on and off), and in another year went to *My Bed* (the artist literally put her unmade bed in the middle of the museum floor), the concept of beauty has clearly lost all meaning.

The Christian, on the other hand, must affirm that beauty has an objective component to it. Like truth, it finds its source and definition in the character of God. Scripture tells us that God is beautiful (Psalm 27:4); in particular, we are to find beauty in His holiness as we come before Him in worship (Psalm 29:2). Fundamentally, then, what is beautiful is what conforms to the character of God; what does not conform to His character is likewise ugly.

What, then, does this fundamental definition of beauty contribute to our understanding of art? How is the character of God to be translated into the works of human creativity? We must understand that God has revealed His character to us in His Word and in His world. When God created the world, it was in itself beautiful, and thus revealed God's beauty to man. Despite the fall of man into sin and the consequent desecration of the created world, that world continues to display the glory of God for those who have eyes to see it (Psalm 19:1). As sub-creators, then, we are able to produce something of genuine beauty when what we create corresponds to what God has created. This does not mean that all visual art must be photographic any more than it means that all music must mimic the sounds of babbling brooks or waves crashing against the seashore. What does it then mean?

For one thing, art that possesses the quality of beauty will be characterized by order. In the same way that the order of the created universe is both simple and complex, so the order of beautiful human creations may be simple or complex - in fact, perhaps the most beautiful of all works of art are those that contain a depth of complexity brought together in the context of an overall simplicity (a musician who takes a simple folk tune and develops complex variations around that theme, or a painter who portrays marvels of light and texture in a simple bowl of fruit).

The necessity of order may be seen in the extent to which mathematics lies at the heart of the artistic endeavor. The foundational harmonic relationships of music are mathematical in character - the ratio of frequencies in a major chord is very precise, and if one of the notes is off by a few hertz, the result is certainly not beautiful, as anyone who has ever heard an elementary band concert knows.

The same is true in the fields of painting and sculpture. The human body is designed according to mathematical proportions (remember Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of the human body in a circle?), and the artist who fails to observe those proportions will wind up with something that is less than human, not more. The same is true, if anything to an even greater extent, in the field of architecture - if mathematical verities are not observed, the building will soon fall down.

We must note, of course, that our ability to represent beauty in art is limited by our God-given talents, as our ability to observe such beauty may be limited by our powers of observation and our knowledge of art's complexities. For instance, something may look or sound chaotic to the untrained eye or ear, but when the observer is brought to understand the structure inherent in the given work, the order then becomes apparent and the observer is able to appreciate it to a greater degree.

We should also note that those who create art always operate within the context of their humanity and God's created universe. Even the artist who denies God's existence and uses his talents to communicate a sense of despair and hopelessness is doing so by using talents given by God and the materials created by God. Such an artist affirms the reality of the God he denies with every stroke of the painter's brush and every blow of the sculptor's chisel. In the very exercise of his creativity, he shouts out the existence of the God who made him and the materials he uses. Thus it should not surprise us that those who do not acknowledge God can create things of great beauty (the dilemma of Salieri in *Amadeus*), nor that denial of the God who made them causes artists to produce works that are deliberately ugly, grotesque, or obscene.

TRUTH IN ART

John Keats, in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, said, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty - that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." In a fallen world, such is sadly not the case, though undoubtedly it was in Eden and will be again in the New Jerusalem. It is entirely possible in our world for art to be true without being beautiful, and to be beautiful without being true. The relationship here is complex, and bears some explanation.

First of all, in a world marred by sin, ugliness exists and is real, so that the sensitive observer of man and the world will see, and thus portray, this ugliness without flinching. We should not be surprised, then, when so much of the great art and literature of the twentieth century pictures despair and ugliness - authors and painters see sin, but have no understanding of redemption. This is true art, but it is not beautiful.

On the other hand, the Christian artist sees in the world the fullness of God's creative genius, the reality of sin, and the truth of redemption. He thus portrays resolution as well as dissonance, chaos being overcome by order, and conflict leading to final restoration. Beauty in the midst of ugliness is therefore an appropriate theme of Christian artistic endeavors.

Secondly, art may be true but not beautiful when it is an accurate portrayal of the worldview of the artist. The mercenary flack who does his work for money, giving his employer whatever he wants, is not an honest artist no matter how talented he may be, whether he is a Renaissance painter

following the dictates of a commission or a computer graphic artist designing a television commercial.

In fact, failure to present the ugliness of a fallen world is often less than honest, whether one is speaking of the idealized and glorified nudes of the classical Greek sculptors (true in the sense of being accurate pictures of the outward form of man, but false in ascribing to him a glory that belongs to God alone) or the sappy sentimentality of far too many Christian artistic endeavors. Instead, the artist who possesses integrity puts his view of the world onto the canvas or pours it out through the keyboard, and we as Christians must appreciate the truth that he speaks, even though it is not ultimate truth. Albert Camus' *The Stranger* and Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* speak truth about the artists' perceptions of a world without God, but are not ultimately true because we do not live in a world deserted by its Creator. Instead, the very talents these artists use to rail against the meaninglessness of the universe give evidence of the God who created them and in whose world they live, whether they acknowledge it or not.

As we thus embark on our study of the arts, we should expect to see God there. We should also expect to have our appreciation for God's creative gifts stimulated and our own abilities to give praise to God enhanced as we "Come see the beauty of the Lord."

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS II

The Dawn of the Christian Era

Christianity throughout its history has had a rather ambivalent relationship with the arts. In some eras, the Church has claimed art for its own, while in others, art was rejected as pagan and a threat to the purity of the Christian faith (including, as we shall see, our own Calvinistic and Puritan tradition). As we begin our historical survey with a discussion of the art of the Ancient Church period (up to the fall of the Roman Empire in the West in 476 AD), we will find a transition from a period in which the forms of art popular within the prevailing culture are rejected to one where the church itself dominates art in almost all its forms.

CLASSICAL ART AT THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY

The art of the Greek and Roman world was highly advanced, but clearly partook of the philosophy of the classical age. The sculptures, frescoes, and mosaics portrayed the gods and heroes of classical mythology, and in the same way that the gods and heroes themselves were idealized men and women, so the art based on such figures pictured idealized humanity. The unclad human figure was perhaps the most common subject for such works of art. The artists of the era developed great skill in copying the human body in idealized form. Though most of what has survived from the classical period involves statuary, the frescoes and mosaics also display an advanced understanding of light and shadow, giving a three-dimensional effect to the works of the era.

In addition to the gods and heroes of mythology, the artworks of the classical age also portrayed heroes such as politicians, military leaders, and philosophers. Sculptures of Jupiter and Venus are numerous, along with portrayals of Odysseus and Hercules, but the artists of the day also found suitable subjects in Pericles, Aristotle, Julius Caesar, and the Roman emperors. All had in common a sense of man as the ideal; even if the individual man did not always measure up to the theoretical standard, the artist was able to portray him in such a way that the ideal could clearly be seen. Such an approach was coherent with the Platonic philosophy that was popular in the classical age, since thinkers of the age believed that, behind the tangible individual objects we see there exists an ideal world of Forms from which the individuals draw their salient characteristics.

ART IN THE ERA OF PERSECUTION

Clearly, the philosophy undergirding the art of the early Christian era was not compatible with Christian faith. As a result, especially in the early years of persecution up through the beginning of the fourth century, we find a conscious rejection of the artistic styles popular at the time. Instead, for the early Christian artists, symbol takes the place of the Platonic Forms. Portrayal of the human body (or nature, for that matter) as it really is was irrelevant to their purpose. Art was not produced in order to glorify man, but to glorify God.

Furthermore, the condition of the Church in its first few centuries was hardly conducive to giving attention to art. The Church was being persecuted by the Roman government, sometimes more severely than at other times, but had little leisure to devote to the arts for the sake of appreciating beauty alone. A few examples have survived of mosaics decorating places of public worship (few actual church buildings existed before the fourth century, since most of the churches

met in private homes, or in the catacombs when persecution became really severe), but the most common forms of art are the frescoes used to decorate Christian places of burial.

What did this mean in practice? First of all, early Christian art was very simple. Whether the flat figures in the frescoes or bas-relief sculptures carved into catacomb walls, little attention was given to realism (some scholars have suggested that, since these decorations were probably made by slaves with artistic inclinations, one could hardly expect advanced technique or signs of artistic training). The subject matter of these frescoes, found mostly in the catacombs beneath the city of Rome and preserved because the entrances to these labyrinths were concealed for centuries after the fall of the empire, focused on communicating the glory of God. Christ was usually the central figure (the Incarnation had apparently communicated to the early Christians that the Jewish prohibition against portraying God need no longer be observed), but the artwork in the tombs also often pictured Old Testament stories, such as the tale of Jonah and the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, that were believed to symbolize the truths of the Gospel.

The art of the early Christian era also quickly developed its own vocabulary. Symbolic art is of little value without a shared set of symbols, which function much as words do in literature. Symbols such as the fish (IXθYΣ), the ship (the church, compared to Noah's ark), the shepherd, the lamb, the vine, the anchor (faith), the alpha-omega, the chi-rho (first two letters of *Christ* in Greek), the dove, and of course the cross appear frequently in the art of the early Christian era, both because the art was intended to have a teaching function, and also because the art that was in public view often needed to communicate its messages cryptically.

ART IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN EMPIRE

With the conversion of Constantine and the issuance of the Edict of Milan, Christianity was freed from the shackles of the persecutions and able to bring its artwork out into the public eye. The conversion of the emperor also brought pagan influences into the Church, however, with the result that the techniques that had previously been rejected out of a desire to divorce the new faith and its adherents from the pagan past now were increasingly adopted for Christian use. The tomb carvings now become increasingly complex and skillful, taking on the look of some of the classical works of the earlier era. Church buildings are now commonplace, and are freely decorated with many of the same pictures and symbols that characterized the frescoes in the catacombs, albeit of a much higher quality.

The style of Christian art in the fourth and fifth centuries continues to move away from that of the classical world in crucial ways, however. Because the desire is still to glorify God rather than man, the figures in the artworks are idealized in different ways than we find in the works of the Greek and Roman world. While the art of the classical Greeks and Romans idealized man on earth as a means of portraying the eternal Forms from which all things were derived, the art of the Christian era found its ideal in the heavenly realms. Thus the ideal man was not the perfect specimen of physical beauty, but instead the perfect specimen of spiritual beauty, shown as existing beyond the realm of time and space, in the context of eternity. Next week, we will see this development more fully as we look at the art of the Middle Ages.

MUSIC IN THE EARLY CHURCH

It is not our intention to give all of our attention to the visual arts in this course, though they will be a major focus of our attention. I would like, therefore, to make a few brief comments about music in the era under consideration this week. We should not be surprised that the music of the early Christian era, like much early church worship, derived its earliest form from the practice of the Jewish synagogue. The most common songs used for worship were therefore psalms, sung responsively (leader/congregation) or antiphonally (one group responding to another). The psalms are particularly well-suited to such musical expression because of the predominance of Hebrew parallelism in their structure. Though Paul mentions "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" in Ephesians 5:19 and some suspect that poetic passages such as Philippians 2:5-11 represent early hymns, we know little of the nature of these forms of worship used in the first century, though second-century Roman governor Pliny the Younger mentions the fact that the Christians in Asia Minor habitually sing "songs to Christ" when they gather.

Even before the Edict of Milan, however, original hymns clearly begin to appear in the worship of the Church. These take the form of poetry structured in stanzas, each of which was intended to be sung to the same tune. One of the greatest of the early hymnodists was Ambrose, bishop of Milan in the late fourth century, who wrote many hymns for the use of his congregation. Not only have some of these hymns survived in the liturgies of the Western Church, but some of the tunes have even been preserved in the works copied over many centuries in medieval monasteries. Other than these few surviving examples, however, we can do no more than speculate as to the nature of the tunes that were used (some think that popular folk tunes would have been employed for the purpose, but we really have no certain way of knowing this). In any case, it is clear that by the time of the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, Christians were freely employing their artistic gifts to the glory of God - a trend that will continue and expand as we move into the Middle Ages in next week's lesson.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS III

Art, Music, and Architecture in the Middle Ages

The survey format has its obvious weaknesses, and one of them is the requirement that extremely rich and complex periods be summarized in such a brief fashion that any pretense of adequacy is impossible. Such is our task today as we attempt to give an overview of the art of the Middle Ages. The period before us extends for more than 900 years, from the fall of the Roman Empire in the West in 476 to the dawn of the Renaissance around 1400. During this era, Christendom experienced its first major division - the schism between East and West in 1054, though the two parts of the old Roman Empire had been growing apart for many centuries before the formal split occurred. In the East, we find the art and culture of the Byzantine Empire, while in the West we progress from Romanesque to Gothic, and from the Dark Ages to the era of Scholasticism. During the Middle Ages, the Church became a patron of the arts, as most art was made for religious purposes, whether icons, church and tomb decorations, or the great cathedrals themselves. Obviously, the Middle Ages is anything but uniform, and we must make at least some small attempt to treat these differences in our discussion of medieval art today.

THE ART OF THE BYZANTINES

The Byzantine Empire, and the Eastern Orthodox Church intertwined with it, valued tradition above all else (it was commonly believed that the seven ecumenical councils of the Ancient Church had brought the Church to a perfect understanding of Christian doctrine so that nothing further need be said on the subject). Thus we find little change from the shaping of the artistic conventions in the fifth and sixth centuries to the fall of Constantinople (and even in many cases to the religious art produced in Eastern Europe to the present day). The purpose of art was to portray the spiritual world, which was the only true reality. Thus paintings and mosaics pictured otherworldly figures in stylized poses, holding or wearing symbolic objects that indicated their identity. The backgrounds were either flat (often the gold associated with the eternal realm) or decorated with geometrical shapes (one of the architects of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople defined architecture as "the application of geometry to solid matter") reflective of the divine order. The portrayal of the reality of the spiritual world was so central to the works of the Byzantines that their icons - pictures of Christ or the saints used in worship - came to be thought of, not merely as representations of eternal verities, but as real windows into the spiritual realm. It was also in the art of the Byzantines that the halo makes its first appearance, adapted from the symbolism of the sun gods of the ancient pagan religions. Even Byzantine architecture was otherworldly, with the axis of the church vertical, reaching upward from the circular nave to the dome above, rather than horizontal, as in the typical basilica arrangement in the West.

MEDIEVAL PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN THE WEST

In the years following the fall of Rome, barbarians invaded and adopted much of the culture of the conquered peoples (along with their Christianity). The barbarian influences were also felt, however; religiously, in the evolution of church festivals like Easter and Christmas, and artistically, in the presence of barbarian motifs in the religious works of the age.

With the rise of the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne, the art increasingly communicates the theme of the union of Church and state. A picture of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the final vision of the Kingdom of God in the book of Revelation, was inscribed on the crown of the Holy Roman Emperors. Charlemagne's empire was short-lived, however (though revived by Otto I in the tenth century, ultimately lasting until the time of Napoleon in the early 1800s), and after the decentralization accompanying the rise of feudalism, Byzantine influences grow in strength, so that the art of the ninth through the twelfth centuries has much in common with Byzantine iconography. Since this was an era of great political instability in the West, much of the work of this era has not survived, and our greatest examples of art from this period are found in Romanesque architecture.

We should also speak a brief word about the artwork of the monasteries. In the East, monks painted icons. In the West, they illuminated manuscripts. The preservation of sacred literature was an important part of the mission of the monasteries, and the monks often covered their carefully-made copies of Scripture and the writings of the Fathers with intricate miniature pictures, some intended to illuminate the narrative and some for purely decorative purposes (ornate capital letters at the beginnings of books and chapters, geometrical designs, and even fanciful creatures in the margins, carefully hand-drawn for the sheer creative pleasure of it).

The sculpture and painting of the Gothic period (corresponding with the High Middle Ages) show a marked departure from the Byzantine tradition, as these creative works take on an increasingly realistic appearance. Sculptures served largely as decorative and didactic accompaniments to architecture, whether on cathedral doors or pulpits, walls or tombs. Because these sculptures were seen as handmaidens of the architectural endeavor and thus part of the overall artistic effect, they continued to be in relief rather than free-standing. Themes included Bible stories, the lives of the saints (especially Mary), the relationship between Church and state (political figures bowing before the Virgin or Christ Himself), and visions of apocalyptic drama (a good example of this is the monastery church door sculpture described in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*).

Painting, too, became increasingly naturalistic as technique improved and the desire for beauty in the worship of God gained popularity. Stained glass works, which brought together many artistic skills including painting, showed the Gothic preoccupation with light, as the windows became vehicles through which the worshipers were enlightened, both through the figures and stories pictured on the windows and the brilliantly-colored light of God's revelation that they admitted to the sanctuary. Painters such as Cimabue and Giotto moved away from the complete otherworldliness of Byzantine art and incorporated increasing naturalism (though retaining the haloes), and thus became forerunners of the Renaissance. The emphasis on eternity rather than time can be seen in the narrative paintings of the Gothic era, in which multiple scenes from a story appear in the same picture.

ROMANESQUE AND GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE

The rise of the monasteries in the early Middle Ages, and especially the revival associated with the Cluny reform movement among the Benedictines in the tenth century, led to a renewed emphasis on church architecture. Romanesque churches were built using the eternal and perfect shapes of the square and the circle, and were often filled with relief sculptures, and occasionally

frescoes, around the walls (similar in style to the earlier Roman art), illustrating biblical narratives in much the same way as the stained glass windows of the following era.

As had been the case with earlier Christian art, Gothic architecture was profoundly God-centered. The Gothic style was initiated by Abbot Suger in Saint-Denis in the twelfth century. The soaring spires of the cathedrals reached hands upward to the divine, while the stained-glass windows admitted the light and beauty of God into the realm of the human. The very structures of the churches were intended to illustrate the theology of the Church - not only speaking of the transcendence and immanence of God, but also of His Trinitarian nature (nave, transept, and apse). The cruciform shape of the interior speaks of the central event of the Gospel, and the pictorial representations in the stained-glass windows often portray key biblical narratives.

But Gothic architecture also shows the influence of the scholastic theology of the High Middle Ages. In the same way that the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas attempted to encapsulate the totality of Christian truth and present it in a orderly fashion, with multiple and perfectly symmetrical divisions and subdivisions, so the Gothic cathedral in many ways takes the shape of an outline, with smaller divisions resting atop the main ones, down to the finest detail. Reason is thus portrayed in visible form as the link between man and God, even as Aquinas had argued (this desire to organize everything also extended to the manuscripts produced in the monasteries and in the literature of the age; it was in this era that the Bible was first divided into chapters, for instance, and during which Dante produced his intricately and symbolically structured *Divine Comedy*). In the same way that Aquinas' appeal to reason required that the structure of his *Summa* be explicit to the reader, so the architect of the cathedral made sure the worshiper could see how the structure was put together - the order and subordination is clear for all to see. Furthermore, in the same way that Peter Abelard had tried to harmonize contradictory elements in the Scriptures and the traditions of the Church, so the architects of the cathedrals, building on the "authority" of previous architects, incorporated seemingly contradictory elements (pointed arches and rose windows?) and, through continual reinterpretations, brought these elements into harmony.

THE MUSIC OF THE MIDDLE AGES

We saw last week that congregational singing had been popularized in the West by Ambrose of Milan. In the Byzantine Empire, meanwhile, church music gained complexity as churches began to use trained musicians in place of congregational participation (for instance, while in Ambrose's hymns, each syllable corresponded to a single note, in later Byzantine music, a single syllable would be stretched out over many notes, requiring training and practice).

In the West, musical development occurred primarily in the monasteries. In the early seventh century, Pope Gregory I instituted a simple melodic approach to singing called *plainsong*, which, transmitted through the Benedictine monasteries, was to dominate the Catholic liturgy for over a thousand years. With the coming of the Cluny reform in the monasteries, important innovations began to appear, the most notable of which was a new notation that indicated the note to be sung in relationship to the recently-devised idea of the musical scale. Later, the placement of notes on a staff evolved. For the first time, singers could learn a piece by sight-reading instead of by rote.

In the ninth through the eleventh centuries, we find the first tentative appearance of polyphony - more than one note being sung at the same time by different portions of the choir (by the thirteenth century, a third voice had been added, with the different voices singing different rhythms, or even different melody lines). Intervals such as the octave, fourth and fifth were emphasized because their clear mathematical relationships were thought to correspond to the divine pattern of the universe. Though plainsong continued to be central to the liturgy, polyphony grew more and more popular during the Gothic era, often built around Gregorian melodies. The obsession of the High Middle Ages with the division of thought into orderly segments also appears in music, as for the first time pieces of music are separated into measures, so that time as well as space becomes segmented into observable parts with clear relationships. In addition, Gothic cathedrals were designed with acoustic properties in mind, so that the voices of those standing in the choir would resonate throughout the stone structures. While Gregorian chant was typically sung unaccompanied, the High Middle Ages introduced the organ into church music.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS IV

The Renaissance

Any attempt to survey the history of art by breaking history into clearly-defined periods will inevitably encounter some problems. Not only do styles of art distinguished by art historians overlap in time, but some exist simultaneously for significant periods. Because our concern in this section of the course is to relate the history of art to the history of the Christian Church, we will be breaking our study over the next two weeks up into categories that fit Church History better than they fit art history. Though today's study is entitled "The Renaissance," we will in reality be discussing the developments in the Renaissance prior to the advent of the Protestant Reformation - i.e., the fifteenth century, with slight mention of the early decades of the sixteenth. The remainder of the Renaissance will be considered next week under the title "Reformation and Counterreformation," since much of the Renaissance art of the sixteenth century reflects a reaction against Protestantism by the papal and imperial patrons of the arts.

SOURCES OF RENAISSANCE THOUGHT

The Renaissance is a term used to describe the rebirth of classical learning that swept over Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Between the fall of the Roman Empire in the West to the barbarians and the adopting of art by the Church for its own purposes during the Middle Ages, the art of ancient Greece and Rome survived in Western Europe largely in the form of architectural ruins. Two events played a major role in reacquainting Western society with its classical heritage. The first of these was the Crusades. Between 1095 and 1291, hundreds of thousands of soldiers, pilgrims, and merchants traveled from Western Europe to the Holy Land. On the way, they encountered the classical ideas, writings, and art forms preserved by the Turks and the Byzantines and brought many of these back to Western Europe with them (this was particularly true after the Fourth Crusade in 1204, during which Constantinople was sacked; many treasures were carried back to the palaces of Venice, Florence, Milan, and Rome). The second event of major importance was the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, which brought another major influx of classical art and literature to the West as Christians fled the hordes of infidels descending on the center of Orthodox Christianity. It is also worth noting that Spain had been under Muslim control since the eighth century, finally to be consolidated under Catholic control under Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, and that much knowledge from the Eastern Mediterranean had found its way to Spain by way of North Africa.

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY IN EUROPE

The fifteenth century in Europe was a time of political and ecclesiastical chaos. As already noted, the Byzantine Empire, on the verge of crumbling for centuries, finally fell to the Turks in 1453. In the West, the papacy had just gone through a scandalous era of schism following the Avignon papacy in the fourteenth century. When the schism was finally resolved by the Council of Constance in 1417, the result was a reaffirmation of papal power over the Church. The popes of the fifteenth century, however, were notoriously corrupt, fighting in wars like all the other petty Italian princes, openly fathering children (e.g., the notorious Borgia pope Alexander VI), and caring little about spiritual things while fancying themselves to be great patrons of the arts (the Sistine Chapel was built by Sixtus IV and added to by Julius II, who hired Michelangelo to paint the ceiling). To

a large extent, then, the Church in southern Europe followed the artistic trends of the day rather than setting them; each pope had to outdo the last in the magnificence of his buildings and artistic endeavors, and he was willing to hire the best in the world in order to surround himself with opulence.

In Italy to some extent, but more so in Northern Europe, people became disillusioned with the corruption in the Church. Lay monastic movements and mystical groups appeared with increasing frequency, often persecuted by the popes when they noticed their existence (the anti-humanist and anti-papal revolt in Florence under Savonarola, which included the Bonfire of the Vanities during which much Renaissance artwork was destroyed, influenced Botticelli so strongly that he no longer painted classical themes, even after Savonarola was burned at the stake). This mystical strain strongly influenced the artwork in the north, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands.

THE ART OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

What are the salient characteristics of a style of art so rich as that of the Italian Renaissance? Several points may be noted. The first is that the art of the period freely mixes the secular and the sacred. On the one hand, the religious art of the fifteenth century borrows heavily from the classical styles brought back from the East. No longer are figures devoid of identity apart from symbols indicating that the man in the picture is Peter rather than Paul; no longer are they placed in settings that conform to no place except heaven. Instead, the people in the pictures look like real people - attention to detail became an obsession; in fact, the people in the pictures often *were* real people - patrons painted as wise men, the pope portrayed (by one of his critics) as the Jewish High Priest, or even the painter's mistress pictured as the Virgin Mary! Furthermore, the paintings of the era were set in real places, or at least in real-looking places. The architecture was the architecture of the fifteenth century, and was often identifiable to the viewer. The clothing was that of the contemporary world as well. In addition, the painters of the era paid great attention to the mathematics of their art. Perspective, foreshortening, and the play of light and shadow were discussed in detailed treatises by men such as Ghiberti and Leonardo da Vinci (e.g., da Vinci's *Last Supper*). Biblical figures were also often pictured using classical poses and techniques, as may be seen in the nude statues of David done by Donatello and Michelangelo.

On the other hand, the classical art of the fifteenth century borrows heavily from the religious art that preceded it. Despite the fact that the artists of the Renaissance saw themselves as making a clean break from the Middle Ages against which they were reacting, there were inevitable connections between the two. Not only do we find that the vocabulary of medieval art continues to be used to identify saints and biblical characters in religious paintings, but also the secular artwork of the age - in itself a departure from what preceded it - often borrows the conventions of religious art (e.g., Botticelli's *Allegory of Spring*, the structure of which is very similar to earlier paintings portraying the Virgin Mary surrounded by adoring saints, and Michelangelo's inclusion of classical figures in his work in the Sistine Chapel).

One significant development in Renaissance art, of course, is that the artists of the day *did* return to classical themes. Gods and goddesses of the classical world reappear in the art of Europe (Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* is a famous example). These works of art do not at this point represent

a rejection of Christianity in favor of paganism; all of these artists would have professed Christian faith in one form or another. Instead, they believed that classical themes and images could appropriately be used to portray virtues such as love and courage (or the famous Renaissance quality of *virtu*) without conflicting with Christian truth. Raphael's mural *The School of Athens*, located in the Vatican, pictures the conviction of the fifteenth century church that Plato and Aristotle, the great philosophical influences in Scholasticism, can be reconciled as teaching different aspects of the same truth.

In addition to the production of art with classical themes, the Renaissance also became an era of great portraiture. The same techniques that were used to locate biblical narratives in contemporary time and space and to give mathematical precision to the portrayal of the natural world (another favorite theme of Renaissance artists) were applied to drawing and painting realistic pictures of anyone who was willing to pay for the artist's services.

THE ART OF THE NORTHERN RENAISSANCE

As already noted, the art of the Northern Renaissance was heavily influenced by the mysticism that was for many an escape from the corruption and political machinations of the organized Church. Groups like the Spiritual Franciscans and the Brethren of the Common Life sought immediate communion with God apart from the formal sacraments of the church, as mystics had always done. Such desires were often expressed in works portraying apocalyptic themes and scenes from the Book of Revelation. The *Ghent Altarpiece* by Hubert and Jan van Eyck and the bizarre images of Hieronymus Bosch (e.g., *The Garden of Earthly Delights*) are good examples of the mystical art of the era. Note that because Northern Europe was much more strongly influenced by the Reformation than was the south, we will consider developments in this region much more fully next week.

EARLY RENAISSANCE MUSIC

The music of the fifteenth century advances largely in terms of improved technology and musical trends, since little can be known about the music of the classical age. One of the most important developments in the field of music was the advent of the printing press, which allowed for cheap and uniform copies of music to be sung in churches and palaces. The standard form of music during this time was four-part harmony sung *a capella*; variations included doubling the vocal parts with instruments or using larger groups of people with many people singing each part. Solo singing was rare during the fifteenth century, though sometimes a four-part song would be performed by one singer and three instrumentalists. The themes continued to be religious in nature. The greatest music produced during this time was written in the Netherlands by men such as Johannes Ockeghem, who was influenced by the mystical trends of the day, and by Josquin des Prez, who was praised by Martin Luther for his mastery of the tools of his trade.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS V

Reformation and Counterreformation; Mannerism and the Baroque

Martin Luther changed everything. The advent of the Protestant Reformation at the beginning of the sixteenth century affected all of Europe, including the arts. In the same way the religious and political leaders were either supporting the Reformation (often for their own ends) or reacting against it, so artists were caught up in the same polarized environment. In today's lesson we will look at the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries - the ages during which the doctrines of the Reformation had their greatest impact, both positively and negatively.

THE REFORMERS AND THE ARTS

We have already noted that Christianity has had an ambivalent relationship to the arts throughout its history, and nowhere is that ambivalence more apparent than in the time of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers sought to distance themselves from the extrabiblical traditions of Catholicism, and in the process often rejected the forms of art patronized by Catholic prelates and nobles. On the other hand, Protestant doctrine opened up entire new fields of endeavor for artists. The details of these developments differ considerably depending on the manifestation of Protestantism at which one looks.

GERMANY AND THE LUTHERAN WORLD

Martin Luther had a great appreciation for the arts; he was a skilled musician himself, and greatly appreciated the contributions artists made to the worship of God. On the other hand, he hated idolatry with a passion, and saw much of the art associated with Catholic worship as serving that function. In the months following Luther's condemnation at the Diet of Worms in 1521, he was taken into hiding by agents of Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony. While he was there, and believed to be dead by many of his followers, radicals seized leadership of the fledgling movement and began to destroy anything associated with Catholicism - burning monasteries and convents and "liberating" monks and nuns, smashing stained-glass windows, and demolishing statuary and paintings. When Luther heard of these actions, he quickly came out of hiding and put a stop to the destruction, decreeing that any aspect of worship not directly contrary to Scripture might be retained in the Lutheran churches. The result was an open atmosphere with respect to art in the Lutheran countries (primarily Germany and Scandinavia). Among the notable artists influenced by Luther were Albrecht Durer (already famous at the time, the themes of his art changed from Renaissance humanism to biblical themes and woodcuts supporting the Reformation cause) and Lucas Cranach.

REFORMATION AND ART IN THE NETHERLANDS

The branch of the Reformation influenced by Zwingli and Calvin took a much more radical approach. Instead of arguing that anything not contrary to Scripture may be retained from Catholic worship, they insisted that anything not commanded in Scripture should be forbidden in worship - the Regulative Principle. As a result, virtually all artwork was banned from the worship environment; for example, when Zurich turned to Protestantism under Zwingli's leadership, many of the patrons who had sponsored artworks in the cathedrals supervised their orderly removal. Reformed churches were generally without ornament (one source said they looked far too much like

lecture halls), simple in architecture and design, with an arrangement of space that reinforced Reformed values; for example, the pulpit would be in the center with the communion table beneath it rather than finding the altar at the center with the pulpit off to the side.

Contrary to the impression their places of worship might give, however, the Reformed Protestants were not against the arts. Instead, the Swiss and Dutch saw the arts as one part of a much larger picture. This larger picture was defined by what they called the Cultural Mandate - the command given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to subdue the earth to the glory of God. Thus, for the Reformed Christian, all of life was sacred, not just what went on in a church sanctuary. Thus agriculture, business, and science could be done to the glory of God - and so could art. Such a belief is reflected in the absorption of Dutch painters with the everyday lives of their subjects, landscapes that pictured the glory of God in nature, and portraits that showed the dignity of the individual in the sight of God. Artists such as Frans Hals and Jan Steen painted the daily lives of the Dutch people in a way that demonstrated that such lives were worthy of record - God was pleased by the diligent businessman as much as by the faithful pastor. Preeminent in this category is the great Dutch painter Rembrandt van Rijn, who not only highlighted the daily life of the ordinary Dutchman, but also painted hundreds of biblical scenes with the same eye for detail, suggesting that these narratives, far from being outside the realm of human experience, portrayed the lives of people just like his viewers. We should note here that the art of the Dutch Masters is by no means secular art, despite the fact that most of it does not involve directly religious subjects. To them, all of life was sacred, and the glory of God could be seen in the face of the simplest peasant in the same way it could be seen in the most detailed biblical narrative.

THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND

The early years of the English Reformation were highly politicized, driven more by the marital and dynastic ambitions of Henry VIII and his successors than they were by the theology of the Continental Reformers. It should thus surprise us not at all that the art of the early sixteenth century in England was closer to that of the Renaissance than that of the Reformation on the Continent. Painters such as Hans Holbein and writers like Thomas More (Erasmus in the Netherlands fits this category better than the last one, since he never supported the Reformation) demonstrate humanist more than Christian values. The humanist emphasis continues through much of the Tudor and Stuart dynasties, whether one looks at the architecture of Inigo Jones and Christopher Wren or the writing of Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. The closest England gets to genuine Reformation-influenced art during these two centuries is in the writings of men like John Donne and John Milton, though Milton himself certainly did not always espouse orthodox theology.

MUSIC IN PROTESTANT LANDS

Music, too, varies according to which Protestant country one might be examining. Luther loved music, and Germany became the home to great chorales and cantatas, such as those written by Heinrich Schutz (Bach and Handel fall in the next century, so we will be considering them next week). England produces madrigals (a favorite style of Elizabeth I), along with the instrumental and operatic works of Henry Purcell. In Calvinist lands, however, music, like the church buildings themselves, was simple and unornamented - congregational singing, usually of the Psalms, without

instrumental accompaniment (in Puritan England, Oliver Cromwell's army sung such hymns as they went into battle against the forces of the King).

THE CATHOLIC REACTION

Whenever a strong movement arises within the Church, there is almost always a reaction in the opposite direction among those who find the new movement abhorrent. So it was with the Reformation - the Catholic Church after the time of Luther began to place renewed emphasis on the very traditional elements of Catholic worship that the Protestants had rejected. We thus find strains of devotional art emphasizing Mary and the saints, the Eucharist, and the power of the established Church in its relationship to the state.

MANNERISM AND THE DECLINE OF THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY

If you were an artist living in the generation after Michelangelo and Raphael, what would you do for an encore other than seeking another means of gainful employment? The Italian painters and sculptors of the sixteenth century had basically two choices - they could follow the rules of perspective and proportion developed so painstakingly and executed so well by the masters of the High Renaissance and wind up with inferior imitations of what others had done far better, or they could deliberately break those same rules in order to demonstrate their artistic virtuosity. For the most part, artists chose the latter path. The result is a body of detailed, skillfully-executed, but somehow not quite right paintings and sculptures that lack the soul of the previous generation's works. Artists such as Tintoretto and Veronese produced visually interesting works that brought together odd combinations of classical and Christian elements in ways that did not always pass muster before the Inquisition. When Veronese, for example, did a painting of the Last Supper, the Inquisition objected that he incorporated about fifty figures into the picture, including "Germans, dwarfs and similar vulgarities" (he neglected to mention that two of the extraneous figures were Michelangelo and Titian), rather than just Jesus and His disciples (and could not even identify which figures represented which disciples), and placed them in a Venetian villa. When the Inquisition insisted that he alter the picture he refused, and instead changed its title to *Christ in the House of Levi*.

MYSTICISM AND THE GOLDEN AGE OF SPANISH ART

The reform of the Catholic Church began in Spain even before the Protestant Reformation emerged in Germany. In the sixteenth century, Spain was dominated by the Inquisition and the mysticism of the Society of Jesus founded by the Spaniard Ignatius Loyola. In addition, the Council of Trent, which attempted to counter Protestant gains in the middle of the sixteenth century, laid down restrictions on the kinds of art that were appropriate for the Catholic world. Two examples of the mystical strains encouraged by the intense devotional spirit of the Jesuits are the paintings of El Greco and the great palace of Philip II, the Escorial. The works of El Greco portray a world where the spiritual is all that matters, but instead of the timeless and placeless pictures of the Middle Ages, we find characters who look almost like disembodied spirits themselves, with their elongated bodies and ghostly coloration. In the Escorial, we find a palace that is more monastery than anything else, designed in the shape of a grill to honor St. Lawrence, who was martyred by being roasted on a grill, and on whose feast day Philip won a great victory. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada

and the fall of Spanish influence in the world, Spanish art became more secular as exemplified by the painting of Velasquez and the writing of Cervantes.

VENETIAN AND FLEMISH BAROQUE ART

The art of the seventeenth century is often denominated Baroque; its chief characteristics are intense light, a sense of movement and energy, and overall unity given to disparate elements in the picture. Two of the great centers of Baroque art were Venice and Flanders (note the contrasts between the art of Catholic Belgium and that of Protestant Holland). In both locales, the emphasis on Catholic tradition is visible. For example, the paintings of Artemisia Gentileschi such as *Judith Slaying Holofernes* portray scenes from the Apocrypha, rejected as canonical by the Reformers but incorporated into the Bible by the Catholic Church. Sculptors such as Bernini attempted to capture the mystical ecstasies of the saints in marble, as may be seen in his sculpture *St. Theresa in Ecstasy*. Baroque architects, on the other hand, reached for the ornate in their work; it was during this time, for instance, that the colonnades and buildings surrounding St. Peter's Square in Rome were built, along with the Louvre and Versailles Palace in Paris. The Flemish approach in the Baroque era can best be seen in the busy pictures full of chubby cherubs painted by Peter Paul Rubens.

MUSIC IN CATHOLIC LANDS

The music of the sixteenth century in Catholic countries was in many ways less innovative than that found in Protestant lands, since the Council of Trent and the Inquisition again demanded fidelity to church tradition. Palestrina, for instance, wrote madrigals, but later repented and devoted the rest of his musical career to writing Masses. In the Baroque era, musicians had more freedom, and new forms arose - Monteverdi and Lully wrote operas in Italy and France, respectively, chamber music became increasingly popular, and styles such as toccata and fugue and theme and variations began to appear.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS VI

The Enlightenment; Late Baroque and Rococo

The seventeenth century had been an age overflowing with creative energy, both in the arts and in the sciences. By the dawn of the eighteenth century, people were exhausted - tired, more than anything else, of religious controversies and religious wars. The era known as the Age of Reason thus produces little of significance in the area of religious art, largely because the dominant minds of the day considered religion too insignificant to be worth much time and energy, while those who still considered Christianity to be a matter of importance - those touched by the Methodist revival, for instance - had little to do with the arts because, for them, the matter of chief importance was the saving of souls.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The eighteenth century was the age of Latitudinarianism and Deism - people worshiped a Watchmaker God who had fashioned a finely-tuned machine in which man could live, then wound it up and let it go, leaving man in charge. And man was without question up to the task - the pinnacle of Creation, supreme in dignity and power, destined for unending upward progress. All this was inevitable if only people could manage to leave one another in peace so they could enjoy life on their estates, discuss the latest ideas in the salons, and appreciate the beauty and orderliness of everything around them. It was, like our own era, an age that prided itself on the virtue of tolerance.

It was also an age of internationalism in thought and outlook. Reason, after all, was a quality shared by all men of all nations, so one should expect that reasonable people everywhere should come to the same basic conclusions about things (this idea went by the name of *natural law*). As a result, national boundaries meant little - German monarchs ruled England (George I and his successors), a German princess ruled Russia (Catherine the Great), and a Spaniard ruled in Naples; the great artists and thinkers of the day were cosmopolitan men - the German Handel spent most of his productive years in England, as did the American painter Benjamin West, while Voltaire frequently visited the court of Frederick the Great at Potsdam. Even warfare didn't take national boundaries very seriously - the desire to maintain a balance of power in Europe meant that small pieces of territory were frequently transferred from one jurisdiction to another with little concern for the wishes of the inhabitants, while military alliances were made and broken without regard for matters of belief or political allegiance (in the Great Mid-Century War, the major participants actually changed partners in the middle of the war). Ironically, the height of this cosmopolitan mindset arrived with the career of Napoleon, the last of the Enlightened Despots, who tried to erase national boundaries by conquest while imposing his Napoleonic Code on every nation under his sway.

The emphasis on the dignity of man also made the Enlightenment a humanitarian age. The rulers of Europe fancied themselves to be Enlightened Despots, acting for the good of their people while needing no transcendent justification to do so. Though most of the artists of the age were concerned largely with pleasing the rulers who were paying their salaries, some had broader social concerns, such as English painter William Hogarth, whose satirical works mocked the practices of the rich while publicizing the horrors of the Industrial Revolution in its impact on the poor, and

Jonathan Swift, who took to task the follies of his era in works like *Gulliver's Travels* and *A Modest Proposal*.

The Enlightenment was also an age during which art was produced more for popular consumption than had been true in the past. The Church was no longer the chief patron of the arts, and while the aristocracy continued to keep the commissions flowing at a brisk pace, the rising middle class was increasingly interested in, and able to afford, the works of artists. Portraiture thus continued to be important, as evidenced by the careers of English painters Joshua Reynolds and Thomas Gainsborough. Writers, too, wrote for the educated general public. The French *philosophes*, men such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Diderot, were not abstract philosophers, but popular writers interested in communicating their ideas about political and social affairs to the educated man-on-the-street.

Finally, the eighteenth century was more an age of prose than it was an age of poetry. Since the world was thought to be a machine, order was valued more than almost any other virtue. Poetic sweeps of emotion did not impress the men of the Enlightenment, who were beyond being swayed by such juvenile matters and chose to look to their reason instead; after all, had it not been unbridled emotion that had led to so many devastating religious wars in the previous generations? Thus we see the outwardly-ordered life of drawing-room comedies such as Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and small-town novels like those of Jane Austen. Even the poetry of the age shows obsession with order - Alexander Pope's rhymed couplets become vehicles for communicating a Deist philosophy of life in his *Essay on Man*. And in the field of music, of course, we have the sublime orderliness of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

ROCOCO ARTISTRY

Baroque art tended toward the ornate and decorative in some of its manifestations, and this aspect of art became even more pronounced in the early eighteenth century with the introduction of a style of art known as Rococo. The term comes from the French word for *shell*; the art of the era was given this name by later critics who scorned the shells, vines, and other decorative features that often framed the paintings and architecture of eighteenth-century artists. Those who received large commissions from churches (largely Catholic) and aristocrats, such as the Italian Tiepolo, painted massive works that commanded large spaces in ways that gave the illusion of three-dimensionality on the ceilings and domes of churches and palaces. French rococo artists Boucher and Fragonard painted works commissioned for individual nobles (the former was the favorite artist of Madame de Pompadour, the mistress of Louis XV), while English portraitists Gainsborough and Reynolds pictured nobles and country squires alike in their works. Much of the art of the era was done on a reduced scale suitable for the salon or drawing room, as opposed to the palace or cathedral. In any of its manifestations, however, the theme of Rococo painting was *elegance* - an elegance portraying the good life of the comfortable, the orderliness of the world, and, in general, man's satisfaction with the world he was in the process of shaping.

FORERUNNERS OF ROMANTICISM

The optimism of the Enlightenment suffered little at the hands of the American Revolution; in fact, the deep thinkers of the day were convinced that the values expressed by the colonists in

seeking their freedom from England were the same values that the advanced minds of Europe had already been championing for decades. But this optimism crumbled quickly when the idealism initially expressed in the French Revolution led first to the Reign of Terror and then to the voracious empire-building of Napoleon. If reason led to such horrors, perhaps emotion wasn't so bad after all; if internationalism led to ambitions of world empire, then national distinctives might be necessary to protect people from tyrants. The result was Romanticism, which we will be examining next week. At the end of the eighteenth century, however, hints of this movement were already appearing, whether in the emotionally-charged paintings of Jacques Louis David, the chronicler of the French Revolution, or the impenetrable mysticism of William Blake in England.

MUSIC - FROM BACH AND HANDEL TO HAYDN AND MOZART

In music, the eighteenth century takes us from the peak of the Baroque to the high point of Rococo - in other words, from Bach to Mozart. Johann Sebastian Bach was in many ways a throwback, influenced by the Protestant Reformation like men of an earlier era. Obscure in his own day, Bach spent most of his life as a choir director and organist in Leipzig. He took the hymn tunes of the Reformation and arranged them as chorales for congregational singing. Even in his non-religious pieces, such as his concertos and fugues, he explicitly expressed his desire to glorify God, ending each of his works with the letters SDG (*soli deo gloria* - "to God alone be the glory").

While Bach worked in obscurity in Germany, his composing talents unrecognized by those around him, his contemporary Georg Frederick Handel journeyed to Italy and later to England, where he established a worldwide reputation. Initially, Handel focused on Italian opera, a style of music that was no longer fashionable in England, cranking out forty operas in thirty years, but finding that few of them drew a sizeable enough audience to compensate the composer adequately. Though initially he had little interest in music with sacred themes, he hit the jackpot, so to speak, when he began composing oratorios - including *The Messiah*, which he wrote in an amazing 24 days. While Bach's compositions were often complex and demonstrated mastery of the idiom, Handel more often sought the ornate for the sheer beauty of it (and thus was much more a man of his age than was Bach).

It is at the end of the eighteenth century, however, that the greatest practitioners of order for the sake of order appear - Franz Josef Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The perfect balance and complex structure of Mozart's music is the aural equivalent of the poetry of Pope, the painting of Tiepolo, or the architecture of Balthasar Neumann (architect of the Wurzburg Palace). Mozart wrote for the nobility (he received commissions from Joseph II of Austria) as well as for the public - operas like *The Magic Flute* and *Don Giovanni* were composed for the public opera house. The order of Mozart's compositions is such that altering a single note would detract from the effect of the whole - or so Mozart argued when, according to the screenplay for the movie *Amadeus*, Joseph II suggested that his music had "too many notes." But, as we will see next week, order and the satisfaction of the rational in man proved not to be sufficient; the emotions must be fed as well.

All of this is not to suggest that Bach was the only one producing sacred music during the eighteenth century, of course. The Methodist Revival brought about a great age of hymnody in England, led by the works of Charles and John Wesley, along with William Cowper and John Newton. Others touched by the revival, including William Williams and Augustus Toplady,

contributed greatly to the rich store of Christian hymns used for worship in the Church to the present day.

We have now moved clearly into the realm of the secular in the arts. The Enlightenment finished what the Renaissance started; the God who no longer needed to be at the center of man's endeavors in the Renaissance is now no longer needed at all, unless one feels the compulsion to give Him a nod as the Creator of the great World Machine. From now on, the arts operate largely outside the realm of Christian thought, and Christians consequently leave the arts to the pagans. In the last two weeks of our survey of art history, we will see the consequences of this break between the Church and the world of the arts.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS VII

The Nineteenth Century - From Neoclassicism to Impressionism

The art of the nineteenth century is tremendously varied in nature, but it has certain basic characteristics in common. First of all, it is predominantly secular in outlook. Even art with Christian themes lacks any coherent Christian philosophy, with a few notable exceptions such as the *Peaceable Kingdom* pictures of American Quaker Edward Hicks and the sacred works of the Pre-Raphaelites in England, influenced as they were by the Oxford Movement and its emphasis on the mysteries of the Church. Secondly, the nineteenth century introduces the concept of the artist as rebel - much of the art of the period is revolutionary in character, reacting against some aspect of the surrounding society, or often against the prevailing views of art itself. The art of the nineteenth century also reflects epistemological uncertainty, along with varied ideas about the role of art in society (see below). Four significant movements delineate the era - Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Realism, and Impressionism, though they overlap significantly in terms of time.

NEOCLASSICISM AND THE AGE OF REVOLUTION

The French Revolution and the subsequent rise of Napoleon shook the world. The Revolution was blatantly humanistic and anti-clerical (at one point the Cathedral of Notre Dame was rededicated as a Temple of Reason), while Napoleon loved to accentuate the glories of ancient Rome, to which he considered his empire a worthy successor. We already noted last week that Jacques Louis David became the most notable artistic chronicler of the Revolution. Classical themes predominate, not only in the painting of David and his pupil Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, but also in the architecture of the period, modeled after the architecture of the classical world (this era produced the Church of La Madeleine, the Vendome Column, and the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, along with many of the best-known public buildings in Washington, DC). In music, the heroic age of Napoleon is best represented by Ludwig von Beethoven. A transitional figure, Beethoven immortalized Napoleon in his Third (*Eroica*) Symphony, though he later became disillusioned when Napoleon adopted imperial pretensions. His later work serves as a bridge to the sweeping emotions of the Romantic era.

The nineteenth century, however, is an age in which the gods no longer exist. Though Napoleon or George Washington may be painted or sculpted in the pose of Mars or Zeus, the reason for doing so is not because the symbols portrayed by the gods of antiquity still had meaning, but because the perfection of form was worthy of emulation. Neoclassicism thus becomes the last gasp of the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason. That the era ended in horrible bloodshed and tyranny caused many to seek other directions.

ROMANTICISM - EMOTIONS OVER REASON

We noted above that the nineteenth century (and indeed the twentieth century was even worse) was an age of epistemological uncertainty. Toward the end of the Enlightenment, German philosopher Immanuel Kant had brought into question the entire basis for human knowledge when he asserted that the mind altered all that entered it by way of the senses, so that what we call knowledge can never correspond to what is really "out there." Kant's epistemology had revolutionary effects on philosophy and theology, but it also impacted the arts. After all, if what we

see doesn't correspond to reality in itself, what should the artist paint? One of the answers given in the early nineteenth century is that, if truth is not to be found in the senses or in the reason of man, one must turn to the emotions. Though Romanticism was largely a literary movement, represented by English poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and Shelley, and in America by the Transcendentalists and others, it had its impact on the realms of visual arts and music as well.

One consequence of Romanticism was the belief of some that the main purpose of art was to stir the emotions. Eugene Delacroix in France and Francisco Goya in Spain used art as a tool of political propaganda. Delacroix' *Liberty Leading the People* memorializes the 1830 Revolution in France, picturing the figure of Liberty leading the rebels over the barricades. Goya, in his *Executions of the Third of May, 1808* pictures Spanish prisoners being shot by Napoleonic troops. In both of these pictures, the allegorical figures (note the Christlike pose of the central prisoner in Goya's painting) have very this-worldly functions without being tied to transcendent values.

Romanticism also led to attempts to capture motion in the visual arts. The paintings of Joseph Mallord William Turner in England portrayed steaming locomotives and storm-wracked ships at sea. Others turned to landscape painting, thus communicating pictorially the pantheism that was implicit in Deism and more explicit in American Transcendentalism; the Hudson River School of landscape painters is a good example of this trend.

The Romantic era also brought a new emphasis on national distinctives - again, a reaction against the internationalism of Napoleon. Whether the collection of traditional fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm, the fascination with the mysteries of the Orient (odalisques - Turkish harem girls - often replace nude Venuses in the paintings of the Romantics), the Polish folk tunes of Chopin or the emotionally-laden dances of Berlioz, the Romantics made it clear that not everyone should be expected to think or act in the same way, and that the differences between people were more important than the similarities. Nationalism in music reaches even greater heights later in the century in the works of Tchaikovsky (the *1812 Overture* honored the resistance of the Russian people to the invasion of their land by Napoleon) and, preeminently, Wagner (his *Ring of the Niebelungenlied* brought German ethnic myths to the stage in ways that glorified Aryan supremacy).

If the Neoclassical era brought about a revival of interest in the Roman Empire, Romanticism turned people's thoughts back to the Middle Ages. We thus find neo-Gothic architecture, such as that represented by the Houses of Parliament in London, along with buildings like the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York.

REALISM - THE SALONS

Romanticism too brought its reaction - the school of Realism that gained official approval in France through government-sponsored shows put on by Salons involving annual contests in which submissions were passed before a group of judges to ascertain their worthiness for display. Because the criteria were largely technical and the censors kept a sharp eye out for anything that might offend public morals (Manet's *Olympia*, a picture of a well-known prostitute, didn't make it past the censors, leading the artist and other rebels to set up a *Salon des Refuses* to exhibit the pictures rejected by the system), the paintings that were received for public display tended to be technically excellent, but with little soul or power. When Louis Daguerre developed the first effective

photographic technique, artists began to wonder whether painting would no longer be necessary, since the camera could duplicate life far more accurately than the best of Realist painters. The Realist movement did produce the sculptures of Auguste Rodin, however, and painters like Manet and Degas got their start during this era.

IMPRESSIONISM - THE PRIMACY OF SENSATIONS

While early Impressionists began working within the Realist environment, questions soon arose concerning the true nature of reality. Does the real world consist of what we see, or were the Romantics right in suggesting that there was something more that the artist should convey? If so, what is it? Was Kant right about our perceptions not corresponding to the outside world, and, if so, can the artist ever really transcend his own perceptions? If he is imprisoned by his own perceptions, should not those perceptions then become the subject of his art? Was the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, who insisted that "you can't step into the same river twice," right to suggest that the only constant in life is change, so that the artist can hope to do no more than capture the moment? Do new discoveries in science have anything to do with art? Impressionism attempted to address all of these questions.

With regard to the nature of reality, Impressionists illustrated the belief that sensations defined the reach of the artist. They forsook the common practice of sketching from nature then finishing the final work in the studio, instead preferring to capture the moment by painting the finished work on the easel (one of the reasons why the Impressionists were initially rejected by the critics and the public is because their works looked unfinished - slapped together hurriedly with little polish and little more than a suggestion of the subject being painted). Such an approach was necessary if the painter was to capture an unrepeatable moment in time - a philosophy emphasized by series of works of the same subject at different times, such as Monet's paintings of Rouen Cathedral. Note that what is happening here is that art is becoming increasingly subjective. Art should be viewed as distinctive not only with regard to national identity, but also in terms of the personal perspective of the artist. I paint not what is there, but my response to what is there. In music, Impressionism appears in the music of Debussy, among others.

Impressionism also shows the impact of science on the arts. The latter part of the nineteenth century was a period of time when people were losing confidence in the orderliness of their world. The loss of confidence in human reason was succeeded by the belief that the world itself was irrational, so that it could never be understood by the human mind. This irrationalism was encouraged by the works of men like Darwin, who saw random chance driving the struggle for survival, and Freud, who believed that the essence of man consisted of an unconscious id, driven by animalistic urges toward sex and violence that promoted self-preservation. One of the consequences of this new irrationalism was the belief of some that truth could only be found outside the bounds of organized society. While Rousseau had suggested this a century earlier, the philosophy of the noble savage takes pictorial form in the work of Paul Gauguin, who found in the Pacific Islanders among whom he went to live the answers to the questions that puzzled him (see his *Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?*). The lack of belief in the orderliness of the universe also led musicians to seek their own structure, since none could be found in the outside world. For example, Schoenberg developed the twelve-tone scale, arguing that relationships among the notes were insignificant, that keys and chords were restrictive, and that no note should assume

prominence over any other note in a composition, therefore each note should appear once in each series before any note may appear twice. Thus we find the exaltation of dissonance in a way that had never been the case among those who sought increasingly complex harmonies in order to innovate beyond what had gone before them.

Another way in which Impressionism shows the effects of science is in the emphasis of the Impressionist painters on light and how we perceive it. Impressionists experimented with color on the canvas in ways that had never been attempted before. Instead of combining colors on the palette, so that blue and yellow paint would be mixed and applied to the canvas as green, the Impressionists put blue and yellow paint on the canvas in close proximity so that the eye of the beholder would then combine the two to produce an impression of green (this is why Impressionist paintings tend to look a whole lot better from a distance than they do close up). An extreme form of this philosophy was the pointillist technique developed by Georges Seurat. Large paintings consist of nothing but tiny dots of primary color, which the eye then blends into rich colors and textures at a distance (see *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*).

By the end of the nineteenth century, it is obvious that art is moving rapidly away from any conception of absolute truth. Since we cannot know what is real, our perceptions are all that really count. When we reach the twentieth century, we will increasingly see naked perceptions unrelated to any objective reality at all, so that one can hardly guess what the artist perceives. Thus the demise of the Christian worldview has drastic consequences for the world of art.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS VIII

The Twentieth Century - Expressionism and Beyond

The twentieth century was a century that witnessed the wholesale destruction of old values. The attempts to search for meaning and reality largely came up empty, and the art of the era reflects that emptiness to a startling degree. We find that one style succeeded another with numbing rapidity, but all in one way or another expressed the consequences of rejecting a Christian view of the world.

EXPRESSIONISM

The Impressionists at the end of the nineteenth century attempted to capture the reality of the moment through use of light and color. They were followed by a group of Post-Impressionists, such as Cezanne and Gauguin, who placed more emphasis on the impressions of the artist than on the reality being observed. Parallel to Gauguin in the realm of painting was Stravinsky in the world of music; his *Rite of Spring* used primitive sounds of nature in much the same way Gauguin's paintings used primitive images of Tahitian natives.

The Post-Impressionists paved the way for the Expressionists who followed them. The Expressionists saw the purpose of art as being the communication as the inner state of the painter. Included among the Expressionists are the Fauvists in France and a group in Munich called "The Blue Rider." They were noted for their use of bright colors and emphasized the idea that art stood on its own, independent of external reality. Painters such as Matisse who began with oddly-colored paintings of recognizable objects, such as *The Green Line* (a portrait of his wife), grew increasingly abstract. Inner reality became the source of truth - only one example of the twentieth-century psychologizing of the art world, as artists sought to put on canvas the subconscious emphasized by Freud and others.

CUBISM

Pablo Picasso is considered the originator of Cubism. The basic philosophy of the movement was that reality was to be discovered by uncovering the fundamental structure of objects. Cubist paintings thus consist largely of geometrical shapes considered to be the building blocks of the reality observed by the painter (see Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which ultimately dehumanizes the prostitutes who are the subjects of the painting). What we thus see is man as machine. We should not be terribly surprised that, a decade after Nietzsche had declared that God was dead, artists should be concluding that man is dead as well.

Late in the first decade of the twentieth century, Cubism underwent a change. From the early "analytical cubism" that sought to find the structure underlying reality grows "synthetic cubism" - a portrayal of forms with no links to reality (see Picasso's 1909 *Nude*). In essence, the later cubism denies any meaning outside the mind of the painter. He creates his own structure, which has no inherent relationship to the surrounding world (cf. the music of Schoenberg), for which no real structure exists. Picasso explained the rationale for this when he said, "The world today doesn't make sense, so why should I paint pictures that do?"

ABSTRACTION

Thus begins the era of art as pure abstraction. The paintings of Piet Mondrian consist largely of colorful geometric shapes, with no attempt to connect them to external reality at all. Other abstract painters presented shapes, colors, and textures on canvas, then gave their pictures titles that had no apparent relationship to what observers could see. Marcel Duchamp, whose paintings include *Nude Descending a Staircase* and *The King and Queen Surrounded by Swift Nudes*, often gave his abstract paintings sexually provocative titles. Some have suggested that he was merely mocking his bourgeois audience by forcing them to become voyeurs by looking for sexual content that was nowhere to be seen, while others see in his paintings yet another step in the dehumanization of man.

SURREALISM

Surrealism, pioneered by de Chirico and having much in common with the Theater of the Absurd and the novels of Joyce and Kafka, challenged every aspect of accepted reality. Some have suggested that the melting clocks in Salvador Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*, for example, reflect the demise of the Watchmaker God of the Enlightenment or even Einstein's Theory of Relativity, with its insistence that time is variable rather than fixed. Dali's *Christ of St. John of the Cross* pictures a man on a cross, translucent and hanging over a communion table, indicating a mystical view of Christ that separates Him from earthly reality. The meaninglessness of life propounded by the Surrealists was later spelled out in the writings of Existentialists like Sartre and Camus in the middle of the century.

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM

The next step was to conclude that if the universe is meaningless, it should be able to speak its reality without the deliberate direction of the artist. A random universe should speak through random art, which can be the only truth in a meaningless world. The most notable exponents of this approach to art were Jackson Pollock, with his drip paintings, and John Cage, with his totally random approach to music. Cage ultimately found even his random approach unsatisfactory - in one particular "composition," he incorporated eight minutes of total silence; the final conclusion is that a random universe has nothing to say to man, and the purpose of the artist is to destroy. As painter Karel Appel put it, "I do not paint, I hit. Painting is destruction." The desire to destroy all of society's values continues to be a central facet of contemporary art, which becomes increasingly pornographic and blasphemous. Contemporary music, especially on the popular level, demonstrates the same nihilistic tendencies.

POSTMODERNISM

The postmodernism of the late twentieth century differed from the relativism that preceded it by asserting that each person determines his own reality. Thus, instead of denying truth, postmodernists maintain that truth really exists, but is unique to each individual person. How has this affected art? In the postmodern age, painters often refuse to title their works, arguing that the meaning of any work of art must be supplied by the observer. Postmodern novelist Umberto Eco chose *The Name of the Rose* as the title of his most famous novel precisely *because* it has nothing to do with the content of the story, thus forcing the reader to give his own meaning to the book.

We thus have arrived at a time when art expresses alienation, the death of values, the dehumanization of man, the death of God, and the meaninglessness of life. Artists are expected to rebel, destroy, and undermine all that society values. When they are not communicating what is vile, they fail to communicate at all, speaking in obscure terms intelligible only to an in-group elite, if at all. How are Christians to respond in such an environment? Should Christians desert the world of art as hopelessly corrupt and unworthy of the attention of the righteous? Should Christians instead engage in cultural critique, meeting the culture with a message of hope that responds to the nihilism all around us? Should Christians give their time and talents to participate in the world of art, bringing an alternative message to speak truth into the world of the twenty-first century? These questions will occupy the remaining weeks of the course as we look at Christian responses to the arts in the modern world.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS IX

Appreciating the Arts - Visual Arts

For the next few weeks we are going to talk about appreciating the arts, and in the process look at three different forms of art - visual arts like painting and sculpture, music, and cinema; with the latter two, we will be speaking more about art on the popular level than about the "fine arts" that have been the focus of our study thus far. Today, however, we will begin by dealing with the question of whether art appreciation is something to which the Christian should legitimately devote his time, then move on to discuss the visual arts in particular.

SHOULD ART APPRECIATION BE PART OF A CHRISTIAN'S LIFE?

Perhaps we should begin here by asking whether or not art has value in itself. Must art have a function, or does it become valuable simply by its existence? Is there such a thing as art for art's sake? First of all, we should note that very few things have intrinsic value - value due to their existence alone. God obviously fits into this category, but so does man - as created in God's image, man has such value that to destroy the image of God in man merits the destruction of the destroyer (Genesis 9:5-6). Man's creations, however, bear no such distinction, so for an artist to claim for his works an intrinsic value that takes them beyond the pale of criticism, asserting that they are worthy simply because they are art, is idolatry - imputing a value to something that God alone has the power to assign.

Note the implications of this. If art lacks intrinsic value, it must therefore serve some larger purpose and must be judged according to the extent to which it serves that purpose. Artists are thus accountable to their public; it simply will not do to demand acceptance (and tax-supported financing) on the basis that something is "art." The greater purposes that art must serve include things like goodness, truth, and beauty (see below).

Now we must address the issue of whether or not a Christian should take the time to appreciate art at all. Should this be one of the ways in which he uses the finite amount of time God has given him on this earth? As we have seen, many Christians throughout the ages have thought so, though in recent centuries Christians have largely abdicated the field because of the ungodly directions taken by the art world. Is art appreciation part of the full-orbed worship that the Christian owes to his Creator, or is it a waste of time in a world speeding recklessly on its way to hell? Who was right, the Dutch Masters or the Pietists? If we are to take the Cultural Mandate seriously, I believe we must insist that all the world belongs to God and should be brought under submission to His purposes. To argue that some activities are by their nature religious while others are secular is to make an unbiblical dichotomy that leaves part of the world to the devil - something to which he has no right. Christians, sadly, have contributed much to the decline of Western culture simply by abdicating certain areas of endeavor to the unbelievers, thus assuring that evil would be triumphant in those realms of life.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE GOAL OF ART APPRECIATION?

If we are to seek to glorify God through involvement with the arts, what should be our goal in doing so? Certainly one goal should be to praise God for the gifts He has given to His creatures.

This means that we can appreciate excellence in the arts even when the producer of the artwork does not himself acknowledge God as the source of that excellence. What qualities should such excellence demonstrate? Philippians 4:8 tells us that we should focus our minds on those things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and praiseworthy. What will these look like in the arts?

Without question one simple criterion is that of technical excellence. An artist who executes his work with great skill may be praised as an exemplar of the glory of God even if that technical excellence is utilized in the service of false gods or ungodly philosophies. In order to appreciate that technical excellence, however, one must educate oneself to some extent.

Secondly, an excellent work of art is one that is true. As we noted in the first lesson of the series, such truth may consist either of fidelity to what is - God's truth as expressed in His Word and His world - or fidelity to the worldview or even the emotional state of the artist. Christians who observe such works of art can recognize the truth found in them as they speak of reality as it exists, or as it is perceived by those who are in rebellion against the Truth.

Thirdly, an excellent work of art is one that elicits a response on the part of the observer. From a Christian standpoint, however, one must be cautious in this area. A beautiful landscape can elicit wonder at the beauty of God's creation, but a skillfully-written play can also twist one's emotions to the extent that the viewer is ready to call evil good and good evil. Thus responses on the part of the Christian to works of art must always be *critical*. We may not allow ourselves to be immersed in a work of art, swept along by its power to a destination desired by the artist but contrary to the glory of God. The response to the work of art should lead to edification, whether through the catharsis elicited by the work itself or through the critical operation of the sanctified mind that rejects what is evil while clinging to what is good.

Thus the believer must finally reject art that is done to the praise of other gods, though he may appreciate the quality of its craftsmanship. The Lord ordered such artwork destroyed in ancient Israel. When Nebuchadnezzar praised his beautiful capital city, which included the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, God struck him down because of his arrogance (Daniel 4:28-37). Beauty in the service of other gods is not to be praised for its own sake. When Paul viewed the idols scattered throughout the streets of Athens (Acts 17:23), he did not admire the beauty of their artistry, but spoke of the truth of the Creator they inadvertently acknowledged.

WHAT IF THE ART IS PRIMARILY DESTRUCTIVE IN CHARACTER?

What do these criteria imply about the art of the twentieth century? Because of its espousal of meaninglessness, ugliness, and despair, is it therefore without value? The criteria above should lead us to the conclusion that, in both areas of technical excellence and fidelity to the worldview of the author, much of the art of the twentieth century has value. In fact, the message of despair is an honest word from those who believe that God does not exist and are left to try to make sense out of the carnage that man has wrought in the present era. What a Christian may never do is absorb such works uncritically, or he may find himself being influenced unconsciously by the nihilism, hedonism,

or relativism of the age. For the Christian, everything must be evaluated within the context of biblical truth.

WHAT ABOUT NUDITY IN THE VISUAL ARTS?

A question that often arises in connection with the appreciation of the visual arts concerns the appropriateness of viewing the portrayal of nudity. In order to gain a biblical perspective on this issue, we should note that nudity occurs in the Bible in three contexts - those of innocence, shame/sexuality, and poverty.

Innocence, of course, appears in the Garden of Eden. There God created Adam and Eve and proclaimed them "good." Their original state was one of nakedness. We may thus conclude that, in a sinless world, clothing would not be necessary. When Adam and Eve sinned, however, they were ashamed of their nakedness - lust had now entered the picture - and clothing was needed to cover their shame. This clothing God provided, indicating that in a sinful environment, nakedness should not be displayed to the world. Throughout most of the rest of Scripture, nakedness is always associated with shame and/or sexuality. When the sexuality is illicit, so is the nakedness. Further, those who are stripped naked by their enemies are treated in such a way as to elicit shame. The unclothed human body is only pictured as an object of admiration in the Song of Solomon, where it is described in the context of marital love.

Nakedness appears in one other way in Scripture, however - as a sign of poverty (e.g., Matthew 25:36). Those who are naked are thus objects of the pity of man and the care of God. Clothing the naked is thus pictured as a good thing to do.

We may thus conclude that nakedness is never pictured in Scripture in a positive light after the Fall except in the context of marital love. What does this imply about its use in art? First of all, we may conclude that the ways in which it is used in Scripture are also appropriate in the realm of art - to convey innocence and the perfection of God's creation, depravity, marital love, and poverty.

The matter is not quite this simple, however. What about the reactions of the viewers? Can sinners in a sinful world look on nudity intended to portray innocence and see innocence in it, without being stimulated to lustful thoughts? And what about the use of naked models, and the reactions of the artists to those models? While artists of my acquaintance insist that they can draw naked models (or model in the nude themselves) without sexual reactions, I find this difficult to conceive, though I suppose even the strongest of human reactions can become deadened over time. Certainly artists often painted their mistresses, or had affairs with models they painted, so we know that weak humanity cannot always separate life from art. While I will leave the resolution of this issue to those more knowledgeable than I, I must admit that I find it difficult to justify with a completely clear conscience, whether in the Fine Arts or in contemporary movies and television.

Next week, we will leave the realm of the Fine Arts and move on to art on the more popular level as we consider Christian appreciation of music in today's world.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS X

Appreciating the Arts - Music

So far in this course, we have focused our attention on what might be called "high art." Today, we will spend most of our time on music at the more popular level, discussing Christian appreciation of both secular and sacred music. Needless to say, this is a matter of some controversy, and one on which we have little direct guidance in Scripture.

IS THERE A CHRISTIAN STYLE OF MUSIC?

We will address first the question of instrumental music, since the answer to the question of style will influence the way we approach the questions that follow. It is relatively simple to assess the lyrics of music, but what about the music itself? Is it legitimate to speak of certain kinds of instrumental music as Christian or non-Christian?

All art uses what God has made and rearranges it in creative ways. Thus, at the root, all music speaks of God's creation, since the composer has nothing else with which to work other than the tools provided by God. Sounds can be arranged in ways that glorify God and in ways that express rebellion against Him, however, and the distinction goes beyond the words that accompany the music.

We have seen in our survey of the history of the arts over the last two thousand years that art both shapes and is shaped by the prevailing philosophies of the age. This is true of music as well. The intricate structures of the music of Bach and Mozart are very different from the sweeps of Romantic flair in Berlioz and Wagner, while the twelve-tone and random music of the twentieth century reflects the conviction that the universe has no underlying order or inherent meaning. I would thus argue that, at least at a very basic level, instrumental music reflects a philosophy that may be Christian or non-Christian, particularly with regard to the question of order versus disorder. If this is so, Christians may appreciate a variety of music, but should, as we noted last week, be conscious of the philosophy being conveyed, and thus be critical listeners. Furthermore, Christians should be careful that the music they use (see below) reflects a Christian worldview. We must be careful not to adopt unwittingly a style of music that communicates an anti-Christian philosophy and seek to use it for the glory of God. This does not, of course, rule out any use of dissonance, for example. Dissonance can be used to communicate the fallen nature of man and the world, and thus may speak truth from a Christian standpoint.

MUSIC AND WORSHIP

The use of music in worship is as old as the Scriptures themselves (the first example is found in Exodus 15, after the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites). Several points should be noted concerning the use of music in the worship of God's people.

First of all, worship is addressed to God. He is the one to whom we speak when we sing praises, and the vehicle used by His people should reflect who He is. This does not mean, of course, that we are restricted to Bach chorales when we worship God. The variety of moods in the Psalms indicates that many kinds of music are appropriate for entering God's presence - hymns of majesty,

joy, somberness, mourning, and thanksgiving. Music for use in worship is limited only by the range of emotions appropriate for approaching the throne of God. We ought to ask ourselves, however, if certain emotions are inappropriate for entering God's presence, which would then imply that the kinds of music that convey those emotions would also be off-limits.

Secondly, worship is addressed to the worshipers (Colossians 3:16). The songs we sing are one way in which God's people edify one another. How does this affect the music we use in worship? For one thing, it implies that the words we sing should speak truth about God, His character, and His works. But if the music is to be a vehicle for exhorting one another, it must be the servant to the words, helping to convey those words without either drowning them out or contradicting them by a style of music that clashes with the message of the lyrics. Words and music must blend into a harmonious whole so that the people of God may come into God's presence as a group, engaging both their minds and emotions in the service of the Holy One.

What are we to say, then of the practice of setting Christian words to popular tunes? Martin Luther, who engaged in this practice, is said to have asked, "Why should the devil have all the good tunes?" In our own hymnal, we have a few examples of songs set to popular folk tunes, some of which may still be recognizable by a few of the old-timers, but some of which have come to be accepted as hymn tunes without people being aware of their history (*Amazing Grace*, for instance, is set to a folk tune in its most popular incarnation, and has been set to many others since John Newton wrote the words). This question brings us to the cultural aspect of worship music. If, for example, singing *Amazing Grace* to its most popular tune caused the worshipers to think of the secular words set to the original melody, it might not be a useful tool for worship. On the other hand, few today would be bothered by such interference. But what of the use of more contemporary tunes, the original lyrics of which may be familiar to a modern audience? Is that a help or a hindrance to worship? I'm inclined to think the latter, but I would be reluctant to be dogmatic on the subject.

MUSIC AND OUTREACH

Music today is often used as a means of outreach to the unbelieving world, primarily though not exclusively among young people. The basic idea is to draw people to the message of the Gospel by using music that appeals to them. To what extent is this appropriate? I would argue that the basic question is the same as that treated above - does the music serve as a suitable vehicle for conveying the message, or does it contradict or detract in some way from that message? Paul argued the legitimacy of being "all things to all men so that by all possible means [he] might save some" (I Corinthians 9:22), but this did not involve means that contradicted the message of the Gospel. Thus the same constraints apply in outreach as in worship.

We should also note that cultural and environmental issues apply here as well. While certain kinds of music may not be inherently evil, they may carry with them certain associations within the youth subculture that would detract from the message of the Gospel (for example, kinds of music associated with rebellion against authority may not be the best choices to convey the need to submit to the authority of God in one's life). Such issues also arise in outreach on the mission field, as kinds of music that might seem to partake of nothing more than cultural distinctives to a Western mind

might carry meanings to those within the culture that would make them inappropriate for conveying the message of Christ.

MUSIC AS ENTERTAINMENT

The issue here is popular secular music; I doubt that many would question the edifying potential of listening to Christian music. As we discussed last week, the basic problem is that so much of the music of today is immoral, filled with profanity, sex and violence, and conveying messages that are the antithesis of the Gospel. Should a Christian choose to expose himself to such influences? One might argue that knowledge of the world's music helps the Christian understand where unbelievers are coming from (an argument similar to that legitimately made for exposure to non-Christian literature), or that it provides a point of contact for communication with those who are in the world. While these things may certainly be true, one should note several implications of these arguments. First of all, they acknowledge the negative nature of the music itself; secondly, they require critical engagement with the music in order to use it for constructive purposes. We would thus conclude that two things are inappropriate for the Christian who chooses to listen to popular music - habitual immersion (remember Philippians 4:8) and uncritical absorption. When we expose ourselves to that which is evil without critical engagement on the basis of a biblical worldview, we allow ourselves to be influenced, sometimes unconsciously, by the messages of the world. We must know how the world thinks, but we must never allow ourselves to be drawn into the vortex of the surrounding evil culture in which we live.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS XI

Appreciating the Arts - Theater and Cinema

We have seen throughout the course that Christians have had an ambivalent approach to the arts over the years. This has certainly been the case with regard to theater, and more recently, cinema. Today we want to examine the ways in which Christians should interact with these popular cultural forms of artistic expression.

THE ENTERTAINMENT QUESTION

Ours is a culture obsessed with entertaining itself. A question we rarely ask but should ask more often is whether or not, or at least to what extent, entertainment is a legitimate pursuit for the Christian. Should the Christian be one who, out of a desire to "redeem the time," should prefer "to burn out rather than to rust out"? Or is there a legitimate place for entertainment in the Christian's life?

First of all, we should note that God recognizes the need His creatures have for down time. The festivals of the Old Testament gave periodic respites to the people from the daily grind of the agricultural cycle, and these festivals were often times of rejoicing and feasting. In the New Testament, Jesus took His disciples aside into Syrophoenicia after they returned from a grueling preaching tour. Thus we must conclude that leisure in itself is not a bad thing.

Secondly, God gave the good things of His creation for man to enjoy. We have already seen that the aesthetic beauty of the creation portrays God as an artist, but we should also recognize that these things were made for the pleasure of God and man alike. God wants us to enjoy His world, not just look at it for its utilitarian purposes. Thus taking pleasure in created things is not wrong in itself.

Thirdly, we must note that God's good things are to be used in ways that glorify Him and edify ourselves. This of necessity places certain limitations on the use of leisure, since not all that is available, especially in our aggressively immoral culture, is glorifying to God or edifying to ourselves by any stretch of the imagination.

As noted earlier, however, there are many ways in which things may be edifying. Edification may occur through gaining knowledge and insight that can enable us to interact fruitfully with the surrounding world. Yet, as we saw last week, immersion in that culture can be deadening and should be avoided, especially since such immersion can occur so gradually as to be imperceptible to the one being immersed. Thus, as we will discuss again this week, engagement with the surrounding culture, even when involved in entertainment, must be conscious and critical.

THE CHURCH AND THE DRAMATIC ARTS

The Christian Church has not often interacted positively with the dramatic arts. In the early years of the Church, the Greek and Roman theater was anathema to Christians because of its paganism and immorality. In the Middle Ages, the Church began to use theatrical arts for its own

purposes. Mystery plays and morality plays became a major vehicle for teaching Bible stories and Church doctrine to a largely illiterate population.

When the Renaissance arrived, however, drama, like the other arts, turned toward the secular, and the Church responded by censoring and banning the theater. Plays were viewed as immoral or at best frivolous, while actors were looked down upon as immoral carousers little higher than prostitutes on the social scale. Puritans closed the theaters, and the Restoration reacted against Puritan strictures with licentious and scandalous entertainments, even going so far as to allow women to appear on the stage (it didn't hurt that one of the leading actresses of the day was Charles II's mistress, of course). Despite the ongoing existence of chancel drama in some liturgical churches, the relationship between Church and theater has been largely negative since the time of the Renaissance. The Pietist mindset (what some have called "Methodist Puritanism") that has dominated the American religious scene has rarely been sympathetic to the theater - play-going was something that serious Christians simply did not do.

In America, the advent of Fundamentalism coincided with the invention of the moving picture. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that throughout most of the twentieth century Christians in America had little to do with movies. The arguments were not new ones - immorality and frivolous squandering of time - but the isolationist stance of Fundamentalists created a situation where going to a movie was a social sin on the same level as drinking, dancing, card playing, and mixed bathing.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, American evangelical Christianity emerged from its self-imposed shell, driven largely by the debacle of Roe v. Wade. Combined with the cultural critique of men like Francis Schaeffer, this emergence has produced a greater readiness to engage the culture. Most Christians today no long consider it a sin to go to a movie (note also that the inventions of the VCR and the DVD player have made it easy to do in the privacy of one's home what Christians of an earlier era would not have been caught dead doing in public). Christians have even taken tentative steps into the production of cinema, pioneered by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association as early as the fifties and sixties, and followed more recently by such diverse offerings as *Left Behind*, *The Passion of the Christ*, *Veggie Tales*, and the films produced by the Kendrick brothers and Sherwood Baptist Church. But some are concerned that Christians' new willingness to become part of the larger culture involves an unacceptable degree of compromise in which people open themselves up to immoral influences that can damage their own spiritual lives and testimonies. How should Christians respond to this newly-liberated environment? Is the issue simply one of Christian liberty, or are there other factors that need to be considered?

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH SERIOUS ART

As is always the case with serious art, theater and movies that exist for more than purely commercial purposes seek to communicate a worldview, and as such can be educationally useful for the Christian. These are not often the kind of experiences one may seek for entertainment, but critical analysis of serious plays and films can shed light on the thought of the modern age. For example, European films by directors such as Bergman or Truffaut speak to the meaninglessness of life that is central to existential philosophy, and more recent popular but thoughtful films such as *The Truman Show* and *The Matrix* trilogy present postmodernism with its questions about the nature of

reality. Christians should critically engage such artistic efforts as a means of understanding and communicating with those who are immersed in contemporary culture - a way of speaking their language and building a bridge into the world outside the church.

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH POPULAR CULTURE

Movies on the popular level are purely commercial, of course, and while they may not be made with the intention of making serious artistic or philosophical statements, they nonetheless reflect the culture of which they are a part. In the same way that popular music often panders to the lowest common denominator of the culture, so do movies - "pushing the envelope" on language, sex, and violence in order to attract the attention of jaded souls looking for new experiences. It is far too easy for Christians to be drawn into this culture of experience; entertainment can easily become an idol (I Corinthians 10:7). Again, critical engagement is the key - do we take pleasure in what we see in the same way the world does, or do we apply God's Word to our experiences in order to discern what is evil from what is good? While we may be beyond the legalistic age when Christians thought that going to movies was sin, we must nonetheless ask ourselves whether our approach to movies is one that glorifies God and leads to edification.

The other factor, of course, is use of time. We need to go beyond asking the question of right versus wrong to asking the question of good versus best. I'm not suggesting that Christians should spend all of their free time reading their Bibles or devotional books, but I am suggesting that the question of redeeming the time is not an idle one. There is a difference between the need for down time and making leisure the primary goal of our lives, and while it may be true that it is what comes out of a man that pollutes the man rather than what goes into him, the old computer acronym GIGO still holds - Garbage In, Garbage Out.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS XII

The Christian as Artist

We established in the first week of our study that artistic gifts come from the Lord. For the Christian, such gifts, as with all the Lord gives, are to be used for His glory. But what does this mean in practice for the artistically-gifted Christian? In the closing lesson of our series, we will examine some questions connected to this issue.

VOCATION OR AVOCATION?

Should a Christian who is skilled in the arts seek to make a living in the field? On the surface, the answer is obvious from a biblical standpoint, since Bezalel and Oholiab (Exodus 31:1-11) were professional craftsmen, and the singers and musicians in Solomon's Temple served vocationally in that post (II Chronicles 5:12-13). Furthermore, those who labor are worthy of their wages, and the arts are pictured in Scripture as being worthy labors.

There are a few questions we need to ask, however. The first regards the practicality of such an endeavor. In the highly competitive realm of the arts, where even great artists, writers, and musicians in the past were unable to support themselves by their craft, should a Christian devote great time and energy to something that may not enable him to support himself or his family? When do the practical responsibilities of everyday life supercede the desire to devote one's life to the arts? The Bible is very clear about the responsibility of each person to work to meet his own needs (II Thessalonians 3:10) and those of his family (I Timothy 5:8). This must of necessity take priority over one's desire to work in the arts, especially if the alternative involves drawing on the charitable resources of the local church. In such circumstances, the need to work to support oneself must force artistic endeavors into the avocational realm.

The second question has to do with the matter of compromise. One who works for another person is under the authority of that person, and business endeavors exist in order to make a profit. It is far too easy in such an environment to be more concerned about what sells or what is popular than about matters of truth and integrity. After all, if one needs to make a living, it does no good to produce what people have no interest in buying, and the consuming public has never been noted for its appreciation for what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable.

THE SACRED AND THE SECULAR

The question here has to do with the subject matter of art: When a Christian artist does his work, is it necessary for him to deal with "religious" subject matter, or may he produce works with no apparent religious content? Again, the answer would at first seem to be an obvious one. Since all of life and all of creation belong to God, there is nothing outside the reach of His hand and nothing outside the concern of His people. Whether we look at the book of Esther in the Bible - a work of literature with no explicitly religious content - or think of Bach inventions, Rembrandt's paintings of everyday life, or the space trilogy of C.S. Lewis, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and the short stories of Flannery O'Connor, we see many examples of "secular" art that is not secular at all, but is permeated with the glory of God. So the simple answer is that, for the Christian who seeks

to implement the Cultural Mandate and exercise dominion over all of life to the glory of God, there is no such thing as the realm of the secular, but all is sacred and within the reach of God's children.

But what about the problem of the so-called "crossover" artist? The issue is most prevalent today in the realm of music, where many Christian contemporary musicians have "crossed over" into the realm of pop music, leaving behind the explicit Christian content and messages of their earlier ministries. Sadly, many of these musicians have been drawn increasingly into the lifestyles of the secular music world and have as a result borne poor testimony to the cause of the Christ whose name they profess. It seems to me that the main issue here is one of motive. Why does a person make such a decision? Is it for profit, fame, or popularity? If so, the result is likely to be disastrous, as so many who have followed this path have illustrated. But what if the motive is to reach those who would never come to a "Christian" concert or buy a "Christian" CD? As we will discuss below, a testimony involves both life and content, and "secular" content, unless conveyed by a genuine master, is unlikely to communicate anything Christian to the unbelieving listener. Even Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, with so much Christian imagery, are not recognized for what they are by many non-Christian readers, and how many unbelievers watched in awe as *The Lord of the Rings* unfolded on the screen under the direction of Peter Jackson without the slightest idea that they were seeing Christian values portrayed through the mythology of Middle Earth?

THE ARTIST AND THE CHURCH

One of the ways in which the Christian artist can use his gifts to glorify God, of course, is by putting those gifts to use in the church. As the singers and musicians did in Israel's Temple, so today Christian musicians can use their abilities to enhance the worship ministry of the church. But what about Christian graphic artists and writers? Certainly their gifts may be used in the service of the church's instructional program - writing and illustrating educational materials for children and youth, designing Vacation Bible School programs, etc.

But what about the application of artistic gifts to the worship environment and the worship experience itself? For many centuries, Christian artists used their talents to beautify the structures in which God's people gathered to worship. The Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages are a prime example of this, not only in the beauty of the architecture, but also in the mosaics, paintings, and sculptures that adorn the edifices. In more recent years, Christian artists in some churches have contributed to the worship of God's people by the use of drama and liturgical dance. As heirs of the heritage of the Reformation, however, Reformed Baptists have often questioned the appropriateness of such artistic contributions to the life of the Church. Does the Regulative Principle demand that all such artistic efforts be rejected as "strange fire" offered to the Lord? Clearly such offerings were appropriate in Old Testament times - the Temple was a beautiful, ornate structure, and dancers as well as singers participated in the worship of God (Exodus 15:20; Psalm 150:4; II Samuel 6:14). The New Testament mentions no such things - congregations met in homes, and the simple service of worship followed the pattern of the synagogue and contained no professional musicians, singers, or dancers. Does the fact that these things are not mentioned mean they are not permitted? A strict reading of the Regulative Principle would seem to indicate that this is the case. Yet we must remember that, while in the Old Testament instructions for worship included very specific details (note, too, that while dancing was never commanded in Old Testament worship, it was clearly acceptable to God), the New Testament includes only general principles rather than specific details,

implying that there is considerable freedom in the application of those principles to concrete circumstances in the life of the Church. While I love drama and am generally turned off by dancing, I would tend to argue that, while both may have a place in the ministry of the Church, that place should probably not be in the public worship services. A real danger exists of drawing attention to the "performer" rather than to the message of the Gospel, and this is not something the Church ought to be encouraging.

THE ARTIST AND THE WORLD

Everything the Christian does before the world should be a testimony to the grace and power of God, and this applies to the Christian artist as well. What does it mean, however, for the Christian artist to reach out to the world with the Gospel? Obviously, the use of the arts in communicating Christian truth may be an avenue for the exercise of artistic gifts. The Christian artist should also communicate the Gospel through his lifestyle. But an overtly Christian message presented in a way that conforms to Christian behavior patterns may never reach the world because no one will listen. Does this mean, then, that the Christian artist must be like the world - in dress, in language, in musical style - in order to gain a hearing with that world? Must Christian musicians dress in jeans and ripped T-shirts and use rock rhythms and instrumentation in order for the world to listen to what they have to say? We must return to what we discussed previously in Lesson 10 concerning the coherence between medium and message and the fact that the medium itself often communicates a message to the prevailing culture - sometimes a message of rebellion and chaos. In short, we may be like the world in order to reach them only to the extent that we do not compromise with the world, either morally or in the message that is being communicated. Hudson Taylor insisted that the missionaries of the China Inland Mission dress and eat like the Chinese and live in Chinese-style homes, but they did not worship the household gods of those to whom they sought to minister, nor did they adopt the philosophy of Confucianism. The artist must always remember that it is to God that he exercises his gifts first of all, and that the glory of God is paramount rather than the praise of man. Furthermore, artists, like preachers, must recognize that the power of the Gospel comes from the moving of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the listeners rather than through using the right technique to communicate the message.