

Would Benedict Approve Modern Religious Art?

By Elizabeth Larson
Religion Today

Washington — As it is with the dilemma of the question — "What comes first, the egg or the chicken?" — so it is with the question of art.

Is the artist ahead of time, that is, some place into the future telling us what is to come? Or is the artist behind the times, interpreting what has and is becoming?

Whatever the answer, woe to us if art should ever perish. Such a loss of creativity would surely close the door to our minds, for imagination is that necessary ingredient which inspires new ideas, hopes and goals. And in that, religion and art run parallel, interpreting the nature of mankind.

Michaelangelo poured his soul onto the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel with his "Creation of Adam" as the focal point, while Leonardo da Vinci communicated the beauty of the "Madonna and Child." Churches with elaborate ornaments and immense ceilings were built so the viewer could feel the insignificance of the small being in comparison to the Mighty God Himself.

It was easy to understand Michaelangelo and Leonardo in their interpretation of the beauty of religion. But how does one cope with abstraction, the tendency of the 20th Century artist? What deep significance is expressed in a distorted body, or on a canvas where it appears as if the artist delighted making dots of us by splattering the paint?

There is a definite trend in

redefining the parallel of art and religion. In honor of St. Benedict's 1,500th anniversary, institutions such as Yale University, St. Anselm's Abbey, Dunbarton Oaks and the National Gallery of Art, as well as Catholic University's Hartke Theatre, contributed their insights to a two part symposium on monasticism and the arts during March.

St. Benedict's "Rule for Monks" was written by the saint as a guideline for all monks — obedience, chastity, poverty, fraternal service, and above all else, humility, being the central values of monastic life. The humanities were part of the groundwork of Benedict's book of rules.

Being offended by cruelty and licentiousness, he gave much thought to the arts. He strongly believed in the right expression of the arts and wrote in Chapter 57 of his book of rules: "If there are artisans in the monastery, they are to practice their craft with all humility... so that in all things God may be glorified."

It is possible for us to realize St. Benedict's concept of the arts communicating the spiritual concepts of his time. It is, however, far more difficult to realize the spiritual message in contemporary art.

In abstracting, what is the 20th Century artist doing? He is searching for another dimension of spiritual expression. He transcends the figurative by abstracting the "pure" arrangement. He is bringing God down from the immense ceilings and placing Him in the hearts of people.

Our 20th Century artist is

telling us that—Michaelangelo and Leonardo missed a point.

We must be careful, however, when we evaluate our modern artist's message. He might, in search of a unique style, ignore the true meaning of the spirit.

The 1980 National Conference of the Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art and Architecture is taking place here April 28 through May 1. Religious art in museums, in churches and in architecture will be reviewed by the artists and the clergy. Ecumenical influences which affect architecture, such as immersion baptismal rites and administration of the Lord's Supper, will be among some of the seemingly more prosaic things to be discussed.

Workshops will evaluate the religious contemporary communication of the artists. Is the modern artists' work enhancing or detracting from our worship? And that is the paramount question.

The next time one sees an abstract painting with a title conveying a religious theme, one might do well to look to determine the medium used by the artist. Then, after projecting one's being into the work, standing back and allowing the work to come to one. The strange arrangements devoid of any figurative design may well tell the viewer about another dimension never seen before.

Unknowingly, our contemporary artist may have a glimpse of the future. Even a message from God.

Wouldn't old St. Benedict be proud!

Webster Council bulletin, The Compass, is about the best in New York State. It is readable, attractive, person-oriented toward Council members and their families. It chronicles Council meetings and degrees; spiritual activities, retreats, youth meetings, charity promotions, bingo teams, fish fries, Polish, Italian, German and Irish nights, black jack and 10-cent beer, the sick and bereaved. However, I think frequent references to Columbia would broaden the thinking and interests of members and their families.

Consider what is in Columbia: Supreme Grand Knight DeChant and Editor Van Feldt write clearly in support of the Church and the Pope, a healthy contrast to the dreary hostility to the Church and the Pope that drips from some Catholic periodicals; Fr. Robert Graham, SJ, reports each month from Rome, with insights into the very center of Christendom; Riley Hughes, professor of English at Georgetown, writes good reviews for book readers; William Knittle Jr., director of TV Studies in Hollywood, reviews TV and movie offerings; Letters to the Editor are fascinating; Widow Doris Peters has a section for women which many men would also enjoy. If 1,200,000 Knights and their families kept their sights on the national and international Catholic scene, as well as the local, the whole Church in the States would get a needed jolt.

Handicapped Instruction To Be Topic

Elmira — There will be a workshop for those interested in teaching religion to the handicapped Sunday, April 27 at St. Patrick's Junior High School. Presenting the program will be Sister Mary Norine and Marie Stengel from the Buffalo diocese.

The program will run from 1 to 5 p.m., and then from 6 to 7 p.m. A beverage will be provided for those who wish to bring a brown bag supper. The program is being sponsored by the Chemung-Schuyler Regional Education Committee.

Registration is requested by calling either Sister Bernarde during the day at 734-6984, or Sister Robertina in the evenings, 733-1197.

Still Time To Answer 1980 Census

The Rochester Census Resource Center has begun operations at Rochester City Hall, Room 304A, telephone 428-7225. Its primary function is to serve as a central information facility to the public concerning the 1980 census.

By law, everyone is required to answer the census and officials urge all to finish the forms and mail them in.

Chuck Mangione Concerts to Aid Special Games

Chuck Mangione, whose current album, "Fun and Games," is dedicated to the spirit of Special Olympics, will produce and perform a series of concerts for the benefit of Special Olympics.

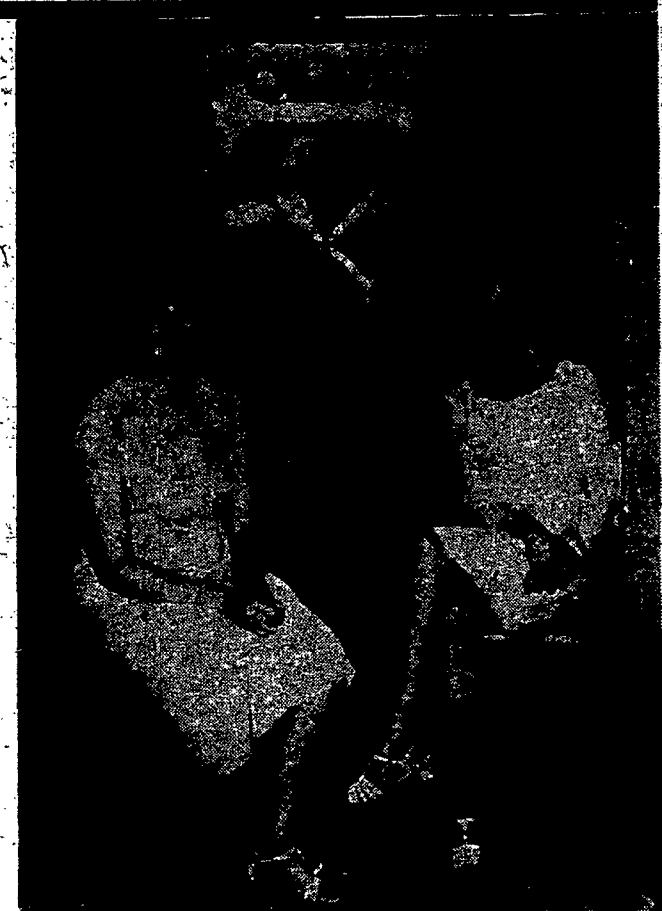
In addition to performing with his quartet, Mangione will conduct a concert orchestra of high school musicians selected by audition from the area in which each concert takes place.

The first of the Mangione concerts will be April 26 in Brockport, site of the 1979 International Summer Special Olympics Games. Other locations will be announced at a later date.

Business In Diocese



Constance M. Fulmer, an executive secretary at Sybron Corp., was named Secretary of the Year recently by the Flower City Chapter of the National Secretaries Association (International). Ms. Fulmer has been employed at Sybron for more than 20 years. She will be honored during Secretaries Week, April 20-25.



Polish Night

Planners of the Polish Night to be celebrated at St. John the Evangelist Church in Greece are (left to right) Nancy Oberholzer, Rose DiBella, Father Joseph D'Aurizio, pastor; Dolores De Coninck and Pat Partyka. The event, which will feature a buffet supper at 7 p.m., followed by music by The Hy-Tones, will be held Friday, May 2. Reservation information is available at (716) 225-7426.

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AUCTION

APRIL 19

INSPECTION 6:30 p.m.
AUCTION 8:00 p.m.

SILENT AND ORAL AUCTIONS

ITEMS INCLUDE:
WEEKEND TRIP TO TORONTO
FOOSEBALL TABLE
5-SPEED BICYCLE
DINNER FOR TWO AT BARRY'S
DINNER FOR TWO AT THE SILVER TORTOISE
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Fr. Paul J. Cuddy



On the Right Side

K. of C. Magazine Applauded

Q: Didn't Father Atwell suggest that you utilize the On the Right Side column to encourage people to buy Catholic periodicals?

A: Yes, on his last note to me two weeks before his death. He had a nice habit of dropping a postal card occasionally, with a comment or disagreement. His cards were pictures either of Rome or of the Holy Land. When he ran out of them he used the U.S. postal cards which are artistically stamped.

Q: What did he recommend?

A: First of all, the Catholic Digest. He concluded, to tease me, "even Commonweal." The latter has a track record of dissent to the Teaching Church almost equal to the NCR, which finds pay dirt in conflicts within the Church, and the "persecution" of Hans Kung.

Q: Well, isn't Kung persecuted?

A: Are you kidding? Anyone who rejects the teachings of the Church should not claim membership in it. Karl Rahner said: "... the Church Magisterium has the competence to set limits, and that as a Catholic theologian he (Kung) was bound to observe them. If I were to come into an absolute conflict with this (Roman) setting of limits, and my conscientious concern for truth were to demand of me an absolute protest against this, then in my view I should have to accept the consequences and say, 'Right, I am no longer a Catholic.'" (Visitor, Apr. 6, 1980)

Q: What do you recommend?

A: Especially Columbia, the fraternal monthly with a circulation of 1,200,000. The reason for its enormous circulation is that each member gets a copy. It is an excellent magazine, but I have the uneasy feeling that many members do not read it. I conclude this because I have almost never heard a member even mention any article, and only rarely have I seen it quoted in any Council bulletin. Our own

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