- 18 Schmemann is a good example of this from the Orthodox tradition. On the Catholic side see, for example, Teilhard de Chardin: 'The Mass of the World', The Hymn of the Universe trans. G. Vann, (Collin, s 1970.)
- 19 See A.A. Anderson: The Psalms, London 1981, Vol.1 p.168.
- 20 Compare this with the claim in the Prologue to John's gospel that the Logos has possessed all things from the beginning. (See R. Bultmann: The Gospel of John A Commentary, (Blackwell, 1971) p.56.
- 21 T. Traheme: Centuries, (OUP, 1960) I, 38.
- 22 See E. Doyle, O.F.M.: St Francis and the Song of Brotherhood (Allen and Unwin, 1980) and E.R. Armstrong: St Francis: Nature Mystic, (California University Press, 1973.)
- 23 A.Bloom: School for Prayer, (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970) p.15.
- 24 See F.R. Berger: 'Gratitude', Ethics 85, (1974-5), p.299.
- 25 Brody's essay is in P. Helm (ed.): Divine Commands and Morality, (OUP, 1981), pp. 141ff.
- 26 See Masie Ward: G. K. Chesterton, (London, 1944), p.59.
- 27 Mirror of Perfection 118; see also D.S. Wallice-Hadrill: The Patristic View of Nature, (Manchester, 1968), p.109.
- 28 For an authoratitive Catholic statement to this effect see Vatican II: Gaudium et Spes para. 16.
- 29 Aquinas: Summa Contra Gentiles V.J. Bourke (trans), (University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), III, II, 112, 13.
- 30 For a full discussion of what he terms 'indirect duty' views towards animals, see T. Regan: The Case for Animal Rights, (Routledge, 1983), Ch.5.
- 31 T. Traheme: Centuries I. 6.
- 32 Centuries I, 12.
- 33 cf G.Berkeley: Works (A.A Luce and T.E. Jessop eds.), (London, 1948-56), VII,
- 34 See W. Eichrodt: Theology of the Old Testament trans.J.A. Baker (S.C.M., 1967), Vol. II pp. 131ff.

On Baptising the Visual Arts: A Friar's Meditation on Art

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I owe my sub-title to Winefride Wilson, one of the last members of that remarkable English Catholic experiment in the uniting of art, worship and life, the Ditchling Community, That was how she rendered the German name of an important manifesto for the revival of Christian art Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's Herzensgiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders (1797), 'Heartfelt Outpourings of an Artloving Cloister-brother'. Wackenroder's impassioned appeal for a renaissance of Christian art, so moribund in his period as in our own, has lost nothing of its relevance today. In this article, I propose to 74

indicate, first of all, the significance of this subject; secondly, to place this discussion in its contemporary secular context; and thirdly, to make some proposals for retrieving, and enhancing, the lost riches of the Church's iconography.

I The significance of the subject

The Second Vatican Council instructs all Catholics that 'those decrees of earlier times [the reference is to the Second Council of Nicaea, 787, and the Council of Trent, 1545-1564] regarding the veneration of images of Christ, the Blessed Virgin and the saints be religiously observed'. And this bare statement of Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, is filled out in its sister text on the Holy Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium. In the latter, we find a distinction (to which I shall return) between 'religious art', ars religiosa, and 'sacred art', ars sacra, seen as the high-point of religious art at large. According to the Council, the two types share a common orientation:

By their very nature both of the latter are related to God's boundless beauty, for this is the reality which these human efforts are trying to express in some way. To the extent that these works aim exclusively at turning men's thoughts to God persuasively and devoutly, they are dedicated to God and to the cause of his great honour and glory.

The distinguishing feature of sacred art, however, lies in its intimate connexion with the Liturgy itself. Sacred images are, the Council fathers explain, designed expressly for use in worship; they are fashioned 'for the edification, devotion and religious instruction of the faithful'. And so these images above all must be 'worthy, fitting, beautiful', since they are rerum supernarum signa et symbola, 'signs and symbols of realities beyond this world'.'

Behind these statements there lies, in the first place, a whole anthropology, or teaching about man—and since, in Catholic Christianity the primary doctrine which the Church possesses about man is his imagehood of God, this must mean an understanding of the human being in his or her relation to God. St Thomas, in his discussion of religious activity, asks whether religion necessarily involves any 'external actions'. He replies that it does for, while our perfection consists in the due ordering to God's glory of our mens ('spirit' or 'the feeling mind' may be the best translations of this word), nonetheless:

The human mind needs to be led to God by means of the

sensuous world (sensibilium manuductione), since—as St Paul says—the 'hidden things of God are manifested by those things that are made'. Hence, in divine worship the use of corporeal things is necessary so that, by using signs, man's mind may be aroused to the spiritual acts which join him to God.⁴

Man is an *embodied* soul, or, better, an ensouled body; body and soul do not merely meet in him, but are immanent, indwelling, one in the other, the spiritual with the 'carnal'. I do not mean this term in Paul's sense of the 'fleshly'—that which is hostile to the Spirit of God, but in the French poet Charles Péguy's sense of *le charnel*—his favoured word for all our solidarity with the visible world, at once as humble as the dust and as radiant as the most splendid epiphanies of finite beauty. We move to God in no other way than from, within, and by the medium of this incarnate order wherein we are situated. We reach out to him through the matter which is not defined over against God's Spirithood for he is the *Creator*-Spirit related to us as origin and goal of body and soul alike. In the words of the too neglected French theologian Eugène Masure man is:

the living sanctuary of an uninterrupted encounter between the visible and the invisible.⁵

Nothing is more natural, then, than art, and especially religious art. The spirit of man expresses its own desire for, and striving towards, its Source, by means of art works, themselves stimulated by the material milieu where the Creator Lord signals to us through all *his* works of creation.

The Council's allusions to sacred art in particular require, however, a second context also if we are to do justice to their importance, and that is the biblical economy of salvation. In the Old and New Testaments, the exchange between God and man is not confined to the word of God—if that term be understood simply of language rather than, against its own Semitic background, as the dynamic energy of Israel's Lord. Instead, the divine Glory shows itself in a variety of scenes or tableaux vivants, from Exodus and Sinai to Calvary and the Resurrection Appearances all interrelated in the developing narrative of the divine Action. And while the prophets, as recipients of the divine Speech, were told to act out their messages in the form of special gestures or signs (ot'), with the taking flesh of the personal Word of God himself, prophecy in its last representative, John the Baptist, yields the centre stage to a Figure

76

whose whole human being is a sign. Jesus' humanity discloses in visible form the divine person of the Son, and the Son from all eternity is in the image of the Father. Both the Gospels and the Liturgy find the supreme self-revelation of God, therefore, in those visual scenes—the mysteries of the life of Christ-where the pattern of our salvation was first made known. From the Nativity to the Ascension, from the Baptism to the Cross, God in stooping down to us in his Son has shaped a path for us to return to him-which we do in self-identification with the meaning and grace of these archetypal moments in both sacramental, and ordinary, living. The instinct of Christ's faithful was from early centuries to portray these scenes in art, so that, tutored and moved by the image, Christians could apprehend their salvation not in name only but in very truth. Though the possibility of superstitious abuse of images has caused hesitation (Erasmus, and before him, the theologians of the court of Charlemagne), or even rank iconophobia, the Church—and not least the Church of Rome—has held firmly to the view that sacred art is entailed by the Incarnation itself.6

II Our context

We must turn now to the situation in which—in terms of the general culture—we find ourselves today It is true that, at the start of this century, there arose in France, in the work of Cézanne, van Gogh, Gauguin, an art concerned with transcendent reality—over against both the empirical impression tout court or the mere reveries of the personal subject. Again, in German-speaking central Europe an art with metaphysical and spiritual claims on the viewer continued in vigour, notably among the Expressionists, thanks to the still potent energies there of the Romantic revival, so that secular art could have recognisably religious theme.8 Moreover, in the course of this century, a variety of artists not themselves Christian, have looked back for guidance and inspiration to earlier Christian forms-to the Russian icon in the case of Malevich, with his lost modern icons 'The Orthodox' and 'Head of the Peasant', and Chagall, with his illustrations of Old and New Testament scenes, or to the more modern Western icons of the folkloric Bavarian Hinterglasmelarei, 'painting on the back of glass', which interested the Blaue Reiter school, and notably Vassily Kandinsky with his own 'Sancta Francesca' and 'Saint Vladimir'.' Yet these are only dots in a kaleidoscope. The overall situation of the practice of art in the twentieth century Western world, and especially today, is disorientated in the extreme. One witness must suffice, the American art critic Susi Gablik. She takes as her theme the shift from 'modernism', the later nineteenth century profusion of new styles and

ideologies, to the current 'post-modernism', where modernism itself is left behind in a pluralism so radical that it can no longer chart intelligibly the historic development of styles, and abandons, moreover, the very task of relating the texts of the intellectuals to the stuff of the world. The world of the visual artist now:

is a world complicated by changes without parallel. Models and standards from the past seem of little use to us. Everything is in continuous flux; there are no fixed goals or ideals that people can believe in, no tradition sufficiently enduring to avoid confusion. The legacy of modernism is that the artist stands alone. He has lost his shadow. As his art can find no direction from society, it must invent its own destiny.¹⁰

Not that this loss of a transcendent point of reference—both for individual action in a genuinely common life, and for the common life in a goal truly capable of integrating nature and history because lying beyond them—is in any way surprising. As Gablik remarks, the circumambient culture in which modern art came to be stands on four pillars: secularism, individualism, bureaucracy and pluralism. In a despiritualised world, where the numinous, the mythic, and the sacramental are progressively eliminated; in a bureaucratic or managerial culture which has snapped the roots in tradition of an individual now seen overwhelmingly as economic agent and above all as consumer—is it any wonder that art has lost its moral authority, and finds itself deprived of any coherent set of priorities, or persuasive models from the past, or even criteria for self-evaluation?

The strain of commitment to a spiritual vision in an unspiritual society has proved too much for modern art. For such early modernists as Kandinsky and Malevich, the artist was the last active carrier of spiritual value in a materialised world: and such Abstract Expressionists as Rothko tried to perpetuate such an understanding of vocation. But, on the whole, by the 1970's, 'the aesthetic' meant no longer an aesthetic spirituality (Malevich claimed to see in his black squares the face of God—perhaps a vestige of the 'negative theology' of the divine mystery found in the Christian East). Instead, it signified an exclusive concern with the demands of the painterly medium. Despite such exceptions as Dorothea Rockburne with her Angel series and the Annunciations of Brice Marden, the artwork was conceived increasingly as nothing more than a painted surface. To ask after meaning became the new philistinism.

78

In the context of the 'secular fundamentalism' of the contemporary West—with its rejection of all cognitive beliefs about the nature of reality (save the belief that we cannot know what that nature is) and of all understanding of ethics as formed within a common life, in response to values and goals established in relation to a transcendent Truth and Good, the artist can no longer take as his own the corporate ends of society (for it has none worth the name), but must distinguish himself through his singularity.11 But the removal of all inhibitions from individual freedom simply removes the artist from the social substance. As the trenchant English critic not only of art but, even more, of criticism, Peter Fuller, pointed out, if art can be anything that the artist says it is, then it will never amount to anything more than that.12 Fuller, who before his early death in a car accident in 1990 was deliberately seeking out Christian theologians in an attempt to come to grips with the mystery of being which artistic meaning must presuppose, likened the freedom of the contemporary artist to that of the insane. They can do whatever they like, since whatever they do, they will have no effect at all. Thus, for example, the anti-commercial and anti-art establishment gesture of the pioneers of such things as 'Minimal', 'Conceptual', 'Performance' and 'Body' Art have secured both market value and establishment status: the avant-garde is co-opted; the business world has met it, and embraced.

Gablik, in her survey of our present winter, has appealed for a renaissance of the sense of artistic tradition, without which there can be no generation of stable and lasting criteria for art. Her appeal for a counter-insistence to that of modernism, her stress on the need for preserving 'certain continuities', echoes Fuller's last contribution.¹³ What she has in mind, more clearly than he, is a high doctrine of cultural continuity with historic, religiously-founded civilisation.

Our present situation is one in which art, having abdicated any connection with a transcendental realm of being, has lost its character as a world-view—as a way of interpreting either nature or history . . . For those who see transcendence as being as vital to the human mind as hope—and as indestructible—the irreverence of modernism is a real threat to the social and psychological bases of human greatness.¹⁴

The negative lesson is that we must learn how to set limits to the exploration of cultural experiences—as much as to the possibilities of biological experiment, and for the same ultimate reason, that the world, before it is an agendum, a field for action, is a factum, a deed, and not

III The recovery of tradition

The positive lesson to be drawn from reflection on the current situation is an invitation to the Church of the West to re-constitute its iconographic resources, and to use its ethos—its ethical teaching on human life in society—to provide some guidelines for the re-orientation of a non-sacred art which may, however, still be of religious importance in its orchestration of spiritual themes.

To take first (and briefly) this question of an art which is spiritual yet not believing: the Church's ethical and philosophical concept of the human being as flourishing through the virtues, both a person and, inextricably, a social agent, and in both dimensions—interiority, and the common good, open to a transcendence which he cannot name,—is itself of the utmost cultural pertinence. Catholics could learn from the experience of Anglicans about the possibility of sustaining a dialogue with artists who are 'half-way to faith', not least because artists of a sympathetic temper are glad of the opportunity to approach, through the venues of cathedral or parish church, a (hopefully) receptive audience. But Catholics should also learn here from the mistakes of Anglicans, and most recently, in England, the embarrassing controversy about the figure of a 'golden man'—Adam in his primaeval innocence, or Feuerbachian man in self-exaltation to divinity?—placed, during an exhibition on the spiritual in art, within the interior of Lincoln cathedral. An art expressive of a 'spiritual quest' does not belong in the liturgical setting where the mysteries of orthodoxy are confessed and celebrated. But it could certainly have a place elsewhere in a church complex: for example, in a parish hall or room where, let us say, catechumens, or those simply enquiring about faith, are taking their first steps in the context of the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults. Such 'religious' (but not 'sacred') art carries within it those questions-Why is there something rather than nothing?, 'What is man?, What is the good for man, and what his destiny?—which are the meat and drink of all religions.15

Moving on to the second topic, which concerns me more, since it is closer to Christianity's dogmatic heartlands, that of sacred art—what do I mean by the urgent need to 're-constitute' the Church's 'iconographic resources'? In the first place, I mean a willingness to scan the repertory of styles from the past in search of iconographic qualities still desirable in the art-making of the present. To wrench to our purpose a saying of Jeremy Bentham, the question should be not: How long ago did a stylistic feature originate?, but Can it be of theological use to the Church

today? We must have done with the self-denying ordinance that rules out all allusion to the art of the past on the grounds that 'modern man' (that chimaera) wants only the contemporary—and receives as a consequence an often uninspired, and too facile, abstract art, in the windows and on the walls of his churches, an art which of its nature cannot express the Christian fact (for the revelation of the Incarnate is always through *form*), though it may evoke certain dimensions of that fact, such as (a generalised) 'mystery' or 'transcendence'.

If Gablik is right in her fundamental contention that, without rules and standards, innovation becomes meaningless, and criticism a beating of the air, and that, for there to be standards, a tradition must be in place, then we must re-consider the recent disdain of the bien-pensants for any recourse to former artistic styles. The rejection of all such recourse as pastiche, or imitative sterility, not only disfranchises the (limited, but real) achievements of Christian art since the Romantic movement. More than this: had such a veto been generally observed in yet earlier generations their finest creations would never have come to be. Thus, on the one hand, the Lukasbund (the precursor of the Pre-Raphaelites, and committedly Catholic) looked to mediaeval German wall-painting and the Italian primitives; the Beuron school to Egyptian art; the English Gothic Revival to the 'Decorated' or 'Middle Pointed' style of the Western middle ages; Bernard Buffet to the Catalan Romanesque. And on the other, the great styles of historic Christendom involve a series of revivals, as new needs, materials, and techniques, as well as ideas prompt the re-discovery and extension of the basic principles of a tradition. Are we supposed to question the authenticity of the Byzantine art of the 'Palaeologan renaissance', or the International Gothic?

But secondly, the re-creation of iconographic means must go hand in hand with the evangelical control of iconological themes. The faithful should not be subjected, in what they see in church, to the caprices of a parish priest, or—probably worse still—an ecclesiastical architect. Within the rudimentary limits indicated by the Second Vatican Council, and the Code of Canon Law of the Latin church (can 1188), a new consensus should be fashioned as to just what images, and in which inter-relation, might house aesthetically the Christian liturgy. Basically, the rôle of sacred images in the liturgical assembly has been to orientate the Christian in theological time and space. First, in theological time: so that, by taking in the Church's painting and sculpture he or she comes to place themself in relation to the economy of salvation as it advances from the beginnings, through Israel to Jesus Christ, the founding of the Church, its history of holiness, and the final return of the Lord with all his saints. But theological space is also important here: within the 'now'

of the offer of creation and redemption, the Christian belongs to a cosmos, and that cosmos—above all through man who is its priest, is open to the heavenly world which is not so much awaited by us as eternally present to us. In other words the Bible and the history of the Church, suitably contextualised in a Christian metaphysic, are what must guide the formation of a *scheme* of images—ideally, in every church building erected, or restored.

It should be said at once that the rite best placed in the Catholic Church to carry through these recommendations is that of the Byzantine Uniates—precisely because it has developed a full, organised scheme of images, displayed on the icon-screen separating (but also linking) sanctuary and nave, and throughout the church-building as a symbolic microcosm of the spiritual universe, and because, also, it has put into liturgical practice the concept of the festal icon, which is to serve as a focus, at once didactic, and devotional, for the high-points of the Christian year. No other Christian tradition in the Great Church has developed not only its iconology—its understanding of sacred images, but also its iconography—its creation and use of such images, with this admirable thoroughness. This is not simply an unfavourable comparison of the Latin church with its Byzantine-Slav sister. The non-Byzantine Oriental rites -whether of the Syrian or the Alexandrian family-are equally lacking in consistency with that of the Latin West. We shall not be far wrong in ascribing the more sustained attention which the Byzantine Church gave this matter to the trauma of the Iconoclast crisis. For, although the Seventh Ecumenical Council, Nicaea II, which restored the images, left surprisingly little trace in the way of subsequent theological commentary, the crisis itself made a permanent impression on the Byzantine mind. The idea that the Gospel, as the proclamation of the Word Incarnate, must be made equally and inseparably via the word-language and the (visual) image, became a pervasive one, both in theory and in practice.16

In a sense, then, I am calling for a Byzantinisation in this regard—of the Latin church (and the other non-Byzantine rites). Nor is this cloud-cuckoo land, for the process of 'reception' of the art of the icon is already well-advanced in certain Catholic circles in the West.¹⁷ However, I am not in fact proposing that Western church art should become *stylistically* Byzantine, that we should import Greek or Russian icon-screens to replace our ousted communion-rails. I am simply appealing for the replication, in the different stylistic circumstances of the Western rite, of the quality of iconographic imagination and practice which characterised the Greco-Slavonic church.

In practice, this will not be done without the creation of at least one

school of Church art in the territory of every national bishops' Conference. Such schools are absolutely taken for granted in the Orthodox world. In the recent West, an isolated example was the 'school of sacred art' founded by Maurice Denis and Georges Desvallières along the lines of a studio workshop for apprentices. Without a coherent strategy, embodied in suitable institutions, allowing for doctrinal and theological stimulus and control, as well as financial subsidy and moral support—nothing significant will be done. Sacred art will continue to wander in the wilderness, and Christian initiation will remain deprived of one of its most vital dimensions: the baptism of the imagination.

What is it that we lose by such a deprivation? In the first place, the chance to see, and live with, images of transfigured humanity—above all, of the Saviour-which not only cohere with but root in the deepest humus of the psyche the truths contained in the formal doctrine of the Church. Even if the homily, for example, fails to convey a suitable sense of who Jesus Christ is, whether by a defect of doctrine or a lack of the power to move souls, heart and mind can still be touched by the Christ of a Byzantine mosaic, a Romanesque fresco, a Russian icon, or such a twentieth century image as Rouault's' Holy Face-itself indebted to a persistent tradition of depicting the Redeemer in this guise, not unconnected, perhaps, with the 'true image' long venerated at Edessa (Syria) and found, in its mediaeval form, in the Shroud of Turin.19 (And though our grasp of the figure of Christ is, evidently, central to the happy condition of the 'sense of the faith' in the Church, the same basic point about the 'adequate' and potent image can also be applied to the quality of perception of our Lady, and the saints.)

And in the second place, the absence of suitable images means the loss of models, and incentive, for growth in the virtues, both natural and divine. The gestures depicted by the artist can be a moral education in themselves (as with Blake's bowed heads, intimating humility, tenderness, compassion), and a school in how to respond to the crucial events of man's salvation (as in Giotto's depiction of awe, prayer, blessing).

If our Catholicism has become at once too wordy and too fixated on 'structures', then the therapy it needs is to turn from 'problems' to 'presence'—for in any case, it is only by virtue of the saving presences, and their pressure on our minds and hearts, that problems in this context can be solved at all. And to mediate the presence of the Holy, the Church must regain her rôle as 'iconifier'—bearer of images and mother of artists.

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- 3 Sacrosanctum Concilium 122. For an overview of the Council's references to images, and allusions in other contemporary documents of the Church of Rome, as G. Rapisarda, 'Le immagini sacre nelle indicazione del Vaticano II e delle riforma liturgica', in [Auctores varii] Culto delle immagini e crisi iconoclasta (Palermo, 1986), pp. 153-173.
- 4 Summa Theologiae IIa. IIae., q.81, a. 7.
- 5 E. Masure, Le Signe. Le passage du visible à l'invisible (Paris 1954), p. 42.
- 6 E. Lanne [O.S.B.], 'Rome et les images saintes', Irénikon, (1986), pp. 163-188.
- 7 See my The Art of God Incarnate. Theology and Image in Christian Tradition (London, 1980), pp. 11—12
- 8 See R. Rosenblum, Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition. Friedrich to Rothko (London, 1975).
- 9 See e.g. M. Betz, 'The Icon and Russian Modernism', Artforum (Summer 1977), pp. 38-45; and J. Masheck, 'Iconicity', in idem., Historical Present. Essays of the 1970's (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1984), pp. 209-228.
- 10 S. Gablik, Has Modernism Failed? (London 1984; 1985), p. 13.
- 11 I take the concept of 'secular fundamentalism' here from G. D'Costa, 'Secular Discourses and the Clash of Faiths: The Satanic Verses in British Society', New Blackfriars 71, 842 (October, 1990).
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- 13 S. Gabhir, Has Modernism Failed?, op. cit., p. 77; cf. Fuller's reprint, with a new prefatory essay, in 1990 of his Images of God. The Consolations of Lost Illusions (originally London, 1982).
- 14 S. Gablik, Has Modernism Failed?, op. cit., p. 80.
- 15 Nostra aetate (The Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on Non-Christian Religions), 1.
- 16 C. Walter [A. A.], 'The Icon and the Image of Christ: the Second Council of Nicaea and Byzantine Tradition', Sobornost N.S. 10, 1 (1988), pp. 23 ff.
- 17 Cf. E. Fortino, 'The Role and Importance of Icons: a Roman Catholic Perspective', in G. Limouris, *Icons. Windows on Eternity* (Geneva 1990, = Faith and Order Paper 147), pp. 124—131.
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- W. Bulst-H. Pfeiffer, Das Turiner Grabtuch und das Christusbild I (Frankfurt, 1987), pp. 95-136.
- 20 I draw this term from G. Goethals, The Church and the Mass Media: Competing Architects of our Dominant Symbols, Rituals and Myths', in J. McDonnell and F. Trampiets (eds.), Communicating Faith in a Technological Age (Slough, 1989), p. 77.