

THE CHURCH AND CULTURE SINCE VATICAN II: ON THE ANALOGY OF FAITH AND ART

CHARLES M. MURPHY

St. John's Seminary, Brighton, Mass.

ONE OF the principal preoccupations and intentions of the Second Vatican Council noted by Cardinal Agostino Casaroli in his address to an international encounter of artists during the special Holy Year of Redemption in 1984 was the renewal of a positive dialogue between the Church and the world of culture.¹ An entire section of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*, chapter 2 of Part 2, was devoted specifically to the promotion of culture on the part of the Church.² This outward thrust of the Church to the world and to the world's autonomous concerns became in the course of the Council its fifth major goal.³

After the Council, in a variety of ways, Pope John Paul II has implemented vigorously this conciliar intention. He has revitalized the Pontifical Academy of Science. He has addressed in a fresh way past estrangements, notably by calling for a new study of the Galileo case and a frank recognition of wrongs "from whichever side they came." He has praised the cultural experiments of Matteo Ricci, comparing his efforts to those in an earlier age of Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. The Pope has manifested his concern concretely by creating on May 20, 1982, the Pontifical Council for Culture and by appointing in the same year an auxiliary bishop for the Diocese of Rome, Pietro Rossano, with the unusual charge of the pastoral care of culture ("la pastorale della cultura"). More significantly in terms of our purposes in this article, he has given two discourses devoted to the topic of the relationship of the Church and art which, I hope to show, are helpful theological elaborations of the Christian humanist world-view he expressed in his inaugural encyclical, *Redemptor hominis* ("the human person is the way for the Church"),⁴ and an important contribution as well to a Catholic theology of culture. The analogy which he draws between faith and art clarifies in today's cultural context both of these expressions of the human spirit.

¹ *Osservatore romano*, Feb. 20, 1984, 1.

² The Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, also has references to faith and art in chaps. 6 and 7, devoted to the promotion of sacred art and music.

³ The four original goals mentioned in the introduction to *Sacrosanctum concilium* are: greater intensity of the Christian life, adaptation of changeable institutions to contemporary needs, the unity of Christians, and the spread of the gospel.

⁴ *Redemptor hominis* (March 4, 1979) no. 14.

This ambitious project, made more urgent since Vatican II, is usually spoken of as “the evangelization of culture,” understood as “shedding the light of the gospel upon the products of human culture” and as the “inculturalization” of the gospel message itself into new cultural expressions. Here I focus rather upon the act of faith and how its nature is illumined within the context of artistic works and how it is related to the aesthetic dimension of human life. As human freedom and conscience have been used as bases for understanding the meaning of faith, so also, I hope to suggest, can the aesthetic experience. After analyzing the foundational section of *Gaudium et spes*, I will explore the two addresses of John Paul II and their anticipation in some suggestions by Jacques Maritain, sketch out some of the theological details of this analogy, and indicate directions for further theological reflection.

GAUDIUM ET SPES ON CULTURE

Even as the conciliar debates were in progress, Pope Paul VI, on May 7, 1964, gave an impassioned plea to both the Church and artists to undertake an examination of conscience about the reasons for the “humiliating and impoverishing” rapport between them in recent times after such a long, rich history of productive relationship.⁵ The Council itself described the separation of faith from life as one of the greatest errors of our time.⁶ Later, Paul VI, in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, wrote that “the rupture between the gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our era.”⁷

Gaudium et spes was the Council’s valiant effort to overcome this alienation, identifying the Church’s mission as not only “to” the world but precisely “in” it, proclaiming its belief that Christ is the revealer not only of God to the human person but of the human person to the human person.⁸ The section devoted to the Church and culture elaborates this central thesis through the Christian anthropological vision of the human person as the image of God, which is the basis of all of *Gaudium et spes* and one of its three or so major contributions, along with the notions of communion as the basic reality of life, human and divine, and the Church as people of God in history, the sacrament of this communion. The human person, the image of God, is the creator of culture and creates himself/herself through his/her own cultural history. This, the Council says, is the “new humanism” and the test of humanity’s spiritual and moral maturity—that “the human person is defined before all else by

⁵ It was Paul VI who inaugurated a wing of the Vatican Museums dedicated to modern art.

⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 43.

⁷ *Evangelii nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975) no. 20.

⁸ GS, no. 10.

his/her responsibility to his/her brothers/sisters and at the court of history."⁹

Human culture according to the Council is "autonomous," the product of human freedom and striving, not to be controlled by governments or the Church. But such a conception of the human person and culture is profoundly religious, because it comes out of a conviction concerning human dignity, the value of human freedom, as willed by God and even as the image of God; hence culture, though autonomous, is "linked" to the gospel.¹⁰

Though the Church has no specific cultural mission, the Church does advance culture in numerous ways. By preaching this religious vision, the Church provides an "incentive"¹¹ to further cultural progress. It discloses a balanced view of life unimpeded by excessive material preoccupation and especially by human sin, thus allowing space for worship, contemplation, and artistic expression.¹² Drawing upon the Gospel of John and the theology of Irenaeus, the Council finds the enlightening Word of God, enfleshed in Jesus, at work everywhere in the world. The Church, therefore, not only teaches but can learn and receive from human culture, which can be a "kind of preparation for the acceptance of the gospel message."¹³ The section concludes by noting that the gospel is transcultural, "for the deposit and truths of faith are one thing, the manner of expressing them another."¹⁴ Part of the Church's "pastoral care," then, is to present the gospel in new cultural forms, drawing upon the insights of contemporary literature and art to provide new languages for faith.¹⁵

At the Council's conclusion on December 8, 1965, its final message had a special word addressed to artists, asking their help today to "render visible the invisible world."

Pietro Rossano sees much progress since the Council in relating the Christian message to what he calls "subjective" culture: the task of the human person to develop and humanize himself/herself and the relevance of religious values to that task. But especially with regard to culture in the objective sense—"human inventions, books, works of art, laws, music, cinema, attitudes, life-styles, current trends"—we have to recognize, he writes, that "we are not yet at daybreak, perhaps only at cockcrow. A

⁹ *GS*, no. 55.

¹⁰ *GS*, no. 58.

¹¹ *GS*, no. 57.

¹² *GS*, no. 59.

¹³ *GS*, no. 57.

¹⁴ *GS*, no. 62.

¹⁵ Casaroli (no. 1 above) V.

religious reflection on culture that is serious and effective cannot be improvised. It requires much patience, attention, and a previous clarification of ideas. . . .¹⁶ In the preface of his book he states: "The Christian is called upon to project the light of the gospel upon culture. But the way of doing it is not totally clear."¹⁷

In assigning to human culture an integrity all its own, Vatican II drew upon a fundamental concept of Vatican I, namely that of the "two orders" of faith and reason, the supernatural and the natural. Vatican II went further than Vatican I in showing that the two orders, though distinct, are united in a single history.¹⁸ Who the human person is, furthermore, even on the natural level, the Council asserts, is known fully only in Christ. But, as Walter Kasper has observed, how these two orders totally relate to one another was not elaborated by the Council.

The connection between the transcendental starting point and the historical or salvational-historical aspect is admittedly left more or less undetermined by the council; the two aspects stand side by side in relative isolation in the conciliar texts. The integration of the two viewpoints is therefore an important task for dogmatic foundational reflection.¹⁹

It is here that two recent addresses of John Paul II to artists take on special significance. They do try to advance how, as Yves Congar hoped when *Gaudium et spes* was being written, the "*sermo de homine* and *sermo de Deo* are related"²⁰ and how the act of faith and the artistic task are related to each other.

JOHN PAUL II ON THE ANALOGY OF FAITH AND ART

John Paul II used the occasion of a liturgy in honor of Beato Angelico (Giovanni da Fiesole), whom he declared patron of artists and painters, to underscore what he called "the organic and constitutive bonds between Christianity and culture, between the human person and the gospel."²¹ In the case of Beato Angelico, the Pope declared, "faith became culture and culture became faith made visible; in his life and work, art became prayer." Beato Angelico became a consecrated religious and a priest "to become more a person," and he became a great painter to express the beauty of his deepest self: by creating his artistic works, he created

¹⁶ Pietro Rossano, *Vangelo e cultura: Note per un incontro tra il Vangelo e la cultura contemporanea* (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1985) 9, 10, 45, 46.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 5.

¹⁸ *GS*, nos. 2, 4, 10, 11, 22.

¹⁹ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 70.

²⁰ *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* 5, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969) 59.

²¹ Homily, Feb. 18, 1984 (*Osservatore romano*, Feb. 20-21, 1984) no. 2.

himself. In this way, the Pope stated, we see how "art reveals itself as a road which can lead to Christian perfection" and how Christianity is itself a deeply human message of great transforming power.²² Human artistic creativity, he went on, is a reflection of the divine creativity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Scriptures have been the source of inspiration for many cultural works such as those of Beato Angelico. All of human existence and history acquire meaning, he concluded, only from the unshakable conviction that God loved the world so much He gave His only Son.

These themes receive a deeper theological elaboration in the homily the Pope gave at a Mass for artists celebrated in Belgium on May 20, 1985, in which he declared that "a world without art can only with difficulty open itself to Christian faith and love."²³ It was on this occasion that he gave the most extended development of his theology of art—art which, he says, like Christian faith, hope, and love, introduces us to a new world. Using as his basic text the passage from Acts that "God is not far from each of us, for it is in Him that we have our life, activity, and being,"²⁴ he sought to show that the sole fact of the artistic search to express the deepest levels of human life and the heart of reality, even without explicit religious reference, is itself to draw near to God, however unknowingly. The work of art is itself an experience analogous to the religious experience of faith.

In divine revelation God addresses Himself to humanity through historical events interpreted by prophetic words which give the events their meaning. Faith, therefore, is a way of seeing history and beneath history, calling our attention to deeper realities and the interiority of things: "Our eyes become capable of seeing the beauty and coherence of everything that lives in this world."²⁵ In an analogous way art resembles this prophetic word. All authentic art interprets reality beneath what the senses perceive. It is born of the silence that comes from being astonished and from the affirmation of a sincere heart. It derives its strength from its nearness to the mystery of reality. The essential element in art is situated in the deepest level of human life, where the aspiration to give life sense is accompanied by a fleeting intuition of the beauty and mysterious unity of things.

Art has great evocative power and in this way too it is similar to the Word of God. God can never be totally captured in our artistic creations, for He is always beyond; but artistic works are an opening into that

²² *Ibid.*, nos. 2 and 7.

²³ *Osservatore romano*, May 20–21, 1985, 1.

²⁴ Acts 17:27.

²⁵ Homily, no. 2.

beyond of which they are signs. An artist nonetheless has the intuition that nature is already a reflection of the divine beauty, and the human face is the most beautiful icon of the living God.

Art, then, is a privileged expression of a fundamental human sympathy accorded by the artist to one discovered to be like himself/herself, of a love given to what is deepest in another. It is also an expression of a transcendent hope which will not reduce a person, as ideologies do, to a single dimension. Similarly, the Christian has learned from Jesus to recognize behind the face of the other, especially of the poor, the profound mystery of the Son of Man himself. Jesus too inspires hope, and like a divine artist he spoke his whole life with parables. The symbolic language of artists evokes the same Reality which is beneath everything, the God who is not distant.

SOME ANTICIPATIONS IN JACQUES MARITAIN

According to Cardinal Garrone, Jacques Maritain, and in particular his *Humanisme intégral*, was an important influence upon *Gaudium et spes*.²⁶ It is not surprising, therefore, that John Paul II, who himself contributed to the drafting of the constitution and whose background is Thomistic philosophy, would employ, when speaking of the relationship of faith and art, concepts very similar to those of Maritain in his dialogue with the artist Jean Cocteau issued under the title *Art and Faith*. Maritain, wishing to explain how the artist and the saint may resemble each other, claims the time is right for such a comparison, for poetry is "entering deeper into its own mystery—dazzled by the revelations that taking consciousness of itself brought to it—where poetic knowledge confronts metaphysics and theology—[where] the savor of a foretaste of the contemplative intuition pulls in the direction of God."²⁷

John Paul, like Maritain, describes the relation between faith and art in terms of analogy. Of this "mysterious and ambiguous" relation Maritain writes:

Between the world of poetry and that of sainthood there exists an *analogical* relation—I use this word with all the force metaphysicians give it, with all that it implies for them of kinship and of distance. All errors come from the fact that people misread this analogy: some swell the similarity, mixing poetry and mysticism; others weaken it, making poetry out to be a craft, a mechanical art.²⁸

Maritain sees in symbol the basis of this analogy: "Art is with grace in

²⁶ Cardinal G. M. Garrone, *50 ans de vie d'église* (Paris: Desclée, 1983) 19.

²⁷ *Art and Faith: Letters between Jacques Maritain and Jean Cocteau* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948) 7–8.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 88.

the habit of symbolizing." Art sees into things and brings forth a sign of the spirituality they contain. Like the Scriptures themselves, nature contains a variety of meanings, and art brings to light all the allusions to their divine meaning. "As nature is an allusion to the Kingdom of God, poetry gives us, without knowing it, a foreshadowing, an obscure desire for the supernatural life."²⁹

Art also is the analogue, the highest natural resemblance, to God's own creative activity, and even to the divine procession of the Word, for art "wants to beget a work, made in our image and where our heart would survive."³⁰ Comparable, too, to the divine inspiration of the supernatural order, which has charity as its basis, is the inspiration of the artist. The artistic inspiration, though remaining within the natural order, transcends "the deliberations of reason . . . and proceeds, as Aristotle observed, from God present in us."³¹ The poet, with a kind of "evangelical wisdom," displays a "natural sympathy" with the secrets of the universe. But here, according to Maritain, we begin to see the limits of this analogy, for "to tend toward the perfection of charity" and "to operate according to beauty" are two "formalities." They should be in agreement, but "in the human person nothing is easy. It is not easy to be a poet, it is not easy to be a Christian, it is doubly difficult to be both at once."³² "Honest love is the supreme rule of the poet who loves his work," but love presupposes knowledge, and true knowledge comes only from faith in the Word. It is in the Church, "where love and truth are together," that true charity is found. Maritain concludes that

religion can, like nature, furnish art with objects, yet it is not a literary object itself. It can *animate* art as the mind animates the body, without mingling with it; in mingling their two essences one soils them both. . . . [I]t is vain to force poetry to ape the mystic state, and to seek the heroic life in the human word. Dreaming is but a false deliverance. It can help to renew the language's resources, the deeper life of verbal imagination, it can help to purify words of the soiling of common usage; it will furnish after all only a technique. There is no spirituality without the Spirit.³³

It is at this point that Maritain gives his sharpest delineation of the gulf which separates the universal and changeless nature of truth from the particularity and constant movement of art: "The first function of

²⁹ Ibid. 90.

³⁰ Ibid. 89. Dorothy Sayers, in her *Mind of the Maker* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1941), draws out this analogy, which was first elaborated by Augustine in his psychological trinity of memory, understanding, and will.

³¹ *Art and Faith* 89.

³² Ibid. 104.

³³ Ibid. 106-7.

the Thomist has been, and will always remain, of a sacred order.”³⁴ Addressing himself directly to Cocteau, he writes:

[B]ecause I am a philosopher, I remain and must remain entirely separated from the world of art, of literature and criticism. . . . Your poetry doubtless has a conception of the world, but it is too immersed in the concrete to be able to be put into a system. My philosophy doubtless has a doctrine of art, but it is too abstract to leave the heaven of principles. . . . Moreover, wisdom and art are two independent absolutes. All sciences are subordinated to wisdom by very reason of their objects. This is not the case with art: it comes into the midst of our hierarchies like a moon prince whom etiquette has not foreseen, and who embarrasses all the masters of ceremonies. Taken in itself, and in its pure formal line, it has with human and divine values neither subordination nor co-ordination, it depends by its object neither on wisdom nor on prudence; all its dependence on them is on the side of the human subject who practises art, *ex parte subjecti*.³⁵

It is precisely here that we begin to see that Maritain’s philosophical approach can carry him only so far, and in fact must be “corrected” by theology, and in particular by the fundamental theological fact of the Incarnation itself. This has often been observed; to cite only one recent example, Margaret Miles writes:

In the incarnational view, the unexpected and unpredictable activity of God within the material world was seen as the result of a new relationship of the highest and lowest entities of the cosmic hierarchy which was brought about by the bonding of these levels in the incarnation of the Word. . . .

It is difficult for us fully to emphatize with the embarrassment felt by late classical people over the disruption of the cosmic order implied in God’s taking human form. . . . The cosmic hierarchy would only be destroyed by the entrance of God into the material world.³⁶

By virtue of the Incarnation, it is precisely the subjective and not the cosmic hierarchy which becomes the locus for the manifestation of God. This very theological correction of philosophy is where the analogy between faith and art derives its greatest strength and truth. Drawing upon the theological unity of the orders of creation and of redemption expressed in the notion of the human person as the icon of God, the Second Vatican Council, coming after Maritain had written, would give great positive value to human cultural products. John Paul II manifests this incarnational theology enunciated by Vatican II. In fact, he sees the mission of the Church as to travel human history with the human person, not an “abstract” philosophical person, but with every individual person

³⁴ *Ibid.* 115.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 116–17.

³⁶ Margaret R. Miles, *Fullness of Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) 82, 112–13.

in all his/her concreteness.³⁷ In his third encyclical he declared that, while the tendency has been to separate theocentrism and anthropocentrism and even to oppose one to the other, the Church, following Christ, must always link them together "in a deep, organic way." He calls this "one of the most basic and perhaps the most important teaching of the last Council."³⁸

As one of the drafters of *Gaudium et spes* concludes, in this constitution it is precisely "*the subjective in the human person [that] is rediscovered for evangelization.*"³⁹

ON THE ANALOGY OF FAITH AND ART

The doctrines of Christ the image of God, and of the human person the image of Christ, according to Jaroslav Pelikan, historically gave Christian art its origin and theological possibility. The aesthetic experience, as I hope to indicate, is, like the act of faith, an expression of this transcendent dimension present in human life. Art is not a substitute for faith but, on solid theological grounds, comparable to it, and thus helps us to understand better the nature of faith itself. If faith is to be found in the human person in all the concreteness of his/her life experience, so also the artistic canon similarly warns: "Go in fear of abstraction" (Ezra Pound); "No truth but in things" (William Carlos Williams); "Not ideas about things but the thing itself" (Wallace Stevens).

The early apologists like Clement of Alexandria also looked to the artistic and philosophical creations of the larger culture to explain the Christian faith, but they often did so in terms of rather strained analogies of image and content: "hints" of Christ in Vergil, "fulfilled" pagan prophecies, Odysseus' mast as a symbol of the cross. We rather focus our attention upon the heightened intensity and depth of the perception of reality as the religious element which the artistic work communicates. Paul Tillich therefore, from a theological perspective, locates in the area of "style" the religious dimension of art, distinguishing style and content in an artistic work.⁴⁰

According to Tillich, a painting with a "religious" subject may not be a religious painting at all if it is stylistically superficial or one-sided and does not convey the artist's penetration into existence in depth. Thus, a painting like Picasso's "Guernica," while having a secular content, is, according to Tillich, profoundly religious in expressing the artist's pro-

³⁷ *Redemptor hominis*, no. 13.

³⁸ *Dives in misericordia*, no. 1.

³⁹ Bernard Lambert, O.P., "Gaudium et spes and the Travail of Today's Ecclesial Conception," in *The Church and Culture since Vatican II*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1985) 49.

⁴⁰ Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University, 1959) 42 ff.

phetic protest against injustice. The artist, through his/her art, as Pope John Paul said, "is making him/herself" and expressing his/her soul. The Pope could therefore make the startling affirmation that "a world without art can only with difficulty open itself to Christian faith and love."

The Second Vatican Council described faith as no mere assent of the mind but the obedience of the whole person to the divine self-communication in revelation.⁴¹ Faith as an all-encompassing horizon of meaning is intrinsically related to every aspect of life, and most surely to an art that stylistically manifests the artist's ultimate concerns. Style here may be defined as the embodiment of the values of those who produce it. The artist's style is an expression, in fact *the* expression, of his particular voice. As Helen Vendler has written, "The referentiality of language in a poem is more inward than outward, even when the topic of the poem is a civic or ethical or mimetic one. . . . What it represents, ultimately, is its author's sensibility and temperament, rather than the 'outside world.'"⁴²

As I will indicate in the last section, the highly personal and even nonreferential quality of the artist's stylistically distinctive voice does point to a major difference between the revelation found in art and that encountered in faith, but here I would point out that faith arises as a response to testimony, to the personal witness and voice of another: *fides ex auditu*.⁴³ It is the personal voice which stirs us to our depths and invites commitment, and in this respect the records of faith and artistic works manifest a similar power.

There is a strangeness in the vision of reality presented in authentic art, a strangeness which often causes rejection or derision because we are not used to seeing things like that. What art does, as Marcuse reminded us, is to dissolve "the repressive familiarity with the given world of objects"⁴⁴ and provide the opportunity for a transformation of consciousness. In this way, too, art resembles faith.

"Did you ever reflect," Rossano has asked, "upon the fact that biblical revelation has been given to us in large part in the form of poetry—psalms and hymns? The same happens in all the scriptures of humankind."⁴⁵ Vatican II, in calling attention to the centrality of the Scriptures in the life of the Church, taught that the apostolic preaching has been

⁴¹ *Dei verbum*, no. 5.

⁴² "Looking for Poetry in America," *New York Review of Books* 32, no. 17 (Nov. 7, 1985) 60.

⁴³ Rom 10:17.

⁴⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon, 1972) 79 ff.

⁴⁵ Letter to the author, Jan. 30, 1986.

expressed in a special way in the inspired books.⁴⁶

[The Sacred Scriptures] present God's own Word in unalterable form and they make the voice of the Holy Spirit sound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles. . . . In the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet His children and talks with them. And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life. Scripture verifies in the most perfect way the words "the Word of God is living and active" (Heb 4:12).⁴⁷

Pope John Paul, in speaking about Beato Angelico, noted how the Sacred Scriptures have been the inspiration of many artistic works, but this is not merely fortuitous. There is in the written word of the Bible considered as a literary production a particular aptitude to express divine revelation and to inspire faith.

There have been many good results from studies of the Bible not only of the historical-critical type but of its stylistic techniques of narrative and of poetry that have helped us to see the theological weight of the authors' choice of words and forms of expression. These studies of the artistic aspects of the Bible help us to understand better why these inspired texts continue to inspire people who wish to shape their lives in their categories and images, and why they create ever-new religious experiences. To cite only one highly acclaimed example, Erich Auerbach, in his classic study *Mimesis*, contrasts Homeric and biblical narratives by demonstrating that the biblical stories, unlike those of Homer, are "fraught with background": "But any such subjectivistic-perspectivistic procedure," he writes, "creating a foreground and background, resulting in the present lying open to the depths of the past, is entirely foreign to the Homeric style; the Homeric style knows only a foreground, only a uniformly illuminated, uniformly objective present."⁴⁸

"Abraham, Jacob, or even Moses produces a more concrete, direct, and historical impression than the figures of the Homeric world," Auerbach argues, "—not because they are better described in terms of sense (the contrary is the case) but because the confused, contradictory multiplicity of events, the psychological and factual cross-purposes, which true history reveals, have not disappeared in the representation but still remain clearly perceptible."⁴⁹

Vatican II, in its Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, points

⁴⁶ *Dei verbum*, no. 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 21.

⁴⁸ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957) 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 17.

out the structure of event and word which revelation displays.

This economy of revelation is realized by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other. As a result, the works performed by God in the history of salvation show forth and bear out the doctrine and realities signified by the words; the words, for their part, proclaim the works, and bring to light the mystery they contain.⁵⁰

John Paul II draws out the implications of this structure to show that analogous nature of faith and art. Art is like the prophetic word breaking upon reality to reveal its depth and meaning and also expressing the artist's hope and love through its symbols. William James had also seen in this way the similarity of the religious and the aesthetic experiences; both perceive nature as sacramental of a spiritual reality, as containing in itself a wholeness and configuration and so as bearing a meaning.⁵¹

The artistic imagination is the human organ of transcendence which by its symbols and techniques of intensification and paradox are sometimes better able than discursive thought to capture and communicate our tacit knowledge of religious mysteries. Macquarrie thus speculates that Velasquez' painting of the Immaculate Conception conveys better the mysteries of election and incarnation, of deity, humanity, and femininity—more of the essential meaning of the Immaculate Conception—than even the dogmatic definition itself.⁵² Pelikan suggests similarly that "Christian worship and hymnody, from the *Gloria Patri* of the Latin liturgy to the nineteenth century hymn 'Holy, Holy, Holy' . . . often gave better expression to faith in the Trinity than did theology; even Calvin thought that the Nicene Creed was better sung than said."⁵³

Art, as John Paul II has said, is capable of coining ever-new languages for faith.

DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

To have faith in God is a conscious act of will and mind; it is a decision. The love of God, as Augustine taught, is "no indeterminate feeling, but a certitude of consciousness."⁵⁴ Faith concretely means faith in the only Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, as professed in the faith of the Church. "How this faith and our natural religiousness as human beings are related," John Paul II stated in his dialogue with André Frossard, "is what needs greater determination." We need, the Pope went

⁵⁰ *Dei verbum*, no. 2.

⁵¹ Cited by John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity* (New York: Crossroad, 1985) 206.

⁵² *Ibid.* 197.

⁵³ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985) 58.

⁵⁴ *Confessions* 10, 8.

on, to explore more fully what Tertullian meant in his suggestive phrase *anima naturaliter christiana*.⁵⁵

The Pope himself, in a recent encyclical, *Dominum et vivificantem*, began to sketch the outline of such a reflection. Referring to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the Holy Spirit is active outside as well as inside the visible body of the Church, God as absolute Spirit, he declared, while wholly transcendent is also immanent to this world and present in it, "penetrating it and giving it life from within."

This is especially true in relation to the human person: God is present in the intimacy of our being, in our mind, conscience, and heart; an ontological and psychological reality, in considering which St. Augustine said of God that He was "closer than my inmost being."⁵⁶

Artists have been accurately described as the antennae of the race. They are par excellence "representative"; the making of art is not just a superfluous activity but is as much a cultural and political act as it is an aesthetic one. For better or ill, they create to a significant degree the world the Church inhabits with the rest of humanity and establish the images according to which persons define themselves. They may also serve as the antennae of that mysterious, unseen presence of the Spirit in human life.

Those who pursue the analogy between faith and art, important as it is, do not do so from an embarrassment about the truth of religious doctrines and all their import concerning a transcendent reality beyond the human. Neither do they do so because they believe that science having exploded the metaphysical base of religious doctrines we are only left with aesthetic reasons to believe. They do so because they detect in artistic expressions the voice of the Spirit uniquely and aptly communicated. They also recognize peculiar pitfalls in attempting such a comparison. Pelikan has observed that within the triad of the Beautiful, the True, and the Good invoked as a way of expressing the many facets of the meaning of Jesus for human culture, it was the Beautiful that took by far the longest time to evolve.

As the iconoclasts saw with great clarity, the Beautiful was (and is) the most subtle and dangerous of the triad: the dangers of identifying with the Good (moralism) have manifested themselves repeatedly in the history of Judaism and Christianity, but it is noteworthy that both the Second Commandment itself and the message of the Hebrew prophets singled out the identification of the Holy with the Beautiful as the special temptation to sin. The formulation of an

⁵⁵ André Frossard, *N'ayez pas peur: Dialogue avec Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1982) 40.

⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem* (May 30, 1986) nos. 53, 54.

aesthetic that came to terms with the reality of this temptation called for philosophical and theological sophistication.⁵⁷

Neither do they advocate a return to "religious" art in the sense of a religious subject matter or one that self-consciously conveys a Catholic world view. All human culture has its own proper autonomy, as Vatican II said. Or, to cite Cocteau in his exchange with Maritain, "Art according to art! God cannot be deified [in artificial or archaic forms] without ridicule. He likes to be lived. Dead languages are dead. One must translate him into all the living languages."⁵⁸

We must continue to respect the secularity of art, even in a prevailing cultural environment of unbelief such as our own. Rather than seeing him/herself and the world as reflections of God's glory, the artist as artist often seeks to express no sensibility but his/her own, no reality other than an aesthetic one. He/she may regard religious beliefs, like all cultural products, as meant eventually to be discarded, for human invention is perpetual and never fails to reinvent a culture. In such a world view, the *analogia entis* is but an aspect within the *analogia mentis*. All that remains for Wallace Stevens, for example, one of our most culturally significant modern poets, by the time he writes his last poem, is the belief in "the aesthetic inexhaustibility of the world and the emotions."⁵⁹

For the task of relating faith to culture, it is enough to affirm the human person and his/her expressions of transcendence without prematurely imposing a conscious religious specificity. As John Paul II declared before UNESCO:

I think most of all of the fundamental link of the Church, that is, of the message of Christ and of the Church, with the human person in his/her very humanity. This link is effectively creative of culture at its very foundations. To create culture, one must consider, down to its last consequences and integrally, the human person as a particular and autonomous value, as a subject bearing personal transcendence. One must affirm the human person for him/herself, and for no other motive or reason—the human person for him/herself!⁶⁰

More than likely, artists today may not wish to have their work identified as a "preparation for the gospel." But the links between their work and the gospel need not be created, for they are already there; and perhaps the best mode for the Church's presence to such artists is by providing a distinterested encouragement and support in their artistic

⁵⁷ Pelikan, *Jesus* 94.

⁵⁸ Maritain, *Art and Faith* 49.

⁵⁹ Helen Vendler, *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee, 1980) 59.

⁶⁰ Garrone, *50 ans* 87.

travail.

When the Church fostered art in the past, it was as patron in an aristocratic age of "high" art. Today, in a more democratic age, the Church is being urged as a "Church of the poor" to foster popular culture. It is no doubt partly for this reason that even some believers have difficulty with what they label the "kitsch" of contemporary liturgical art and language, preferring the aesthetic values of an earlier age. The Church must continue, therefore, to encounter the creators of art of the highest standard, but in new ways. The Church in the present age cannot be the grand patron of art on the same scale as she was in the past, but her influence today can be even greater if she can succeed in reaching and identifying with the deepest yearnings within the human heart manifested in art. Such a passionate desire for love, for reality, for truth, as Wallace Stevens, for example, displayed with greater and greater intensity and disappointment throughout his whole poetic life, does comprise a powerful testimony, considered from a religious point of view, for the need of an answering divine revelation of love. To cite again only the case of Stevens, how inhibited he was in his desire to believe by the cultural poverty of the forms of Christianity he encountered all his life in America!

St. Jerome, one of the most cultured persons of his age, gave up for a time, out of Christian scruple, all reading of secular literature. In a famous dream, a "judge" had accused him, "You are a disciple of Cicero, not of Christ." Expanding upon Tertullian, who asked, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?",⁶¹ Jerome wrote: "What has Horace to do with the Psalter, Vergil with the Evangelists, Cicero with the Apostle?"⁶² The answer that Jerome eventually came to, and which the poet-pope John Paul II has recalled to our attention, is that both faith and art are in their own ways responses to the presence of God's ever-active Spirit.

⁶¹ *De praescr. haer.* 7, 9.

⁶² Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 43.