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ABSTRACT LITURGICAL ART

by

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A Paper submitted to the Faculty of the School of Theology of Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Liturgy.

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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This Paper was written under the direction of

Helen Rolfson, O. S. F.
Form of Disclosure

ABSTRACT LITURGICAL ART

Description of the Project:

This paper is the end product of an Independent Learning Project under the direction of Helen Rolfsen, O. S. F. at Saint John's University, School of Theology, Collegeville, Minnesota, which investigated the spirituality of liturgical art in the Roman Catholic tradition. The particular focus of research was on the use of abstract art and iconoclasm within the tradition and in general theory. The paper presents the author's theory of contemporary liturgical art for the Roman Catholic Church in the West based upon his findings.

Purpose of Disclosure:

Disclosure of this research is made for the purpose of consultation alone and not publication. In no way do the views presented in this paper represent those of its director or Saint John's University and the School of Theology.

Parties to whom the Disclosure may be made:

Disclosure of this research is given with the permission of the writer to any interested individual for use in research with any reference or quotation attributed the proper credit.

Signature of Student Writer

Date

11 October, 1994
Introduction

In his essay entitled "Christian Kitsch," Karl Pawek states that there is more to the problem of Christian kitsch than stylistic deficiency. Sacred art of questionable merit with a tendency toward poor taste is a theological problem as well as an aesthetic one. Neither problem can be properly considered in isolation. Theology must be inherently present if an object is classified as religious, sacred or liturgical and any object designated as art plainly lies within the concerns of aesthetics. The underlying problem is that far too often, especially in liturgical situations, the two never meet. What is theologically sound may lack aesthetic merit and what is aesthetically successful may be theologically suspect. Thomas Mathews proposes that the ideal juxtaposition of art and theology did not even exist in the Middle Ages. That period of history which so many look back to nostalgically as the most perfect synthesis of theology and art, Mathews contends, does not confirm our dreams of the Middle Ages. It is indeed a rare experience to encounter truly sacred art and even rarer to experience authentic liturgical art.

In his book *Context and Text*, Kevin Irwin recommends that "more work is needed on what [has been] termed liturgical 'aesthetics.'" Irwin goes on to state:

To agree that liturgy ought to be aesthetically pleasing and that its component elements should be qualitively beautiful would not be difficult. A legitimate challenge to this statement, however, could rightly be mounted when aesthetics is equated with ostentation and beauty merely with expense.

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4 Irwin, 250.
The method proposed by Irwin as a corrective to the problem in post-Vatican II liturgical art is simply to draw more attention to criteria for designing theologically appropriate art. The bottom line of this work is to enter into the conversation of determining a theologically appropriate post-conciliar style of liturgical art for the Roman Catholic Church in the West. The need for the advancement of this discussion is twofold. As alluded to above, the primary need for the discussion of liturgical art is theological. Due to the simple fact that few churches have quality liturgical art, the Church is inadvertently presenting inappropriate theology to congregations in the vast majority of cases. This can no more be tolerated than if inappropriate readings were being used in the liturgy of the Word. A second reason for the need of discussion is to fill a void. Environment and Art in Catholic Worship states: “A major and continuing educational effort is required among believers in order to restore respect for competence and expertise in all the arts and a desire for their best use in public worship.” What is needed, in the words of Margaret Miles, is a “... genuine and thoroughgoing appreciation for the mode of perception—once called the ‘queen of the senses’—that is most capable of receiving and delighting in the sensible world of bodies and things in all their multiplicity, particularity, and diversity.” The intent here is to further the fulfillment of educating the believers in matters of both theologically and aesthetically appropriate liturgical art.

The following research was prepared under the general premise that inappropriate liturgical art is first a concern of theology and second, a concern of aesthetics. The contention is that only non-figurative abstract art can properly fulfill this requirement. The method of research utilized to promote the hypothesis that by definition abstract art is the most appropriate style of liturgical art for this age, and should be the standard by which all such art is measured, is somewhat complex yet straightforward. First, the two historical events which make possible the proposed corrective to the contemporary

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5 Irwin, 251.


state of liturgical will be forwarded. Without the decisive evolution of twentieth century art and the challenge of the Second Vatican Council, the proposition of this paper would not be possible. Definitions and theories of liturgy and art will then be proposed. These theories will then be utilized in the development of a theology of liturgical art. The work of Edward Robinson in this matter will play a substantial role. A summary conclusion reliant upon Pie-Raymond Régamey for support will follow. No attempt will ever be made to deny representational art as valid unto itself or as capable of revealing the holy. Arguments will not be made here against representational art on the grounds that it leads to idolatry. The Roman Catholic tradition has fought these battles adequately for centuries. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* addresses and supports past statements on these matters. The point to be made here is not against representational art per se but against its use in the contemporary Roman Catholic Eucharistic liturgy of the West. The case is not so much against images as it is for the imageless. In the end, it will be demonstrated that only an art which respectfully approaches the mystery of God is proper in the worship of that same God.

**The Contemporary State**

Two major events have occurred in the twentieth century which have had considerable impact on increasing the probability of encountering truly sacred liturgical art in the Roman Catholic world of the West. The first event is the evolution of western art. In short, western art prior to the advent of the abstract had been based on theories of representation. That is to say, art was expected to be mimetic. At its most base level of interpretation, the closer an object's likeness was to its model, the higher its quality was judged. These theories stem from the classical Platonic thought that all things exist by participation in "ideas" or "types." Though some would argue that a shift in philosophical thought in the arts emerged from German Expressionism, it more likely emerged

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8 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 1992, art.: 476, 477, 1161, 1162, 2131, 2132, 2141.

from the earlier French Impressionist school. A radical understanding of this is that the
legitimacy of abstract art in the West dates from the same source as imitation—Plato. In
his last writing, Philebus, Plato has his character Socrates abandoning the mimetic
approach for the creative and abstract.

By "beauty of shape I don't in this instance mean what most people
would understand by it—I am not thinking of animals or certain pictures,
but, so the thesis goes—a straight line or a circle and resultant planes and
solids produced on a lathe or with ruler and square. . . . On my view
these things are not, as other things are, beautiful in a relative way, but are
always beautiful in themselves, and yield their own special pleasures
quite unlike those of scratching. I include colors, too, that have the same
characteristic.10

When the break in aesthetic ideals between mimesis and the abstract actually
occurred is of little consequence for this research.11 That such a significant event did
take place and that it did have an impact of the liturgical arts of the Roman Catholic
Church is what matters. What this shift in aesthetic outlook means is that an art object
is no longer expected to be confused with its model or indeed even be based on a pre-
existing entity.

The second major event to take place in the twentieth century to affect the liturgi-
cal arts in the Roman Catholic West was the Second Vatican Council. In matters specif-
ic to the practice of the visual arts, the Council actually had little to say. Some of what
was said, however, was quite significant and will be addressed later in this work. What
was of most significance for the Council and its impact on all of Roman Catholicism
(and arguably the entire world, whatever the hemisphere or degree of "development"),
were the statements on the Church's relationship to the rest of creation. Such statements
are most clearly articulated in Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the
Modern World). Chapter four of this document, as the title indicates, has as its focus
"The Church and the World as Mutually Related." With a prominent proponent such as


11 In actuality, degrees and elements of abstractness can be illustrated throughout the history of art. The
various characteristics of artistic styles which have come to name a particular epoch in time (e.g., Romanticism),
are generally detectable to some degree in all periods. A period which places a particular stress on
one aspect over others simply becomes known for that and takes on the designation.
Thomas Aquinas in its history, the notion of “secular” knowledge having value was certainly not a new concept for the Church. It can fairly be said, however, that over the centuries, the thought of the “world” having any positive effect on the “church” had suffered. It was then, significant that the Church would rearticulate its position on this matter. Key passages of Gaudium et Spes serve to summarize the position succinctly:

[The] Church, at once a visible assembly and a spiritual community, goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does.

At the same time, she is firmly convinced that she can be abundantly and variously helped by the world in the matter of preparing the ground for the gospel. This help she gains from the talents and industry of individuals and from human society as a whole.12

Thanks to the experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, the nature of [humanity] is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened. These benefits profit the Church, too. For, from the beginning of her history, she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of ideas and terminology of various peoples, and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers, too.

Her purpose has been to adapt the gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned, insofar as such was appropriate. Indeed, this accommodated preaching of the revealed Word ought to remain the law of all evangelization.13

Not the least area of Church life to be affected by the II Vatican Council promotion of the use of “secular” knowledge were the arts. Room was made for the use of vernacular languages, indigenous music was permitted—not to mention the use of non-Catholic Christian music—and in the visual arts, new techniques and styles came to the forefront. With the revised theology of the Council came a need for a new articulation in all the many modes of communication. The allowance of modern “secular” knowledge made this possible.

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12 Gaudium et Spes, art. 40.
13 Gaudium et Spes, art. 44.
Before moving on to the actual development of the thesis that abstract art is the most appropriate style of liturgical art for this age and should be the standard by which all such art is measured, a popular contemporary issue needs to be addressed. The issue is that of economics and social justice. The issue is normally broached in the form of a question: How can so much money be spent on the arts while there are so many pressing social issues—the poor, hungry, homeless and sick? In response to this very real and appropriate inquiry, there seems to be but one justifiable explanation. When used in a liturgical context, the arts are but a means to an end. Liturgical arts exist to serve the purpose of the liturgy, which in short, is to hasten the establishment of the reign of God. Jesus addressed the problem this way:

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany. There a dinner was prepared for him. In the course of the evening, Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, said, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” Jesus said, “Leave her alone.”

“I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.” Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Though these pericopes are an example of drama, if you will, and are not a visual arts medium, the point is clearly made. An aesthetic experience was present for both the “actors” and the “audience” which led to the a deeper, fuller, richer understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ—the image of God, a human being.

A joint statement by the United States Bishops attempts to further the cause of the necessity of liturgical art.

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14 Jn 12:1-8; Lk 7:44-50. As has been the tradition, these two pericopes are treated with some liberty here. According to the footnote in the New American Bible for Catholics (1986 ed.) for Jn 12:1-8, "Details from these various episodes [cf: Mt 26:6-13] have become interchanged."
While we continue to make efforts to alleviate world poverty, it is important that some of the Church’s material resources, even in the case of financially impoverished communities, be allocated to the development of the liturgical arts because they nourish the human spirit and bear witness to the preeminence of the sacred in human life. They enable Christians to grow more and more into that holy temple wherein God can dwell and empower people to transform the world in [the name of God].

The question of rationalizing the expense of quality liturgical art (that is, theologically correct and aesthetically pleasing) for Roman Catholics is, for the context of this paper, moot. Appropriate liturgical art is both a response to and a call from God. Neither mode of communication can afford to be sacrificed.

Liturgy and Art Defined

A clear and concise definition of applicable terms is necessary if a productive discussion of a topic is to take place. The foremost terms in this discussion are liturgy and art. Though apparently self evident to many, each of these terms is rather complex and cannot be left to a popular reductionary understanding. It is not sufficient to define liturgy simply as “communal prayer” nor art as “all that is normally considered as such.” Proper consideration of each of these terms alone could fill a volume or more. However brief a treatment they receive here, it is crucial that some effort is made to clearly identify the conversation’s point of departure. Liturgy will be defined as a “symbol based ritual.” Art will be considered in phenomenological terms.


16 It is the further contention of this writer, that quality liturgical art can be quite inexpensive when the sound principles of simplicity and abstract are held in high regard.

17 Some explanation as to why the term “theology” is not included as key and in need of clarification is appropriate. Quite simply, the standard use of the term “theology” does not seem to cause any complications in the forwarding of the discussion of liturgical art as proposed here. If the particular presuppositions of either liturgy or art from which the theory of liturgical art to be proposed were not made clear, the framework for discussion would be greatly impeded. Let it be accepted then, as proposed in the New Catholic Encyclopedia, that theology is “the methodical elaboration of truths of divine revelation by reason enlightened by faith…” [G. F. van Ackeren, “Theology,” New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 14 (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967), 39].
Liturgy Defined

Derived from the Greek words λαός (people) and ἐργόν (work), the English word liturgy means public work or project. The word liturgy was first used in the fifth century BC to describe an action performed by people as an expression of unity. Often the mode of expression was in the form of a play or game. The crucial element was that all engaged in active participation. Though particular practices have changed over the centuries, liturgy—etymologically—has always maintained two fundamental characteristics. First, liturgy is exercised for the betterment of people and second, the improvement is dependent upon something greater than an individual. In a Christian context, Raymond Hunthausen suggests that the function of liturgy “is not unlike a parable, not so much teaching us something, but provoking and challenging us—even daring us—to resist the status quo and sharpen our vision to the kingdom.” In the words of Paul, “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may judge what is God’s will, what is good, pleasing and perfect.”

In December of 1987, Pope John Paul II issued the encyclical “On Social Concerns.” In this work, the bishop of Rome states, “The kingdom of God becomes present above all in the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist.” This statement is in absolute accord with the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy which states that the liturgy of the eucharist is “... the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives and manifest to others ... the real nature of the true Church.” The rather significant phrase, “the real nature of the true Church,” is not directly defined in the Constitution.


21 Rom 12:2.


23 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL), art. 2. Italics added.
Given the context, however, it seems reasonable to conclude that what is meant is that the liturgy of the eucharist builds up “a dwelling place for God in the Spirit, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ . . .”24 The purpose of the construction of this “dwelling place for God” is twofold. First and foremost, the house of God is to be “a sign lifted up among the nations.”25 Secondly, the liturgy of the eucharist is a time and a place of doxology “under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd.”26 The Liturgy of the Eucharist then, is the source and summit of the Christian life.27 It is a liturgy in which people act in praise and thanksgiving for change dependent upon the Other.

Christian tradition holds that the worship of God, particularly the eucharistic celebration of the Lord’s Supper, is an act which empowers those “right with God” to make things “right on earth.”28 The unified action of sharing and participating in the real presence of Christ manifested in the assembly, proclamation of the Word, as well as the eucharistic elements of bread and wine,29 empowers the community to transform humanity.30 The goal of the Incarnation, the joining of the material and the divine, is furthered by the assembly gathered for the Lord’s Supper.31 Jesus came not merely to save individuals, but to recreate a people. The Lord’s Supper as a joint action is the traditional means of striving toward this realization.32

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24 CSL, art. 2.
25 CSL, art. 2.
26 CSL, art. 2.
27 CCC, art. 1324.
28 Franklin and Shaw, 97.
29 General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), art. 7.
30 Franklin and Shaw, 92.
31 Franklin and Shaw, 103.
32 Franklin and Shaw, 101-102.
A vision of what the participants of the eucharist are to be transformed to is crucial to the success of the liturgy. No different than any other mode of communication, the means through which the goal of a ritual emerges is symbolism. To further the definition of liturgy, the related terms of ritual and symbol must now be considered.

**Ritual**

As stated by Tom Driver, “Ritual is the work of beings who are characterized by their capacity to perform and hence to fabricate a social world. . . .” The exercise of a ritual indicates a lapse or absence in the functioning of the desired situation. If all were well with the world, an attempt at fabricating or refabricating the society would not be necessary. A re-establishment or transformation of the “fallen” is thus in order. Jonathan Smith sees the call for change when, the world is perceived to be chaotic, reversed, liminal, filled with anomie. The man [sic] finds himself in a world that he does not recognize; and perhaps even more terrible, man finds himself to have a self he does not recognize. Then he will need to create a new world, to express his sense of a new place. For man can adapt himself somehow to anything his imagination can cope with; but he cannot deal with chaos. . . .

The goal of ritual is not merely a re-establishment of order or a transformation of chaos, but a total reconstruction of life and the world as it is presently experienced. Basing his thoughts on Ephesians 4:22-24, Dietrich von Hildebrand states that, “All true Christian life . . . must begin with a deep yearning to become a “new man” [sic] in Christ, and an inner readiness to . . . become something fundamentally different.” Christians, therefore, are defined by their “readiness to become something fundamentally

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35 Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Transformation in Christ: On the Christian Attitude of Mind* (St. Paul, MN: Helicon Press, 1962), 1. You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:22-24).
different”—to change, transform, be reconstructed. What is truly demanded is a radical change. “The business of religions and their ritual,” it can be concluded, is to effect transformations, not only of persons’ individual subjectivities but also transformations of society and the natural world. In a religious perspective, the personal, societal, and physical realms are not isolated from each other but participate together in a single field of divine power.\footnote{Driver, 172.}

In agreement with the definition offered here, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states that “Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations belonging to the Church . . . , namely, the holy people united and ordered under their bishop.”\footnote{CSL, art. 26.} Liturgy is to be distinguished then from private prayer. The liturgy of the eucharist is also to be differentiated from that of non-eucharistic liturgies. According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal,

The celebration of the Mass [eucharist] . . . is for the universal and the local Church as well as each person the center of the whole Christian life. In the Mass we have the high point of the work [of] Christ. All other liturgical rites [i.e., the Liturgy of the Hours] and all the works of the Christian life are linked with the eucharistic celebration, flow from it, and have it as their end.\footnote{GIRM, art. 1.}

In the end, as the Constitution quotes the prayer over the gifts for Holy Thursday, the purpose of the eucharist is “making the work of our redemption a present actuality.”\footnote{CSL, art. 2; cf. art. 47.}

The tall order of the highest Christian liturgy is to accomplish all that Christ did. That is, Christian liturgy must initiate what is to come. To borrow and adapt a phrase from the Rule of Benedict, liturgy is “a school for the Lord’s service.”\footnote{Rule of Benedict, Pro! 45.} As the Incarnate Word functioned, so must the eucharist teach us to function. We must learn to serve as Jesus served. In this way, the ritual of eucharist accomplishes its goal as liturgy and we as Christians do likewise. St. Irenaeus is recounted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
as saying: "Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking."41

Symbol

The operating mode of any ritual is symbol. In Dynamics of Faith, Paul Tillich defines a symbol as that alone which is able to express the ultimate concern.42 The ultimate concern, which demands total surrender, promises total fulfillment and threatens total defeat,43 is dependent upon faith. Faith is the act of the believer of the ultimate concern44 which can only be actualized in community through the language of symbol.45 Symbols, therefore, point beyond themselves to the ultimate concern of the faithful. Symbols are not, however, merely signs. A symbol actually participates in that to which it points. Opening up levels of reality which were previously closed, symbols unlock elements of the soul corresponding to elements of the greater reality of the ultimate concern. Impossible to intentionally produce or invent, the symbol grows out of a collective unconscious.46

While parallels between how Tillich defines symbol and what the Catholic tradition holds concerning the liturgy of the Mass are obvious, further development will prove helpful. Drawing upon the field of psychology, Peter Roche de Coppens promotes the cause. De Coppens defines symbols as "... a bridge, a channel, or a connection between the field of consciousness and the unconscious ..., between the personal and transpersonal, between the profane and the sacred..."47 The symbol as bridge is necessary if the personal, conscious and known, is to expand and grow into the trans-

41 CCC, art. 1327.
43 Tillich, 1-2.
44 Tillich, 25.
45 Tillich, 24.
46 Tillich, 41-43.
personal unconscious and unknown, thus becoming personal, conscious and known. Because symbols must be recognized, addressed and participated in if an effect is to transpire, they act on an individual basis. The rate and level of transformation occurs, therefore, according to the readiness of the person using the symbol.\textsuperscript{48} An immature person is not able to receive full benefit from a symbol. Lack of maturity prohibits a person from recognizing all that a given symbol has to offer. De Coppens concludes:

> Seen in this light, symbols are indeed a bridge or connection between the known and the unknown . . . , the actuality and potentiality. They provide a blue-print by which we can progressively transcend ourselves and become more than what we are. They form a graded and progressive curriculum by which the Many become the One, by which the Profane can be linked with the Sacred, and by which the Supreme Synthesis of finding union with God, or the fusion and alignment of the human self with the Spiritual Self, can be realized — which is the true purpose and destiny of man [sic] here on earth. As such, symbols are indeed the . . . basic units through which the inner work can be carried out and accomplished.\textsuperscript{49}

**Art Defined**

Seemingly only a small step away from the popular definition of art as “all one normally calls art”—or worse, “I know it when I see it;” or perhaps even worse still, “I might not know what art is but I know what I like”—is the definition of art as a phenomenon. “Phenomenon,” as used here, denotes a thing or occurrence, which can be experienced, described and appraised. The manipulation of material for the construction of a phenomenon produces a work of art. This broad definition of art introduces the concept of aesthetic attention. Without the consideration of deliberate classification of objects, there is no means of determining what is and what is not art. What determines an object as a work of art is not any particular quality or character. The way an object is treated by a viewer gives it meaning or purpose.

\textsuperscript{48} de Coppens, 139.

\textsuperscript{49} de Coppens, 142. Let it be noted that de Coppens’ phrase “we can progressively transcend ourselves and become more than what we are,” is couched within the context of “by which the Many become the One.” He in no way means to suggest a false becoming of what we are not. What is meant is a Pauline/Gestalt belief of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.
The type of observation which must be given to an object if it is to be judged worthy of the title "art" is referred to as aesthetic attention. For the full and proper experience of a work of art to occur, the observer must free perception from any ordinary classification and allow the perceived to bear a world of its own. One must become "disinterested" and "detached," meeting the work without any preconceived notions or expectations. Objects under consideration as art must be judged for what they are and not for what an individual hoped them to be. One must be willing to give attention to the aesthetic/artistic quality of the object.

Phenomena which have been appraised as art can be classified according to three categories. The three categories are formed by polar opposites and their resulting compromise. In opposition are imitation and creatio ex nihilo. Their resulting compromise is the abstract. The reasons for defining art objects in terms of opposition can most simply be explained by considering each position according to two criteria: 1) what is achieved; and 2) what is offered. The fundamental premise is that the more abstract (obstensibly referential) the work, the better. However, when a work is non-referential, it reaches the outer limit of the art spectrum and reverts to a negative position. The least of art styles, therefore, are the two extremes of imitation and creatio ex nihilo. Abstract art combines the best of referential and non-referential orientations to achieve the only style worthy of being called art.

50 A key note to keep in mind, H. Gene Blocker points out, is that: "The [arts] of a given society [are perceived as] realistic to that society not because they are realistic, but because they conform to the conventions which that society has adopted for depicting realism." This point must be realized by the audience so that a non-domestic work is not mistaken as non-referential and deprived of its appropriate meaning [H. Gene Blocker. Philosophy of Art (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979), 42-43].

51 In Image as Insight, Miles presents four categories of art. She asserts that, "religious images may, at their most denotative, be iconic, that is organized according to a traditional depiction whose every detail—position of the figures relative to one another and to the viewer, bodily posture and tension, gesture, color of garments—may be 'read' by the worshiper in terms of a particular content of scriptural or historic significance. Or a religious image may be representational, in the customary sense of reproducing a visually accurate scene which strongly encourages the viewer to relate the sacred content to ordinary visual experience. At a further remove from denotation, the religious image may be impressionistic, featuring the feeling-toned impression of a particular content on the artist. Finally, at the furthest extreme of ambiguous presentation, a religious image may be abstract, minimally designating both its sacred content and its content in experience—antirepresentational (Miles, 34).
Imitation is placed at the low end of the art spectrum due to its achieving and offering the least. A mirror achieves what imitation sets out to do, and, without doubt, does it better. The ability to copy a subject is an art, but it does not achieve art. There is a great difference between the art of doing, and producing art. Although imitation may be the goal of the artist, in reality such reproduction rarely (if ever) exists. Imitation is primarily a theory. In practice, what is achieved is resemblance. As for what the work of resemblance offers, one can only conclude that it offers nothing that the subject does not offer and, therefore, is worth nothing more. In fact, due to its being a “cheap imitation,” it is worth far less. One could argue that the great achievement of imitation is that it focuses attention. This is a worthy task, but rated negatively in this bipolar arrangement. Any work which can classically be designated as realism is part of this category.

Although imitation involves, or presupposes, some sort of resemblance, imitation is not the same as resemblance. The sole objective in imitation is to create a replica; the product is to look exactly like the thing being perceived. In a Platonic sense, an imitation is an accomplishment and is, therefore, judged as either a success or a failure. The ideal is for viewers to be fooled to think that they are experiencing the “idea” and not merely the reflection of the “idea.” Merely mirroring the world, the artist adds nothing in executing such work. Resemblance, on the other hand, is perhaps most simply stated as a symmetrical relation. The subject and the art work hold similar characteristics but do not mirror one another. The artist’s concern is not to duplicate reality, but to represent certain aspects of reality as perceived from a particular standpoint. The aim is to translate, not transcribe; to transpose, not copy.

At the opposite extreme of imitation and its variants is the non-referential, the creatio ex nihilo. The creation ex nihilo (created from nothing), signifies not that something literally materialized from no thing (other matter), but that the new object has no referent outside of itself. The creation from nothing is neither a representation nor an abstraction. Pointing to nothing beyond itself, the creation is non-relational—except in the most basic and general terms (e.g., color and texture). The aspect of the creatio ex
nihilo which allows it to be placed at the positive end of the art spectrum is that an object which is unique is brought into existence—it achieves. A work without dependence upon something outside itself is proactive, an unmoved mover. Though the connotation will seem rather degrading, not to mention incomplete, the ex nihilo principle might be most easily described as decorative. That is to say, they only exist and do not function in a utilitarian or purposeful manner until deliberately appropriated. The ex nihilo work must be given meaning; it has no inherent purpose.

Falling one step shy of the ex nihilo principle and going one step beyond imitation, abstract art both offers and achieves. Including all that is representational but not imitation, the term “abstract” is being used here in a broad sense. Abstraction denotes works which are non-imitative. Further, by denotation abstraction must be based upon some object or concept outside of itself. The abstract is, therefore, referential. That which is abstracted (pulled out of) must have an origin. Abstract art resembles “reality;” it does not duplicate it. The goal of the abstracter is to create a new view of a subject and thus offer a new view of reality. Because both of the criteria of ranking art are fulfilled, it is the abstract style which is the only true art.

A Theology of Liturgical Art

Eucharistic liturgy does not happen in a vacuum. Liturgy is a ritual action which is manifested through the employment of symbolic language. In his book, Art and the Theological Imagination, John Dixon states “... human life is too intricate, too varied and complex ..., far too complex to receive its definitive statement in any one language.”52 Clearly, Dixon means far more than spoken language. Indeed, the author posits that “We do not live in a world of words but a world of sound and color, weight and textures, lines and surfaces, masses and volumes.”53 It is through these elements of form that the various languages of our world are spoken. Moreover, it is through them and their various combinations that the world and our life in it is revealed. A language both

53 Dixon, 4.
expresses and forms the people using it.\textsuperscript{54} Through the language of the arts, we learn some of the possibilities of being human\textsuperscript{55} and define who we are.\textsuperscript{56}

"Art," for Dixon then, "is not [merely] an ornament to an existing world, it is the primary means of forming [the] world."\textsuperscript{57} "[T]he process of interiorizing and taking as our own the patterns of meaning, attitudes, and values proposed to us by our society and culture" which Dixon maintains the arts are capable of doing, is referred to as socialization.\textsuperscript{58} The process of socialization occurs both consciously and unconsciously, but it is always perpetuated through the symbols of the given culture. Thomas Groome writes, ". . . of all symbols, liturgical ones are potentially the most formative and transformative of people's self-identity, world-view, and image of God because they have 'an aura of ultimacy' to them; they propose and help to 'effect' an 'ultimate model' of reality."\textsuperscript{59}

Through the visually sensed world, there exists the potential for the divine to become perceptible. Indeed, "the whole purpose and nature of art is sacramental: to mirror outwardly the \textit{inner essence} of things, to picture and embody in matter the world of spirit and truth."\textsuperscript{60} Images participating in the divine—as those with an "aura of ultimacy"—translate into a recognizable medium the ubiquitous nature of the divinity. In this way, the divine is made continuously accessible through visible objects. Such images awaken and focus a desire in the worshiper to imitate the spiritual characteris-

\textsuperscript{54} Thomas H. Groome, \textit{Language for a "Catholic" Church: A Program of Study} (Kansas City, MO: Sheed \& Ward, 1991), 15.
\textsuperscript{55} Dixon, 14.
\textsuperscript{56} Groome, 12-16 \textit{passim}.
\textsuperscript{57} Dixon, 12.
\textsuperscript{58} Groome, 14.
\textsuperscript{60} From the 1950-51 Saint John's school bulletin describing the task of the new department of sacred art as in: Colman J. Barry, O. S. B. \textit{Worship and Work} (Collegeville, MN: Order of Saint Benedict, Inc., 1956), 333. Italics added.
tics presented. John Passmore refers to art objects of this type as *telic arts*. As defined by Passmore, telic arts are those which increase the degree to which its recipients feel a stronger sense of solidarity with a particular group and an enthusiasm for its way of life. The various arts utilized by liturgy must be telic in nature, according to the United States Bishops' document entitled *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*. "If an art form is used in liturgy it must aid and serve the action of the liturgy . . . . The art form must never seem to interrupt, replace, or bring the course of the liturgy to a halt." In addition, an art destined for the purposes of serving a liturgy must never be simply decorative. That, and only that, which contributes to the purpose of liturgy is to be included in the liturgy.

"One thing I asked of the LORD," writes the psalmist, "this I seek: To dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life. . . . Happy are they whom you choose, and bring to dwell in your courts." If the goal of the eucharistic liturgy is to aid persons in the actualization of this prayer—the transformation of individual and communal lives to lives pleasing to God, and ultimately to life with God—then to know what God is like is crucial. The God of Christianity, however, is by nature invisible. God "has neither body nor shape," according to the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. How, then, does one come to know God? For any Christian this question has the perfect stock answer: through Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, Emmanuel. As John has Jesus explain himself: " . . . understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father. The Father and I are one." Later in John's telling of the story, Jesus says to Philip: "If you

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61 Miles, 142; 143.


63 EACW, art. 25. Italics added.

64 Ps 27:4; 65:5.

65 CCC, art. 477.

66 CCC, art. 1159.

67 Jn 10:38; 30.
know me, you will know my Father also. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."\(^{68}\)

Yet this is still not the whole picture. Christians do not desire to dwell in the house of Jesus, God Incarnate, but in that of the transcendent **Lord God**. The immanent God does indeed reveal the transcendent God, but it is the latter and not the former which is the teleological task of ultimate concern. In a like way, Rudolf Schnackenburg states that: “It is not the Church but the kingdom of God which is the ultimate goal of the divine economy of salvation and redemption in its perfect form for the whole world.”\(^{69}\) And so the question remains: How can we know God?

The answer to this question is intimately involved with all that was previously said about the nature of art. The transcendent must be deciphered from the immanent. In other words, the goal is to see what Jesus imaged, not what Jesus was. To stand **in persona Christi** does not mean that one must literally look like the person of Christ but to figuratively be what Christ was—one in being with God.\(^{70}\) The trouble with a literal understanding of **in persona Christi** is the same as with representational art; both incline to be strictly narrative. The image of God presented by the gospel writers through the character of Jesus Christ is a matter of tradition, not history. History is set upon establishing exactly what, when and how something happened. Tradition, on the other hand, is oriented toward keeping alive the meaning and power of those events.\(^{71}\)

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\(^{68}\) Jn 14:7, 9.


\(^{70}\) cf Jn 17:21.

The Liturgical Image of God

This section of the paper will focus on the means through which the language of the liturgical visual arts form the worshiping assembly's image of God. Working from the presupposition that all God-talk is analogy, that God is totally other, set apart and beyond any single or even multi-linguistic human medium, it is proposed that abstract art is the most suitable means for imaging God in the liturgical assembly. If an all inclusive God is our ideal, then only a language which represents this concept without falsely incarnating it can fairly image the divine. In an effort to promote ecumenical religion and worship space design, architect Wilfried Beck-Erlang once made a comment that is applicable to the present discussion: Religion and church design are seen as victims of what is strictly an intellectual battle, because in the final analysis there is just one God.\textsuperscript{72}

That which we believe God to be, we also hold as our ideal. We believe that we were made in the image and likeness of God\textsuperscript{73} and that we are all called to be perfect as God is perfect.\textsuperscript{74} One facet of what it means to be perfect is stated in chapter three of Paul's Letter to the Galatians: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."\textsuperscript{75} In short, the inclusivity of God means we must be inclusive and thus perfect. If we are to be inclusive, our symbols must be inclusive. The proper presentation of God in the visual arts of the liturgy should then challenge us to transformation—challenge us to be inclusively perfect. The arts should challenge us to move from a specific incarnation to a full member of the body of Christ. As stated by Maximus the Confessor:

\begin{footnotes}
\item{72} Randall S. Lindstrom, \textit{Creativity and Contradiction: European Churches Since 1970} (Washington, DC: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1988), 15. It is assumed that Wilfried Beck-Erlang is the architect referred to. The architect is not identified by name in the immediate context of the citation. The following section of the book (p. 16), however, begins with a comment by "Stuttgart architect Wilfried Beck-Erlang."
\item{73} Gen 1:27.
\item{74} Mt 5:48.
\item{75} Gal 3:28.
\end{footnotes}
The Christian sanctuary is first of all an image of God, who through His [sic] infinite power creates everything, embracing and chaining together the physical and intelligible realms; and by the single power of His [sic] reason God conjoins and brings into one harmony even what is most diversified and mutually conflicting. Since the same principle of concord is reflected in the created universe . . ., the church edifice is also an image of the cosmos.76

Images which are imitative, though offering the security of an unambiguous denotation, ultimately present idols. To take any image of God literally is idolatrous. Abstract art images God as God truly is. By this rather bold and itself rather idolatrous and heretical-sounding assertion, is meant that the abstract plainly attributes a characteristic to God while clearly never making the claim of being definitive. There is always a feeling of resolution or completeness in the abstract, while a sure sense of incompleteness and mystery pervades. The abstract illustrates that God is such-and-such, while at one and the same time, indicating that there is much more. Quoting Joseph Pichard, Thomas Mathews writes: "Better than realistic painters . . ., the abstract masters have been most successful in expressing the glorious and triumphant aspects of religion."77 Mathews then adds to this opinion: "Perhaps because they try to say so little explicitly they succeed in saying a great deal. By reason of their restraint they are able to restore a ‘sense of mystery,’ a ‘certain monumentality’ to the holy place."78

Dionysius the Areopagite handled the controversy of imaging God quite diplomatically. Though he was most tolerant in accepting images, Dionysius was quite uncompromising on the question of realism. As Edward Robinson explains Dionysius' position:

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78 Mathews, 48.
The more splendid an icon was, he said, the more people would be tempted to think that God actually resembled such an image... But as the one thing that could ever be known for certain about God was that he was totally transcendent..., then all attempts at realistic representation were bound to be futile, in fact counter productive. So yes, icons could be made, but only on one condition: they should be totally incongruous. The ideal, he said, was a 'dissimilar similarity.' Then nobody would get any false ideas about the divine. In fact the more incongruous the image, the more power it would have of anagoge, of lifting the mind up to the spiritual.\(^7^9\)

The only images capable of serving a community gathered for liturgy, for the purpose of being spiritually schooled, are those which refuse to be misleading, that make no attempt to be imitation.

Piecing together salient phrases from works by Robinson, the point of the superiority of the abstract as liturgical art can be made more explicitly. Robinson writes: "... if the ultimate object of worship is conceived of as beyond any literal representation..., any form of naturalism must be ruled out as at best inadequate and at worst distorting."\(^8^0\) "By presenting a picture of the world free from the surface detail," Robinson continues, "... art of abstraction can challenge the mind... to look beyond accidents to find substance."\(^8^1\) Robinson then quotes Ben Nicholson’s remark that “Realism has been abandoned in the search for reality.”\(^8^2\)

In his dialectic on the possibility of creatures seeing and knowing the essence of God, Thomas Aquinas states that: "... to see the essence of God there is required some likeness in the visual power [the perceiver], namely, the light of glory strengthening the intellect to see God..."\(^8^3\) As Psalm 35 declares: "In your light we see light."\(^8^4\) Psalm 142 pleads: "Do not hide your face from me, [O Lord, let your light shine not far from

\(^7^9\) Robinson, “Nothing is Enough,” 14.
\(^8^0\) Robinson, Mystery, 64.
\(^8^1\) Robinson, Mystery, 65.
\(^8^2\) Robinson, Mystery, 65.
\(^8^4\) Ps. 35:10.
me] lest I become like those in the grave, [without your Spirit, without life, dead, forgotten]." It is the presence of the Essence in creation which allows humanity to live and see God. The aesthetic attention, as it were, is in the human person. Humans are predisposed to the experience. "A created intellect cannot see the essence of God unless God by . . . grace [is] united to the created intellect . . . ." Raised up in nature by the salvific act of Christ, the created world is able to function in a way which exceeds its nature. Creation has been deformed and thus sees in a new light and with new eyes. Abstract art is a realization of the new light for the new eyes—a medium not in which God is seen, but by which God is seen.

The task of establishing a normative liturgical art style by which God is seen and suppressing the styles in which "god" is seen is of monumental proportion. The dire necessity of a corrective for the present situation of liturgical art in the post-conciliar Roman Church is only amplified when one comes to realize that aesthetic judgments are matters of theological concern. Robinson claims that “. . . we have been taking [kitsch] into our systems like some toxic radiation for years without suspecting any harm. Only now have we begun (if indeed we yet have) to recognize the debilitating effect it may have on our spirituality.” The crux of the matter, Robinson posits, is that “Bad art does not just fail to tell the truth; it substitutes a lie. . . . Kitsch degrades by satisfying the heart or mind with an inadequate or false image of reality. It is this . . . that makes it an enemy of true spirituality.”

In not so many words, and from a more affirming posture, the document Environment and Art in Catholic Worship supports the notion that liturgical art must “be

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85 Ps. 142:7. cf Ps 31:16; Ps 80:3; Ps 80:7; Ps 80:19.
86 Summa, Q. 12, a. 4. cf Pegis, 97.
87 Summa, Q. 12, a. 5. cf Pegis, 98.
88 Summa, Q. 12, a. 5. cf Pegis, 99.
89 Summa, Q. 12, a. 5. cf Pegis, 99.
90 Robinson, Mystery, 61.
91 Robinson, Mystery, 62.
capable of bearing the weight of mystery, awe, reverence, and wonder which the liturgical action expresses." 92 As maintained throughout the present work, the only art capable of instilling and serving such a character is the abstract. Truly sacred art, as its parallel style—abstract art—will never be free from ambiguity. Art that aspires to have all the answers will always be flirting with idolatry. 93 It is not the task of art to reproduce the visible, but to make things visible. "Its purpose and justification," explains Robinson, "is to open our eyes to aspects of the world, or ourselves, that we have not yet noticed, not to mirror back to us what we already know." 94

The real creation of an artist is not the art object, but what the work itself produces—energy. 95 Energy can, however, only be produced by a source receptive to reconstituting other matter. The work of an artist must, therefore, be "appropriated" by the audience. 96 "The essential element in all truly creative work," explains Robinson, "is that existing material is given new form, new structure. In this respect, creation is the opposite, the mirror image, of entropy." 97 The energy produced by the creative spirit has no limits. It is through such energy that the faculty of spirituality is activated and humans, as participants in God's divine work of art, are able to recreate the world. "[T]he work of a creative artist demands as much from [the audience] as it did from its original creator, if that work is to continue its own creative life." 98 Herein lies the potential of non-figurative art in the eucharistic liturgy of the contemporary Roman Catholic West.

"The best kind of education," explains Robinson, "leaves much to be desired: it does not fill a space so much as to create one, a space which aches to be filled. It would

92 EACW, art. 21.
93 Robinson, Icons, 112.
94 Robinson, Mystery, 43.
95 Robinson, Mystery, 75; 37.
96 Robinson, Mystery, 37.
98 Robinson, Icons, 102. Genesis 1:26-30 clearly suggests God's demands of such "audience" participation.
be a poor education that left nothing behind but satisfaction." 99 Robinson goes on to draw the analogy: "The same is true of religion. A religion that left nothing to be desired would be one that left a sense not of a void but rather a security: the security, all too often, of a tradition to which all problems can be referred, which has the answers to all questions; a security that is not strengthening but enfeebling." 100 The same is true with art and most especially liturgical art. That which leaves nothing to the creative imagination, to move the spirit, to produce energy, is lacking in value. Historically, it can be surmised that periods of religious decline have always had naturalistic artistic tendencies. 101 Conversely stated, "the more spiritualized religious conceptions . . . tend more or less rigorously to aniconism." 102

Contrary to what is typically claimed, we do have a portrait of Christ—"the true likeness of the invisible God." 103 What we have is not a portrait in the typical sense but an active theatrical presentation, if you will, of the living Christ. The faithful who gather for the liturgy of the eucharist are the living and active body of Christ in the world. Animated by the the Second Advocate, who is the Spirit of Truth, who teaches everything necessary to be transformed by the renewal of our minds so that we may discern what is the will of God—what is good, pleasing and perfect 104—we are participants in God’s divine work of art. The eyes which can see God as God truly is are the eyes which belong to a pure heart, a heart inspired and of a new creation. 105 As we accept the responsibility of full, active and conscious participation in this new work, we become more fully active and conscious of life in the Spirit of God. This is the telos

100 Robinson, *Icons*, 36.
104 Jn 14:17, 26; Rm 12:2.
105 Guardini, 354. cf. 1 Cor 2:9-10; 2 Cor 5:17.
of creation and the mandate for the charitable service of the arts in the eucharist.

Conclusion

In the hope of finding a remedy for the unfortunate situation of the liturgical arts, the final chapter of the Vatican II document Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy is devoted to "Sacred Art and Sacred Furnishings." The brevity of this section (art. 122-130) clearly indicates that its purpose was not to cover the topic in its entirety but to merely spell out the most basic of guidelines to initiate discussion. The function of an image to move the worshiper toward imitation and participation in the qualities and way of life formulated by the image was severely altered. After stating that the Church has "always been a friend of the fine arts," particularly those with the special aim "for use in divine worship" as "truly worthy, becoming, and beautiful, signs and symbols of the supernatural world," the chapter continues: "The Church has always regarded itself as the rightful arbiter of the arts, deciding which of the works of artists are in accordance with faith, with reverence, and with honored traditional laws and are thereby suited for sacred use."

Of the four art forms which comprise the eucharistic liturgy—word, music, gesture and visual arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, furniture and utilitarian objects)—the visual arts seem to be the only form lacking any sort of substantial official guideline. With regard to the art of word, there is the canon of readings along with the admonition that Latin is to be preserved. For music, the Church insists that the pipe organ and chant are to be held in the highest esteem. Though also lacking full and suitable support, the art of gesture is still regularly considered in matters of processions and

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106 Miles, 150.

107 CSL, art. 122.

108 CSL, art. 122. Italics added.

109 CSL, art. 36 §1.

110 "The Church acknowledges Gregorian chant as distinctive of the Roman liturgy; therefore, other things being equal, it should be given pride of place in liturgical services" (CSL, art. 116. Italics added). "In the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument..." (CSL, art. 120. Italics added).
rubrics for the presider, if not the rest of the assembly. In matters concerning the visual arts, however, little is officially said in this document. In fact, what is said discourages setting a standard for style as exists for music. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states: "The Church has not adopted any particular style of art as its very own..."\textsuperscript{111} In broader terms, the document Environment and Art in Catholic Worship states that there are but two criteria for liturgical art. "To be true to itself and to protect its own integrity, liturgy must make two demands. Basically, its demands are two: \textit{quality} and \textit{appropriateness}."\textsuperscript{112} Noteworthy as both demands are, there is a definite and purposeful lack of specifics. Most would see great freedom in this statement and interpret it positively, especially when coupled with other statements on the arts such as: "Contemporary art forms belong to the liturgical expression of the assembly..."\textsuperscript{113} and "The art of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church, on condition that it serves the place of worship and sacred rites with the reverence and honor due to them."\textsuperscript{114} In general, this is a good and worthy approach to liturgy. However, the lack of more specific standards seems detrimental to an appropriate liturgical spirituality for the Roman Catholic West.

Because "[i]t is an outrage to present as sacred art what is not even art,"\textsuperscript{115} a definition—a standard—is mandatory if an appropriate liturgical place is to be constructed. Environment and Art in Catholic Worship states that "An important part of contemporary Church renewal is the awareness of the community's recognition of the sacred."\textsuperscript{116} Although "[t]he sacred is immutable and beyond all styles,"\textsuperscript{117} as God is beyond all

\textsuperscript{111} CSL, art. 123.

\textsuperscript{112} EACW, art. 19.

\textsuperscript{113} EACW, art. 33.

\textsuperscript{114} CSL, art. 123.


\textsuperscript{116} EACW, art. 18.

description, it is highly suspect that the sacred is recognized in the arts which do not stress the abstract. It is proposed by this writer, therefore, that the abstract be given the same elevated recommendation for liturgical art that chant has in music and Latin has for language.

"The sacred," states Régamey, "is determined by what God really is." To promote a liturgical art which is anything less than godly—inclusively awe inspiring and mysterious, challenging an assembly of doxological and eucharistic people to transformation—is blasphemous. "As common prayer . . ., liturgy flourishes in a climate of hospitality: a situation in which people are . . . involved as participants and not as spectators." The entire liturgy "involves the use of outward signs that foster, strengthen, and express faith. There must be the utmost care therefore to choose and to make wise use of those forms and elements provided by the Church that, in view of the circumstances of the people and the place, will best foster active and full participation and serve the spiritual wellbeing of the faithful." Any work which is "repugnant to faith and morals and to Christian devotion and that offend true religious sense either by their grotesqueness or by the deficiency, mediocrity, or sham in their artistic quality," should be "remov[ed] from the house of God and from any other places of worship."

The principal purpose of abstract liturgical art is indeed to foster active participation for the spiritual well-being of the community. According to Régamey, abstract liturgical art is "... to create an atmosphere conducive to contemplation, and by doing this it will help remedy the great danger of representational art, which may make us stop short at the mere external appearance involved in the mysteries and thus encourage a too superficial devotion that can border on the superstitious and idolatrous." Régamey goes on to say: "Christian art means the most perfect possible resemblance to

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118 Régamey, 49.
119 EACW, art. 11.
120 GIRM, art. 5.
121 CSL, art. 124. Italics added.
122 Régamey, 220.
the Incarnation of the Word, namely, the *spiritualized* flesh."\textsuperscript{123} What has been spiritualized must be abstracted and made real if a place appropriate to eucharistic liturgy is desired.

Régamey admits that "Christianity prescribes no forms of art as specifically its own," yet he contends that "it suggests an ideal and defines certain limits."\textsuperscript{124} The ideal Christian liturgical art, according to Régamey, "is what one might call supernaturalism, or perhaps more precisely *mystica naturalis*. Christian art," he explains, "must be the most realistic and at the same time the most spiritual possible. It is not a compromise between these two but an intense fusion of both."\textsuperscript{125} Mere realism is thus a negation of art.\textsuperscript{126} Régamey concludes, therefore, that: "... the art form that best corresponds to the order of the Incarnation must be the one that most clearly reveals the divine life of Word and Spirit. ..."\textsuperscript{127} "[The] sort of art produced at this level is bound to show some detachment from what is transitory and perishable."\textsuperscript{128} In short, true liturgical art will by nature be abstract.

A fitting summary conclusion for this paper are the following remarks of R. J. Verostko.

The Church holds that the use of images for devotional purposes is acceptable and condemns the iconoclast who denies the image any place in worship life. However, the Church, in the Latin liturgy, does not require the veneration of images (with the single exception of the crucifix, which is required for veneration in the Good Friday services). The aniconic tendency does not deny the usefulness of images, but simply refrains...

\textsuperscript{123} Régamey, 56. Italics added.
\textsuperscript{124} Régamey, 55.
\textsuperscript{125} Régamey, 55-56.
\textsuperscript{126} Régamey, 60.
\textsuperscript{127} Régamey, 219.
\textsuperscript{128} Régamey, 220.
from their use for either pastoral or aesthetic reasons. The choice of image or nonimage in religious art is not a matter of dogma but rather a matter of pastoral judgment, e.g., helpful or harmful in a specific time and place.129

It is the contention of this writer that the twentieth century West is the time and place for the standard of abstract liturgical art to be established by the Roman Catholic Church. The reason for this assertion is made on the grounds both of aesthetic and theological concerns. Ultimately, the two cannot be separated. Inappropriate art leads to weak theology and poor theology leads to works that are not even deserving of the title art. Appropriate liturgical art is not simply a matter of taste, it is a matter of salvation. As stated in Music in Catholic Worship, “Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it.”130

129 R. J. Verostko, “Abstract Art and the Church,” New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. I (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 45. cf Mathews, 45; 47. As a corrective to Verostko’s comments, let it be noted that: it is a cross and not a crucifix that is the only image required for the celebration of the eucharist. The GIRM states: “There is . . . to be a cross, clearly visible to the congregation. . .” (art. 270). Veneration of this image is not required, albeit implied by the specific required use and incensation at the time of the presentation of the gifts (cf GIRM art. 270, 236).

130 MCW, art. 6.
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