

ART—A MIRROR OF MAN *

EYVIND BOYESEN

Whether past or present, the world and all its activity is constantly viewed in relation to man. Thus, to himself, man seems the center of the whole cosmos. His endeavors all through the ages, in their many aspects, give us a perspective of mankind. One of these aspects, in our highly sophisticated civilization, is art.

The first analysis sees art as something of the imagination, which is one of the functions of the mind. In order to get any idea of art and its purpose, therefore, we must have a general understanding of the mind and the imagination, and how they operate.

It is agreed that man's faculty of reasoning makes him distinct from all other beings. Consequently it is the mind, of which reasoning is a function, that really makes man different. As distinguished from its seat, the brain, the mind is intangible. It does not appear to be in the same category with the dimensions of the body, and its functions are very unlike those of the body also. If the mind and the body are of such diverse nature, is it possible that they can be of the same substance? It is very unlikely.

For our welfare and protection, we are provided with the senses of touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight. But these are also the gateways through which the mind looks out upon this world of matter in which we live. The objects and forces which are sensed through the body, our mind sees and feels, and always either favors or dislikes. That is, some objects mean very much to us as individuals, especially when they are from a person we love. Other objects do not. Some things are desirable because they are of use to us, while other things are not. This delight and undelight, is it not an affection for or against a thing, which represents an estimate of inner quality? If this inner quality depended on the inherent outward form of the objects of nature, it would be felt the same way by us every time we experience them. And also, other

* In the preparation of this paper, given at a College Gymnasium meeting, I am greatly indebted to Bishop George de Charms for his studies and lectures on "The Growth of the Mind" and his doctrinal lecture on "Imagination and Creative Art."

[Mr. Boyesen, who lives in Oslo, Norway, was a student in the College of the Academy of the New Church when this paper was written. *Ed.*]

persons would feel the interior quality identically, since the objects and thus the quality remain unchanged. The fact is, however, that the same form will affect different people in opposite ways. An artist will look at a bridge quite differently from the engineer who constructed it, and it may indeed affect each of them very diversely at various times. From this we can see that quality does not belong to the things of nature. It is a feeling from within, distinct from physical sensations. It is determined by our own affections and accordingly altered. All perceptions of quality are thus felt as more interior, apart from the world of matter. And we have therefore proof that there is *another world*: a world felt as loves and affections, giving the natural world an inner sense and quality.

Human experience is thus dual, and it is the sensation of spiritual objects and forces that we feel as loves and affections inside ourselves. For these, which are perceived as distinct from nature and its dimensions, are spiritual; it cannot be otherwise. In order that we may feel these sensations, we must have an organ capable of receiving and responding to them. The mind is that organ. It is woven from the things of the spiritual world, and is only invested by the body. The mind and the body are not of the same substance or function; they complement each other.

All conscious mental activity rises out of physical sensations, as sensations from pictures in the mind. There has to be some sensation first, from which thought and imagination can be abstracted, so that the mind can build into eternity on these forms. But of forms we must first become conscious, and it is this we must understand before we can see the real worth of art.

We may ride on trains, which from experience we know are all very noisy. The first time we are aware of all the noises, because they are new and interesting to us. If we ride long enough we get used to them. In other words, our attention is no longer directed to them. We have at this point become immune to the sounds of the train. So we really are conscious of the things we direct our attention to, the things we want to be conscious of. In a football game, the players have their attention on the game. They are not aware of the "yelling" and "hollering" at the sidelines. The point is, we center our interest and attention because we have an affection for a particular thing at the time, out of all the things we

are continuously sensing. Anything outside our affections we are not conscious of. It is not from either world alone, therefore, that we have consciousness, but only where the two meet. This border is where the mind is awakened, and there it is being affected both ways by the worlds we experience.

As long as we live on this earth, the touch of spiritual forces and objects does not appear as something objective. They do not give rise to the sensation of things felt as outside ourselves. Therefore we are persistently apt to ascribe both natural and spiritual sensation to outer objects as cause. We tend to mistake the effects of the spiritual world for effects of the material world. But this we should not do; we must learn to distinguish between them. We should produce a sensitivity to what is spiritual. This will then alter the way we see things.

If there were only the sensation of material objects, there would be but one source of reality; "everything would come back to external experience in order to be checked and proved to rest on the firm foundation of fact." But as there is an internal source of spiritual sensation, there is another ground of reality, another source of fact. There are two foundations of truth—nature and the Word.

About the things of nature, man can make new discoveries and evolve new facts all the time. But these truths we recognize because we see a sense in them; they become conclusions on our part which are not in the things themselves. They are from the contact of the spiritual world as well as the material. However, these facts, which are said to be certain and true, change. The truths which have been postulated are not constant, they are only relative. But is it not something constant we are always searching for? Something constant, something certain, which we can always rely on and go back to? For is not truth the most important concept in relation to man, as he is distinguished from animals?

Absolute truth cannot be found by human experience, for it lies beyond its scope. But just as we help a child by educating him or repeatedly showing the particulars of what he sees, so the Lord helps us by showing us absolute truth, in human language, as revelation. The Lord is absolute truth; only He is constant.

The Lord's truth is in the Word, that we might know Him and His glories, that we might know His love and wisdom, in its

tender solicitude for our eternal happiness; but never as a whole, only part at a time. This is what man must grow sensitive towards; as much as he is constantly trying to seek facts about material things and to go deeper and deeper into them, so he should also seek spiritual facts or truths, and will to go deeper and deeper into the understanding of them. The mind is the organ that senses these things, and only it can build up a spiritual sensitivity.

Every product of man's inventive genius has its origin in some *love* or *affection*. Of these we become conscious, so long as we are on earth, only as they first take form in the imagination. There they become ideas, which are constructed out of sense impressions stored within the memory, belonging to prior felt loves and affections. The same is true of all creative art. This also is in its essence a love or affection, identified with an idea, felt as new and distinct, as precious and delightful. But in order that it may become art, it must be shared to inspire the same love in others, it must enrich their lives. To do this, a conscious perception of the affection felt by the artist must be conveyed. However, man is not permitted to see beyond the veil into the other world, where loves and affections are the real objects. No man is able to pass an idea or vision from his mind to that of another, except in some natural form or force. It is therefore necessary to clothe the affections in symbolic forms from the memory, selected and organized by the imagination. It is necessary to express these in similar material forms, perceptible to the bodily senses. This process is by no means spontaneous. It requires skill and practice in whatever art may be the vehicle. We might call it the "labor of love," for without it there is no use performed.

If such is the inspiration of art when its intentions are true, its purpose is to impart something that comes not from without, but from within—something that belongs not to nature but to the spiritual world. And its use is not to satisfy physical need, but to enrich the *spirit* of man.

In short, we might now say that art is the effort to produce by labor the things of the imagination, in material forms. And if this is so, then art is subject to the same limitations as are characteristic of the imagination itself. It has no inherent power of

judgment between good affections and evil affections. The imagination is inspired by affections which are felt as delightful, and anything delightful is naturally felt as good to any man. But looking from a religious point of view, a discrimination is necessary. Evil affections may be—and frequently are—felt as delightful, and thus good. And so the imagination itself must be judged. As Bishop de Charms has put it: "In the light of the teachings of the Writings we would certainly contend that the real worth and greatness of art is viewed from something higher than the imagination. It would appear to us that great art is art inspired by a great love, and executed with consummate skill. It is art based on the true insight into the inner realities of human life. Nor is such insight possible apart from a knowledge and a love of spiritual truth. This is not, and cannot be, derived from the imagination except so far as that faculty is inspired by an internal acknowledgment of Divine Revelation, and submits itself to the government of revealed truth. From this comes all the light of truth to the mind of man. It is the light of the spiritual sun, from which alone comes genuine insight, rational judgment, whereby we may learn to discriminate rightly between good and evil."

True art, then, is the inspiring in others, by means of artistic creation in a material form, of something of the imagination, which reveals in all faithfulness some phase of *truth*.

Thus, although the forms of nature used by the artist mirror imperfectly the forms of his imagination, they show nevertheless the state of affection and perception that the artist is in. A mind without a knowledge or perception of truth would not produce a work of art portraying it; such a mind would stir the affections for what is not of truth. On the other hand, when the mind is in a state of order from a knowledge and perception of truth, and thus in the love of doing good, then the creative imagination desires to portray the beauty of truth. An inner purpose and significance with value and meaning is then present to make the piece of art one that sincerely shows love of truth, and thus inspires in others a love for its good. For true art can only be inspired by a true love, a desire to impart truth for the sake of breathing good and all its affections. If the love is any other, it can impart only what is of itself.

As we then look at art through the ages, considering first a painting—"The Creation"—by Michelangelo (1475-1567), we see expressed a love of truth as perceived from the letter of the Word, shown in terms of the human form. The artist realized that in this form was the greatest beauty—for everything that goes forth from the Lord is in the human form, as He is Man Himself. In literature, Shakespeare (1564-1616) expressed the beauty of truth in terms of human life and love. In his plays—*Macbeth* and many others—he showed that as the Lord fought here on earth for the conquest of infernal foes, so we must strive here to gain a life of justice and honesty, a life of shunning evils and doing uses, in providing for the service and welfare of the neighbor. Musically, Beethoven (1770-1827), with every longing of the heart, shows in his "Eroica" symphony the triumph of life over death. In this work we may truly feel that he was greatly affected by the Last Judgment; and we are left with the full satisfaction of the nobility of spiritual struggle.

Through these art works the mind responds to the spiritual vision of creation and redemption by the Lord. But now, in our own day, most of the paintings defy analysis; most literature depicts the disorders of life while subtly leaving a favorable impression; and most music stirs self's desires from an appeal to loneliness and self-pity. What more is there, when coincidental combinations of colored paints are portrayed, when fiction putting *Lady Chatterly's Lover* in the shadow is being sold at any store to any age, and when music of the "Lover Come Back" type is played and sold everywhere you turn? Is there order in such things? Do these reveal an inner vision with purpose and meaning from the light of truth? The great masters recognized that self, which today is the thing to express, is not worth expressing. They therefore took something that was higher than themselves and expressed it, as they saw it.

Being a product of civilization, art will generally indicate the state of affection that men are in. Can we then conclude that the state of the human race today is one of disorder, because some producers of so-called art show it? I would certainly contend that art is one aspect among the many human endeavors which show a heavy inclination toward a state of confusion and disorder. This is not cause for fear, however. The Lord provides that there is

always more good than evil in the world, more order than disorder, more kindness than harshness, and more honesty than dishonesty. For even where spiritual principles are lacking, He causes ambition and self-interest to lead to good deeds, whatever be in the heart of the doer.

When we ask then, from all the things that are viewed in relation to man—"Is man the center of the cosmos?"—it appears to him that he is; for it is loves of self and of the world which, reigning in him, force the appearance that man lives from himself. But it is love of truth from its good, and thus the Lord, which is the true center of the cosmos, and which should be the center of man's inner life and thought, and hence of his art as mirror of his mind.