

Truth Liberates

December 11, 2010

The argument of the last three numbers of "Eleison Comments" (175–177), has been merely provoked by the French painter Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), because he is by no means the worst of modern artists. That argument has not been that God exists, so modern art is "bosh" (see Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited," I, 6). Rather it has been, modern art is bosh, so God exists. There is an important difference here between descending from the cause to the effect and climbing from the effect to the cause.

If I start from the existence of God as a given, and reason downwards to the wrongness of, for instance, modern art, modern music, modern opera productions, etc., firstly God and his existence are not thereby proved, and secondly his religion can seem to come down on us like a wheel-clamp upon our liberty. Now I am me, and whatever it is that is me wants to be free to choose what art I like. But here comes a Traffic Warden supposedly from Heaven to clamp that freedom? No thank you!

If on the other hand I start out from my own experience of modern art, I am firstly starting out from what I directly know. And if my experience of it is, honestly, dissatisfactory – that is not necessarily the case, but if it is – then I can begin to wonder why I feel such unease in front of highly praised modern artists. I listen again to the praises. I am still not convinced. Why not? Because modern art is ugly. What is wrong with ugliness? It lacks beauty. And if I continue to climb through the beauty of, for instance, landscapes or women as portrayed in art, to their beauty in Nature, to a harmony of parts running through all creation, my thoughts have climbed from my personal experience a considerable way towards the Creator.

In this latter case he no longer resembles a traffic warden with wheel-clamps. On the contrary, far from clamping down on our freedom, he seems to be leaving us human beings with free-will and with freedom to proclaim ugliness through the land and to create a world of chaos. Maybe he is hoping that the ugliness will become horrible enough to turn our thoughts towards the True and the Good. At this point his religion resembles no longer any clamp from outside on our liberty within, but rather a help and liberator of all that is best in me from all that is worst, because unless I am proud, I am bound to admit that not everything inside myself is ordered and harmonious.

At which point supernatural grace is no longer conceived of as a kind of policeman landing on the back of my nature to control by force whatever it does. Rather it is a very good friend that will, if I wish, enable the best in me to liberate itself from the worst, or at least strive to do so.

Was not, and is not still, one driving force behind Vatican II and the Conciliar religion, the widely shared sense of Catholic Tradition being a sort of unbearable policeman, as though all natural impulses are bad? Yes, the impulses of my fallen nature are bad, but there is good in our nature underneath that bad, and this good must be allowed to breathe, because from inside us it synchronizes perfectly with the true religion of God coming from outside. Otherwise I fabricate a false religion out of my bad impulses – like Vatican II.

Kyrie eleison.