

I. Review

A. Creation and art/culture

1. We talked about the triad of cultural virtues:
 - a. Truth
 - b. Goodness
 - c. Beauty
2. We noted that these virtues are:
 - a. Reflections of the glory of God
 - b. And thus inextricably linked together

In other words, you can't express the beauty of the glory of God without expressing his truth and goodness.

These virtues are part of all artistic/cultural expressions whether created by believers or unbelievers – the expressions are limited by our finiteness, but we can evaluate their quality by the extent which they properly reflect these virtues in coordinated balance.

B. The fall and art/culture

1. The way truth, goodness and beauty are treated in art/culture demonstrates the fallenness of man
 - a. When art/culture expresses truth, goodness, or beauty independently of the other virtues in the triad, it expresses an anti-God viewpoint.
 - b. When art/culture attacks truth, goodness, or beauty as untrue or non-existent, it denies God's created order and the God of the order.
 - c. When art/culture glamorizes sin, it misuses its power to exalt that which God condemns.
2. When we critique culture for its fallenness, we mean to critique more than mere content (the surface message of the art/culture).
 - a. We are concerned about art/culture at the level of sensibilities or affections — how does art/culture shape my value system?
 - b. We are concerned about how art/culture teaches us about reality — does my cultural environment give a true picture of reality?

- c. We are particularly concerned about pop culture, which communicates
 - 1) Wrong values (temporary over permanent)
 - 2) Wrong priorities (instant gratification)
 - 3) Wrong affections (the base, the sentimental, the self-centered instead of elevating the soul by worshiping God)

II. A case study in art: two paintings contrasted

A. The first painting (if you know the painting, please don't comment)

1. What do you see of truth, goodness, or beauty in the painting?
2. Any idea who the artist is?
3. Any idea of the subject matter? What is the artist painting about? What is he saying about the subject?

4. The actual history of the painting *Guernica* by Picasso

- a. Oil on canvas painting, measures 11' 5" x 25' 6"
- b. Completed in 1937 to commemorate the bombing of the village of Guernica by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy at the request of Spanish Nationalists (Franco)
- c. Displayed at the 1937 Paris World's Fair, used to raise funds for Spanish Civil War relief

d. **The Bombing of Guernica**

- 1) Guernica located at a crossroads, republican (anti-Franco) forces retreated through here
- 2) Germans viewed any location that facilitated troop movement as a legit target
- 3) Most of the men of Guernica were away, town mostly populated by women and children
- 4) It was market day, many people congregated in the center of the village

5) **The village was totally destroyed**

5. Now what do you think the painting is saying?
 - a. What truths do you see?
 - b. What goodness do you see? (if any)
 - c. What beauty do you see? (if any)
- B. The second painting (again, if you know the painting, please don't comment)
 1. What do you see of truth, goodness, or beauty in the painting?
 2. Any idea who the artist is?
 3. Any idea of the subject matter? What is the artist painting about? What is he saying about the subject?
 4. The actual history of the painting
 - a. In May 1918, John Singer Sargent was commissioned by the British War Memorials Committee to create a large painting for a British Museum.
 - b. Sargent is an American, so the idea was for him to paint American and British soldiers serving together.
 - c. He was 62 yrs old, but travelled to the Western Front to observe the soldiers in action.
 - d. He struggled to find British and American soldiers in the same scene.

From a letter Sargent wrote to a friend: "The Ministry of Information expects an epic – and how can one do an epic without masses of men? Excepting at night I have only seen three fine subjects with masses of men – one a harrowing sight, a field full of gassed and blindfolded men – another a train of trucks packed with "chair à cannon" – and another frequent sight a big road encumbered with troops and traffic, I daresay the latter, combining English and Americans, is the best thing to do, if it can be prevented from looking like going to the Derby."

- The "harrowing sight" referred to the aftermath of a German barrage that Sargent witnessed on 21 August 1918, at Le Bac-du-Sud, between Arras and Doullens, in which mustard gas had been used against the advancing 99th Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division and 8th Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division of the British Army, during the Second Battle of Arras of 1918.
- Description of a friend: "After tea we heard that on the Doullens Road at the Corps dressing station at le Bac-du-sud there were a good many gassed cases, so we went there. The dressing station was situated on the road and consisted of a number of huts and a few tents. Gassed cases kept coming in, lead along in parties of about six just as Sargent has depicted them, by an orderly. They sat or lay down on the grass, there must have been several hundred, evidently suffering a great deal, chiefly I fancy from their eyes which were covered up by a piece of lint... Sargent was very struck by the scene and immediately made a lot of notes. It was a very fine evening and the sun toward setting."

5. Now what do you think the painting is saying?

- a. What truths do you see?
- b. What goodness do you see? (if any)
- c. What beauty do you see? (if any)

The first painting, *Guernica*, communicates something of the despair of our society over war. It does communicate truth, to a degree at least. It doesn't tell the whole story.

The second painting, *Gassed*, does a better job at telling the whole story (my opinion), and expresses all three elements of the cultural triad (truth, goodness, and beauty). Instead of despair, we see the glory of God in the image (though it is communicated by depicting the fallenness of man).

Some comments from a friend of Mark Ward, Zach Franzen, a writer at BJU Press:

I agree that I don't see much beauty in the painting *Guernica*. Some art friends might disagree with me. I'm prepared to say that the degree to which people like the painting corresponds to the degree they feel it displays the glory of truth. I wouldn't want to push too hard to discredit anyone's love of *Guernica*, but since you've asked about it (and since it is almost universally adored) allow me to question the painting's value a little.

First, I'm not surprised that you listened to a podcast and then sought out the painting. I would be more surprised if you saw the painting and then sought out a podcast. Does that make sense? In other words, the enjoyment of the painting is a kind of literary enjoyment. It's word-bound. It takes painting and makes it into literature. If you scrape off all the words that cling to the piece—the art critics and their adoration, and just look at that piece, do you really feel any greatness? Do the cartoon faces make you draw back? If anything, the stylized cartoony rendering of war makes it palatable without making it attractive. I find a lack of empathy in *Guernica*. Perhaps that's because Picasso's emphasis is on terror not on suffering. Still, in my personal view, it's a depiction of the world with no gratitude.

Consider a contrasting painting from John Singer Sargent (attached below). I saw this painting years ago at the British Imperial Museum. It's very large. It is simply titled, *Gassed*. What makes the painting superior, in my view, is that it is beautiful without careening into sentimentality. The suffering of the blindfolded men is contrasted with men in the distance playing rugby or soccer. These are two different stations of youth. The coming of night by the rising of the moon (the light source is outside the painting's right), foreshadows the horrible effects of mustard gas on one's eyesight. The beauty of the light becomes tragic. In other words, gratitude for the created order makes injury salient. If there is such a thing as chocolate cake, then losing one's sense of taste is tragic. If the world is only filled with castor oil (the *Guernica* vision—even the mother and child are rendered as dehumanized symbols), then losing one's taste is not as heartbreaking. Furthermore, Sargeant's painting is more true. Consider: the representational nature of the scene uses the vocabulary of the created order. Picasso's stylization insists that you learn his personal vocabulary so that you can decipher his feelings on the matter. The former spirals out into a wider and wider scope. The latter spirals in into a constricting egotistical space.

In a minor way, Sargeant's view is more nuanced. Within war (if we're honest) there are some very beautiful things. Love of country, love of one's fellow soldier, experiences of privation and (to be honest) leisure. Sargent's painting doesn't really deny these with a simplistic thumbs down. Still, he does indicate a caution against jingoism. He references the idea of the blind leading the blind as it refers to soldiers, but breaks the idea at the head of the lines with a medic/orderly in one instance and a nurse in the other. The people with vision are not the life takers but the life savers.

In short, the context for pain in *Guernica* is ugliness. The context for pain in *Gassed* is beauty. The one speaks of a futility of understanding and raw emotional pain. The other indicates that suffering happens within a broader order. This last vision seems to me more Christian.

III. Transferring the exercise to music

- A. Consider the music of pop culture, compare it to the music you hear at church. Ask this question:
- Which painting, *Guernica* or *Gassed*, would better visualize the sensibilities of each clip?
- B. Concluding question: How does a culture of constant popular entertainment, (expressed in the sensibilities of modern music) shape your soul?