This past month has seen many scandals and controversies over what I would call post-Christian art. At the University of Houston, we saw a pro-abortion statue beheaded; in Austria, we saw a blasphemous depiction of the Virgin Mary meet the same fate, both of which were described as works made to promote feminism. But more recently, we saw a more egregious display of so-called art at the 2024 Paris Olympics, where homosexuals in drag sought to mock the Last Supper, reinvigorate the lost gods of Apollo and Dionysius, and display an unambiguous message that Western culture now stands for degeneracy. How has the West fallen so far? How has the culture that once produced Notre Dame been reduced to drag shows for its entertainment? Why do the once sons and daughters of the Church now make it their only artistic expression to spite her values publicly? This problem did not begin this month, nor did it begin this year or the last hundred years, but it has been the result of a divorce of man's last end and his artistic soul.

No place has been more affected by the Protestant Revolt and its consequences than Germany, the very heart of Europe. It was here that Luther burned the *Summa Theologica* and boldly said man was justified *without* his own works but by faith *alone.* Much ink has been spilled over this statement and whether it can be given any semblance of a Catholic interpretation; indeed, it has been speculated that if justification is to mean merely our initial justification through the sacrament of baptism, we are justified by faith alone. But the deeper problem seems to be whether our work merits anything at all. Luther and his ilk firmly deny this; Catholics make bold to say that one's work does merit, that it increases one's union with God, and that one can really grow in righteousness, and that this does effect a real change in a person, not a mere covering up of one's sinful nature.

Parvus error in principio, magnus est in fine.

If a small error in the beginning makes a great one in the end, how much more of a mistake does a large error cause? An error concerning the very nature of man's redemption, of his life with God, and of the value of his actions will impact his entire being. Such has been the case with man's art in the days since the Protestant Revolution. If man's nature is truly rotten and not changed but merely covered up, if man's own works merit nothing, then what use is his art, which is itself a *work* to imitate his *nature?* This may not have been drawn to its conclusions by Luther himself, but it would be by the inheritors of the Protestant Revolution with its iconoclasms, its whitewashing of churches, and its banning of theaters. Another one of Germany's sons, Richard Wagner, noticed that there had been a stifling of the artistic spirit three hundred years after Luther, especially when compared to the likes of the Greeks, who, despite being in the darkness of paganism still seemed to get man's nature right, at least a pagan man could see some dignity in his work.

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> "The free Greek, who set himself upon the pinnacle of Nature, could procreate Art from very joy in manhood: the Christian, who impartially cast aside both Nature and himself, could only sacrifice to God on the altar of renunciation; he durst not bring his actions or his work as offering, but believed that he must seek His favor by abstinence from all self-prompted venture…What, then, could he [the Christian] take for aim? Surely not physical beauty mirrored in his eyes as an incarnation of the devil?"
>
> *-Richard Wagner's Art and Revolution, as found in The German Classics v15, p152-153*

What Wagner misattributes to Christianity in general, and very likely what he attributes to the "Roman Church," only applies truly to the Protestant distortion of it. It was the Roman Church that produced St. Benedict, who proclaimed the mandate *ora et labora*; it was her sons who rose and rested with only the building of God's Cathedrals in mind. It was precisely Catholicism that said you *must* bring your work as an offering, and art was one of such great offerings. But if man's works mean nothing in regard to his final end, Wagner's critique suddenly rings true. The artistic Christian is forced to live a double life with a double truth, one life where he is an incarnation of sin, his true nature masked with grace, the other life which sees through this deception and understands the intrinsic value of work and his nature albeit in a separate realm of the spirit. This division of body and soul, of the material and spiritual realms, is a common trick of the devil that keeps reoccurring, whether it be in the form of the Manichee, the Albigensian, or the Protestant.

It should be remembered that no heresy can completely stifle man's creative nature and that this general attitude did not impact every piece of Protestant art. It is said, "There are no Protestant cows," meaning that, especially within Christian groups, the artistic outflowing can often be attributed to the vestiges of the Catholic religion that the various heresies took with them (see for example, Bach's Mass in B Minor, a thoroughly *Catholic* work written by a Lutheran). But it absolutely can be said that this change in attitude infected all of Christendom and was effectively spread by the Liberal revolution, albeit with a twist. While the Protestant would look at man's nature with all of its flaws and find it totally depraved and in need of redemption by covering up this nature, the Liberal looks at man's nature with all of its flaws and dares to call it *good*. Not only would the imperative to work for God be removed, but the very need to be redeemed by God would be as well. Like Luther, its full consequences might not have dawned on Liberalism's progenitors, but to us living in the Liberal empire, its consequences are blatantly obvious.

And so, we have the modern man whose work is fruitless as it is not for God but for an illusion, whose sins are not absolved but glorified, who has no story to tell but that of his

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own Pride. Are we then surprised when his art*work* is ugly, when it is nothing but a reveling in one's own unredeemed nature? This is no way to live, and it is no way to create. There is only one solution to this problem, which is a return to the Medieval spirit. The spirit that inspired man to think about God at all times, especially during his work. The spirit that gave him hope that despite his wounded nature, he might become good. And then, man can create beautiful art again, imitating the God who inspires him.

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