

jhs



OUR LADY OF GETHSEMANI
TRAPPIST, KENTUCKY

Nov 26, 1955

Dear Mr Hammer-

On the Eve of the First Sunday in Advent, I am happy to be able to send you the translation of Bl. Gueric's Christmas sermons. I think Sister Rose has done a good job, and I hope you will like them. Of course, though, it occurs to me that if you print them, the book will be read here and there by erudite Jews who will not understand the references to the rejected synagogue -- as if all this had something to do with anti-semitism. That might be another obstacle to printing ~~it~~ the book. I had not thought of it, of course, when preparing the material.

As you say, readers will probably find it difficult in spots. It was for that reason that I thought your press would be the logical one to handle it, as Pico is not easy either! What you say about the autobiographical undertones of the piece is probably quite true, but I had not thought of that either. Of course, all that is said objectively about the truths of our faith and of our Redemption, has subjective repercussions in the lives of those who have been granted a share in the fruits of that Redemption. Whatever we believe we are obliged, in some way or other, to live and even to experience.

I was very interested in your remarks on Fiedler's theory, and they tend to entrench me in my own prejudice against Classicism. Not as art, but as sacred art. It is quite true that primitive and two dimensional art is intellectually poor and limited. Precisely. Less human also-- just that! It is the poverty of primitive art that makes it more ~~able~~ able to serve as "matter" so to speak for a sacramental and religious form.

It seems to me that the self-assurance with which the ~~classical~~ classical eye accepts the "man-made enclosure" tends, at least in most cases, to ~~exclude~~ exclude the

transcendental in the sense of the "Holy"- das ganz Andere. Precisely, in the polis, everything is familiar. In the agora we trade our own opinions and our own vegetables too: and this is right and fitting. There must be humanism, and Christianity is humanistic. And it certainly speaks up in the market place-- where else? But it brings the desert into the market place too, and the desert is vast, empty, and poor, and has no frame...

I do not argue that three dimensional art cannot be holy-- (Fra Angelico!)-- only that it grows up in a context where in fact holiness is not encouraged: the academic context.

How about the spirituality of line, of shape?

Of course, in all this, there is always the probability that we are talking about two entirely different things: or else that we are seeing the same thing from diametrically opposed viewpoints-- or that what seems to be a difference is none at all. In any case I entirely agree with you on the different viewpoints of the artist (who is "in" the space he sees, or at least see his way into it) and the patron who wants something beautiful and has to be talked into seeing something more than a pleasing subject or a pleasant arrangement of things he likes to look at. Whatever may be the artist's approach, he opens up the doors of spirit: but sometimes it is a spirit that is enclosed in its own reference rather than open to the transcendent.

Talking about art and the sacred: I have moved into a new job as Master of Novices and find that in the novitiate chapel we have utterly unholy (because vulgar) altar cards. Do you remember that we spoke of that? Is there any hope of getting you to do us three sets of altar cards, for the three small altars of our chapel? At most, the largest card would be twenty four inches long. Your art would then pray for you in Gethsemani by helping the monks to pray better.

Yes, the Snell book is here and I have begun it. I can see its great importance, and therefore I ask you to bear with me if I do not return it in a hurry. My time is rather sparsely portioned out and it takes time to think through such a book. Many thanks for your kindness-- and I also look forward to seeing the Fiedler.

Our new stations of the Cross are installed and look very well. Bro Giles did not dare, after all, to use the plain brick background, but the dark plaster is quite effective behind the light bath stone. When will you be over to see them?

With best advent wishes to both of you and with all blessings and prayers that you may have a holy and happy Christmas-

Devotedly yours in Christ

M. Louis