

Dear Tom: Thank you for your kind letter of Sept. 15th. We were very soory to hear about your sufferings but were relieved to know you ^{were} in good hands at the hospital. I hope this letter reaches you as a convalescent in the monastery. All good wishes for your recovery.

The news about your agent in New York who endeavors to keep you out of difficulties by cutting ^{down} on the demands which are constantly made upon you, such as blurbs and similar things, ^{are} very good news indeed. I am glad to hear this happened. You need not apologize to me for I made similar demnds. I realize now that the text of my book - which you so kindly and seriously reviewed - will be the appropriate text to accompany a supposed book of reproductions from my pictures.

I admit that my proposal was rather naive, thoughtless perhaps. I fancied a layman faced by these pictures, definitely out of fashion now, and telling what they mean to him. But the layman is not what he once was and how I wish him to be. In ~~these~~ bygone days the layman was after the artist because he needed his work. The priests of the religious orders defined exactly what they wanted and needed as painted stories on the walls of their churches, in order to teach the believers who could not read but were able to see. Though the wishes of the clerics (laymen too regarding the arts) were set down exactly in writing and contracts with the artists made, no patron, as the Church was, would have expected the artists to "express themselves". Yet the artists were free to strive after artistic truth as they saw ~~it~~ fit.

This kind of layman no longer exists, and Church art became as poor as it is. The Churchmen do not know what they want and actually they don't want anything specific; they wait for what the artist offers and meekly accept it, or sfter a while reject it for the wrong reasons. As the Abbot of Scheyern, when I asked him when the frescoes on the barrell vault of their Romanesque church were painted, said: Oh, that was when we had too much money.

You will understand that in this sense you are not, and cannot be a layman, for you are a child of our age just as I am myself. Therefore it was thoughtless of me to ask you. It has become a sort of excuse to admit one is a layman. But the laymen who built the cathedrals thought of themselves as patrons who hired the craftsmen and took the credit for their work. The Sistine chapel is the creation of Pope Giulio ~~III~~ III (?) and he knew why he hired Michelangelo to execute it.

Colpa mia to ask a man who knows how to write (a craftsman of the pen or of the words) to add words to the reproduction of paintings. Sad world in which we live and involuntarily take part of the spirit that reigns in it.
Dear Tom you are of course free to quote anything from my book, and thank you for the good words you had for it.

St. John had reported what he saw and what he heard - an eye and ear witness of Christ's acts and words, and also a proof of the authenticity of the gospel and the personal existence of Christ -- for I want to imagine the human who would have been able to make Christ's gesture in answer to the tempting questions of the Pharisees. Of the writing with His finger on the ground I have heard Adolf von Harnack say: we do not know what He wrote. The son of God did what no human ever could have done. We see Him in this gesture, He has revealed Himself to all of us who can see.

Father Bruckberger, the French Dominican, tells us that he has spent his whole (adult) life among theologians and says that he knows how they reason -- by deduction and from authority. He quotes St. Thomas who says that: ". . . we must believe the authority of those to whom the revelation has been made".

But Christ has revealed Himself to all of us, directly, for we recognize Him in His divine mercy - as Father Louis, the Trappist monk said.

For more than forty years I felt a gentle, but constant urge to give definite visual form to a conceptual idea that is behind the story of the woman taken in adultery, so succinctly told by St. John in his gospel. In the course of these years I have painted two complete versions of this story, besides a great number of trial paintings, unfinished and abandoned attempts to reach the final form. I have now finished a third panel and with it I went as far as I was able to go with my brush. Yet I have not uttered one word, I only used my brush for making a drawing, a design, a graph, a gramma.-- things which ought to be seen and cannot be heard.

Beyond its decorative value the painting contains a message, just as Christ's gesture of silently stooping down meant a message to be understood by the Pharisees. The painting only perpetuates this message. Christ reacts to the tempting questions of the Pharisees first by a gesture that is not understood, then, lifting himself up, He raises His voice and speaks in words. He does not dismiss the Pharisees, He asks ~~only~~ an indirect question which they could answer only in one mood -- by turning away.

I read St John's report in the gospel and painted the attitude of the woman, the Pharisees and Christ's gesture. Christ speaks first with a gesture, silently; then He writes and then He raises His voice and after that repeats His gesture. But the message is never delivered directly, the message which says in words: do not accuse -- forgive. St. John reported what he saw and heard.

Is it so difficult to see what Christ meant with His gesture, are we blind, must we take recourse to words, to hear what He want^{ed} us to see? Addressing the eye again with the diagram which underlies the painting, those who can see are seeing five separate vertical lines and one undivided round line: the circle. Christ gestures first by stooping down, then with His finger He writes on the ground, and finally He lifts Himself up and raises His voice. And again He stoopes down and writes on the ground, and with all of that He communicates.

Whether intentionally or not, Ortega y Gasset does not mention this story in the note to the "Commentary on the Symposium of Plato", posthumously(sic) published under the title of: The Difficulty of Reading. (Diogenes magazine).