

There Is No Art Without Religion  
(By Ralph Adams Cram, in the New York Sun.)

"All the art of Christendom for a thousand years -- from the edict of Constantine to the Reformation -- owed its existence to the fostering care of the Christian Church. It was in the churches themselves that this art -- or rather these arts, architecture, painting, sculpture, music, stained glass, metal and wood work, etc.. -- found their greatest triumphs. But the genius of Protestantism was averse to art and so contributed nothing outside certain fine qualities in choral music -- and a vast amount of wholesale destruction.

"From the year 1800 on for fifty years religious art was completely dead and even then it began to recover only a little, and that in England. All countries, without regard to their religious proclivities, were, and mostly are, sunk in a depth of artistic barbarism not equaled at any time in the history of Christian civilization, not even in the Dark Ages of the tenth century.

"The condition has been worst of all in this country. When the last vestiges of 'Colonial' died away between 1800 and 1825 something so inexpressibly awful came in that there are no words to describe it. There was no pretense at any art except architecture, and this was degraded to a point where to call it barbarous would be a gratuitous insult to the barbarians. Up to 1800 it was stupid, illiterate and ugly, but worse was to follow, for then professional architects took matters into their own hands, and as they mostly cared nothing about religion, knew little of history whether religious or secular, and never had had any training in religious art of any kind., they naturally produced perfectly awful monstrosities that were worse because they were so pretentious and so rotten with self-conceit.

"There was no one to stop them, for their clients, both clerical and lay, were equally ignorant, while their taste was of the lowest degree appreciable by any test.

"What happened was that when Upjohn, Renwick, Haight, and Congdon, during the last half of the nineteenth century, began good work, so following the architectural recovery in England that followed on from the Catholic revival in the English Church, the Episcopal Church in America developed an ambition for better art and so accepted them as its leaders, since when it has never fallen back, but has steadily improved the quality of its art.

Episcopalians Took the Lead.

"No other religious communions took much interest in the movement, however, until Richardson came with his bold and original style, when the evangelical churches surrendered at discretion to the camp followers of the movement originated by this great genius, with the result of populating the land with the most uncouth 'Romanesque' abominations conceivable by the human imagination, while the rest of Christendom continued sinking even deeper in the slough of its own artistic ignorance and indifference. Generally speaking, the Christian religion was degraded and discredited by the worst 'art' in all its forms that history has recorded in the various annals.

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Pope Pius XI, gloriously reigning, has proclaimed the year 1925 a "Holy Year" of jubilee. The jubilee indulgence (granted as a rule every twenty five years) is the highest indulgence proclaimed by the Church. He asks us to pray for peace: not peace by treaty, which cannot last, but peace from sinless hearts.

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Senator Wadsworth, in his Memorial Day speech in New York condemned the radicals who are administering the "pacifist oath" to school children, and asked the churches that are trying to disarm our country to directing their attention to disarming the devil, through sin comes into the world.

Vain Regrets -- Make them useful.

The fourth religious survey shows a great many useless regrets. "If you had your college course to start over again, what change would you make in your religious program?" In answer to this question many students frankly acknowledged a rut and unwillingness or apparent inability to get out of it. Inability of that kind means hopeless lack of character. A violent change cannot be made without a wrench; but the man who cannot make it is doing worse than wasting time in college.

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The end is at hand -- but you can make it a beginning. Several hundred of you will not return next year. If you have made proper use of your religious opportunities here, well and good; you are on the right road, and even though you slip, your soul will torture until you get back. If you have wasted God's grace, call yourself an ass and resolve to be an ass no longer. Show that you know why God made and why He sent you to Notre Dame.

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