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## How Arts Influenced Christianity I N Middle Age

In the Middle Ages, Christianity had a large influence on the people of the time. As Christians, the people had many spiritual goals and truths to acknowledge including reaching the kingdom of heaven and praising Jesus as the one and only king. In order to get into heaven, they believed it was important to know the teachings of Jesus and to pray to God. Moreover, they thought following the teachings of Christ and applying them to daily life would help further themselves in reaching these goals and learning these truths. Based on these actions, artists and thinkers molded their art and politics to fit these roles. The artist who created the Reliquary of St. Foy had the purpose of persuading viewers into prayer while the artist who made the doors of St. Michael's Church had the intention of teaching the viewers about Scripture. In his writings, *The City of God*, Augustine discusses how Christianity leads to peace in a state, a goal of many Medieval thinkers.

Pilgrimages were very prominent during the Middle Ages. There were many purposes for completing a pilgrimage which included obeying a promise made, making amends, and most importantly deepening one's faith. Being closer to God in this life meant being closer to Him in the next. Many Christians would travel great distances to gather and pray. Pilgrims journeyed to biblical sites such as Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Bethlehem; however, Christians found themselves unable to safely travel to the Holy Land due to the start of the Crusades. As a result, Medieval people began to create shrines and churches so they could carry out pilgrimages within the safety of Europe.

A famous shrine was the Relic of Saint Foy located in the Church of Saint Foy in Conques, France. The relic is dedicated to Saint Foy, an influential religious figure known for her refusal to sacrifice to the pagan gods. Saint Foy was and still is an excellent example of how Christians should follow their faith. As Jesus told the Apostles "you will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firmly with me to the end will be saved," (Matthew 10:22). Pilgrims would pray to Saint Foy to find the strength to follow their faith. The relic was useful in narrowing the focus of people's prayers on this goal of Christianity.

It is interesting that the statue does not look like the young girl Saint Foy was. This is because the statue was originally a Roman sculpture. The practice of taking old Roman art and transforming into the Medieval style was very common; pieces made in this way are known as spolia. Spolia were made in order to make a slight connection to the Roman Empire; however, this was seen as a weak attempt to try and mimic the Romans and was given the derogatory term "Romanesque."

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In addition, the statue is very ostentatious; it is gold and jewel encrusted. A problem arose of whether or not the statue functioned as a link to prayer because of its extreme nature. The gaudy appearance of Relic of Sainte Foy was not a singular case. Many people were very concerned that relics were bordering between a means of worship and idolatry. St. Bernard asked, "what doeth this gold in the sanctuary?" It was difficult for some to believe that pilgrims were migrating to only to pray and to not gawk at the glittering statues. St. Bernard exclaimed that the fancy relics only distracted the worshippers from their prayers which are the exact opposite of what they are meant to do. St. Bernard furthered his argument saying the relics were being used to make tourist revenue for the churches rather than providing a religious experience for the pilgrims.

While education was not completely obsolete in the Middle Ages, it was typically centered among monasteries and not the commoners. For this reason, many of the people did not have access to the Bible. Artists used this as opportunity to create art which made Scripture more available to the public. A number of these pieces depicted biblical stories; this was very useful for teaching uneducated people about Christianity. Saint Gregory the Great, in his letter to Bishop Serenus of Marseille, stated that "what scripture is to the educated, images are to the ignorant." In a society devoted to Christianity, it was essential to spread the word of God in every way possible. These works lead to a much larger understanding of Christian doctrine which enhanced people's spirituality.

An example of art being used to teach is the bronze doors St. Michael's Church. The stories of the Old Testament are told in descending order on the left side and the New Testament is told in ascending order on the right side; this represents the fall and the rise of man respectively. Each panel is paired with its opposing counterpart. For example, Eve tempting Adam is paired with the Crucifixion; sin is repaid with salvation. The doors can lead to an overall understanding of how God saves humanity through Jesus Christ, an essential theological concept to Christianity.

In addition to art, politics during the Middle Ages was largely affected by Christianity. Most thinkers of the time were trying to create peace within their society. Peace has an important connection to Christianity because it is "the peace of God which transcends all understanding," (Philippians 4:7). Saint Augustine discusses the large impact Christianity had on the Roman Empire in *The City of God*. While most of his contemporaries believed Christianity ruined Rome, Augustine argued Rome's fall was due to its immoral actions.

Augustine's purpose for writing *The City of God* was to provide Christians a reason God allowed a pagan empire to thrive for so long. According to Augustine, Rome had their state set up to succeed, although it was imperfect. Christian doctrine says that the only way to find pure happiness is to love God over anything else, even over one's self. Rather than the Roman

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people turning inward on themselves, they focused on the love of a higher power: the glory of Rome. The imperfection was the lack of God, but God allowed the continuation of their empire because they turned their focus outward; Romans had the right idea of dedicating all their work to something bigger than themselves, even though it was not God. The Romans believed in everybody doing their part of glorifying Rome because "order is the distribution which allots things equal and unequal, each to its own place," (Augustine, page 4). The system described was Augustine's way of creating peace in society; everyone needed to do their part of glorifying God.

Augustine also explains how Christianity shows that politics is undesirable. Politics creates a false virtue. The justice politics aims to make only prevents people from doing bad things but does not push them to do good, noble things. Augustine ponders this idea about politics by asking "what is its occupation save to wage perpetual war with the vices," (Augustine, page 2)? Earthly cities can never be just. Christianity provides a solution to this: a state will find peace, a large goal for Christians if it follows God's virtues. Some solutions to the problems in Earthly cities can be found in Christianity.

The problem with creating a society based on people doing all deeds for God is that it could inhibit the progress of the state. Revelation restricted the glory of the Roman Empire because it stopped the expansion of territory. In Chapter Five of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus states "love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." For peace to exist in all things, there must be "peace between man and man," (Augustine, page 4). Between the ideas written in the Bible and Augustine's writings, the conclusion drawn is a state cannot wage war on other nations if it wants to be a Christian society. Conquering new lands is the opposite of harmony among men but the Roman Empire heavily relied on this. However, Augustine clarifies that this does not cause the empire to fall but rather stops the growth of it. Rome's sinful nature, a lust for domination, internally destroys the empire.

The Middle Ages focused primarily on creating a deeper connection with God. Their art served the purposes of inspiring prayer and teaching scripture while their politics aimed to create peace in society, a great virtue of God. The art and politics both used physical or earthly symbols that reflected their spirituality to acknowledge the truths presented and to reach larger Christian goals.

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