

Denison Journal of Religion

Volume 9

Article 4

2010

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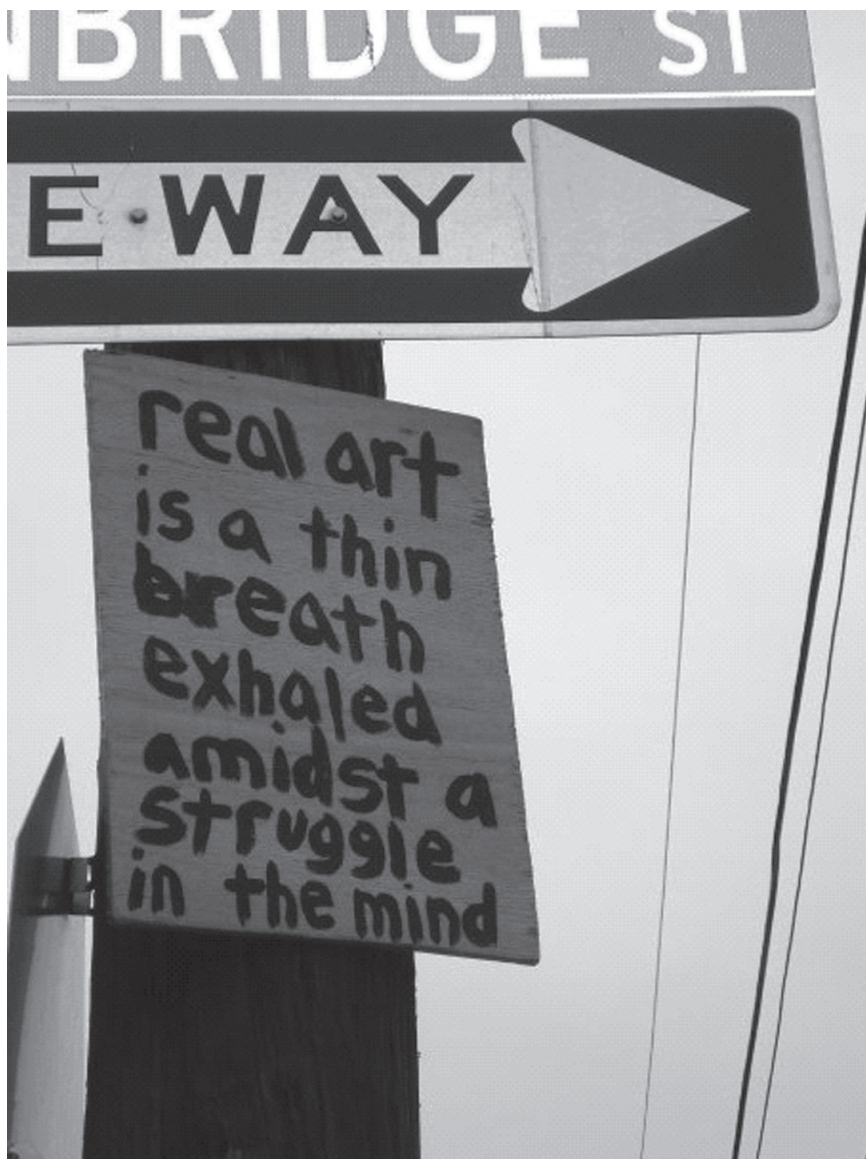
Recommended Citation

Fishburne, Jacquelyn (2010) "The Empirical Impulse: Empire and Religion as Bane and Blessing for Art," *Denison Journal of Religion*: Vol. 9 , Article 4.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/religion/vol9/iss1/4>

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The Empirical Impulse: Empire and Religion as Bane and Blessing for Art

Jacquelyn Fishburne



Introduction: A Thin Breath Exhaled Amidst a Struggle

The first time I witnessed the cover image, the text scrawled across a piece of rough wood, I believed that I had finally found the exact quote I was looking for; the simplicity of the statement holds weight against the heavy hearted meaning. The quote, by an unknown source, speaks of the ways in which art, as a medium through which truth can be expressed, situates itself so as to enable the audience to take from it what they will. "Real art is a thin breath exhaled amidst a struggle in the mind" suggests the ways in which we find ourselves and our creative energy amidst hard times with little to go on except our belief in faith and possibly ourselves. This struggle produces a means through which the artist inevitably will have to work to share their ideals, morals, and traditions with the world.

In understanding what the quote means in terms of 'real art,' one needs to recognize that art is traditionally placed into two categories: the commercial realm and that of the 'fine arts' realm. The commercial realm deals with the ways in which dominant forces commission certain articles of art (often for marketing purposes) in order to gain attention and monetary value. In the 'fine arts' realm, the artist is acknowledged for his/her commitment to the arts and often commissioned to work on matters that deal with socio-economic and political values; the majority of works produced in the 'fine arts' realm fall into two categories: those for private usage and those residing within the public domain.

In order for the arts to thrive after the fifth century an artist needed to have a willing benefactor to fund the production of a creative work in a given medium. This need for monetary support enabled the artist to work both for and against the Empire, using those in a higher socio-economic class for commissions that often displayed the ideals, traditions, and morals of the patron, era, and/or artist, while at the same time working on more privatized works that were reflections of the search for the answer to the question, "*what if?*"

Robert Schumann once said, "To send light into the darkness of men's hearts—such is the duty of the artist."⁶³ As an artist myself, I take this duty very seriously, understanding the ways in which my creative energies can be swayed by outside sources such as Empirical powers. I also feel that in understanding the ways in which both religion and Empire effect art, one will become more analytical of the ways in which 'art' is viewed within all levels of the world. With this, I conclude the introduction portion of my paper and begin the journey of explaining Christianity and Empire as both bane and blessing to art.

⁶³ Kandinsky, Wassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, pg. 13. Kessinger Publishing, New York, Berlin 2004

Section I: Historical Contexts

“Art has the vocation of revealing *the truth* in the form of sensuous artistic shape, of representing the reconciled antithesis, and therefore, has its purpose in itself, in this representation and revelation.”

G.W.F Hegel

If community is a fundamental category through which to understand religious experience, as Richard Horsley suggests, then art must be the plane upon which this understanding occurs.⁶⁴ It is through the utilization of different mediums that a community is best able to determine a source of worship. This in turn, gives them a source of identity that can fall outside of the mainstream view of life, creating a sense of pride, belonging and understanding in their particular setting.

Throughout early art history (prior to the fifth century A.D.), a majority of the art produced depicted everyday scenes; early cave drawings gave primitive examples of worship without a concrete knowledge of what they were used for. As a result, many Westerners believed that these ‘primitive’ cultures held no source of a God figure; this resulted in missionary groups coming in and attempting to ‘culturize’ these groups.

Jewish sects in the beginning of art history worked within their regard for the Ten Commandments, the fourth of which reads, “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”⁶⁵ It is clear this commandment was taken to heart as no images of a Jewish God from ancient Hebrew civilization has been found on record; it has been speculated that some Jews went as far as to avoid the images of Empirical force, creating their own entrances to cities and using separate currency to avoid breaking one of God’s Laws.⁶⁶ Paul Finney addresses this dilemma in Chapter 4 of his book, *The Invisible God*, with his discussion of Mark 12:13-17.⁶⁷ Jesus’ words when confronted about paying taxes to Caesar, “Pay Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and God what belongs to God”, suggests the ways in which the Jewish population was becoming fed up on having to pay for the privilege to survive in a Roman Empire.⁶⁸ The usage of an image of Caesar on one side and an image of a High Priest on the other indicated the ways in which the Empire was attempting to creating a theocracy in which Jewish

⁶⁴ Horsley, Richard A. *Jesus and Empire*. pg. 107. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003 v-178.

⁶⁵ Exodus 20:4

⁶⁶ During the Roman Empire, the coins all contained images of Caesar often as a means of enforcing the ideas of Caesar as God and thus creating iconography that was distributed throughout the Empire.

⁶⁷ Finney, Paul C. *The Invisible God*. Chapter 4. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁸ Mark 12:17

powers were taken advantage of, often causing many well-meaning Jews to break the Ten Commandments in order to survive the growing demands of the empire.

As stated previously, Jewish tradition designated that there were to be no false idols; Caesar, however, by garnering support from those in the religious community was able to take a part of the Jewish identity and twist it into a series of self-praising structures that downplayed Jewish ideals. Along with the iconography on every coin, Caesar also erected a series of statues and reliefs throughout the city, such as at city entrances and arenas that had high traffic and high visibility throughout the community. Many Jews went to considerable lengths to distance themselves from all contact with images of gods and of the emperor. This avoidance of iconography carried through into their architectural structures and works of art. The refusal to worship Caesar's image was a powerful outward act of hostility towards the Roman Empire. As worship of Caesar under the idea of his *imago*, his *genius*, and his *tyche*⁶⁹ was placed under the umbrella of traditional religion, there was a distinct movement away from the worship of gods towards the worship of Caesar as a human god. Much artistic work produced at the time sought to acknowledge and explain why members of the Jewish community sought to negate Caesar's divinity.

Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat explained the ways in which members of the early Christian church, often converts from Judaism, were seeking a way to rid themselves of idolatry in order to recognize Jesus, and not Caesar, as the Messiah. Chapter three of *Colossians Remixed* grants the reader a fictional account of the way in which a prominent Jew, named Nymphia, decides to give up her worldly possessions (mainly products containing images of Caesar) in an attempt to follow a more pure lifestyle; her amazement upon discovering that she was worshipping a false idol, as well as her conflict of deciding whether to give up her prominent social and economic life, led her to break away from the Empirically imposed reality and to create a new community focused on the teachings of Jesus.⁷⁰ Walsh and Keesmaat's use of the narrative of Nymphia grants the audience a more personalized way of viewing Paul's Letter to the Colossians, thus enabling those in a modern context to grasp the way in which the modern global empire has encroached its views upon citizens in a way that allows them to believe that they are a part of normal life. Nymphia's movement away from the idolatry of Caesar present everywhere in pageantry, statues, signage, and, as noted above, coinage, was used as a means of describing how many Jews and modern Christians are and need to be moving away from their current realities into new communities of faith.

⁶⁹ *Tyche* is translated to mean luck or fortune; it was believed that whoever held it would bring cities to prosper.

⁷⁰ Walsh, Brian J. and Sylvia C. Keesmaat. *Colossians Remixed*. pg. 147. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004.

These early Christian communities tried to withdraw as much as possible from the empirical cult of festivities, choosing to put their energy into removing empirical influences on their lives.

One of the ways in which narrative can be used to create a new community and reality is through what Walsh and Keesmaat describe as *targum*⁷¹. Targum enables the audience to make a modern connection to past events which is usually textually based; preachers often use this method as a means of engaging their congregations during sermons. Both past and present art forms often make use of targum as a way to engage audiences in an understanding of the undertones, or overt tonalities, of the work. Art prior to the sixth century often has to utilize religious and political undertones as a means of conveying morals and traditional ideals without directly displaying iconography. By engaging in a medium that can be easily manipulated by the artist, the artist is able to create a narrative of the ways in which God is present in the world without 'offending' anyone.⁷² As the early Church and the Jewish tradition believed that those who looked upon God's face were doomed to death, any interpretations prior to the sixth century were considered to be humans imposing their image upon God which followed the belief that God created Man in His image, therefore Man would be able to create God in his. One of the faults of targum is that it allows the audience to become subject to whoever is doing the reading, or in the case of art, looking; providing multiple ways to gain the same truth is one of the results that art especially when viewed strives for. A singular view of interpreting a message causes a lack of dimension and character to the work and thus sets it up for failure.

In order to survive, it is important for art to be able to function on a level free of its surrounding context. This enables a break between the personal and private realms of reality and can foster a sense of community in those who found similarities in their messages. One of the problems with this is the way in which, while art may seem protected and able to function on its own level, Empirical powers are still able to take hold of the work and, if not deemed inappropriate, can manipulate the message to one that enhances their ideals and focus. Finney points this out when he states that a subject and its origins are not the same thing; when a subject is taken in to be used by state powers, then the meaning of the subject matter is lost and it becomes an object.⁷³ Empirical depictions of Jesus have often-times depoliticized and re-contextualized the way in which Jesus is viewed; the

⁷¹ Walsh and Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*, pg. 38

⁷² It is here important to consider to common disconnect between artist and audience. Artists believe that they are able to create one meaning to a work, when realistically the audience comes from so many separate experiences that they are apt to draw their own conclusions.

⁷³ Finney, *The Invisible God*.

Nazis, for example, stripped Jesus of his historical Jewish heritage and created the image of an Aryan Jesus that better fit their ideals and focus. This claiming of Jesus' image is present in many art works throughout history; the Eurocentric view of Jesus turned him into a puppet that could be easily manipulated by those in power. One of the problems with this manipulation of image is that many Christian artists were forced to use local models for portraits of Jesus; thus the local vernacular was placed upon a distinctly foreign being allowing for many to come to the conclusion that Jesus was exactly like the members of their own community. While it is true that Jesus was human (although this fact is more of a paradox in the way in which his exterior was human while the interior remained divine through the indwelling God), Empire's request for an identifiable Jesus figure resulted in a severe loss in communal identity, causing many outside groups (many belonging to the missionary groups to be explained later on) to feel a distinct disconnect with a saving figure.

Rather than develop a metaphor for the iconographic images, it is important to develop a theoretical model that explains the problems arising out of different topics and then retroactively define them in the world. Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra's *The Prosthetic Impulse* sheds light on the function of metaphor, describing it as a displacement, a nominative term that is displaced from its common context and placed within another setting to illuminate another context.⁷⁴ Quoting Pierre Fontanier, Morra and Smith note that metaphor does not simply refer to objects, rather it consists "in presenting one idea under the sign of another."⁷⁵ It is in this use of metaphor that enables an analogy to form itself; in this methodology, art has been able to convey the ideas of a tradition that forbids idols without creating direct iconography. The religious undertones, made present through the use of religious symbolism and metaphor (such as a lion or lamb for Christ) allowed both the Jewish and early Christian traditions to worship in a way that didn't place value on the overt subject matter. The earliest Christians believed that God was invisible and could therefore not be represented and so had to create other methods for understanding the way in which God was working within the world. Metaphor enables artists in all mediums to construct relations of connection through which two objects are able to form an ensemble. This construction of the ensemble is labeled *synecdoche* by Smith and Morra; synecdoche enables the artist to form an ensemble between two objects that constructs a "physical or metaphysical whole" where "the existence or idea of one being [is] included in the existence or idea of

⁷⁴ Smith, Marquard, and Joanne Morra, eds. *The Prosthetic Impulse*. pg. 21. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006

⁷⁵ Smith, Marquard, and Morra, *The Prosthetic Impulse*.

the other.”⁷⁶ This synecdoche designates that the two relationships work as both exclusion and inclusion, thus creating a perceptual and discursive conflict between the point of view of the object as seen by the spirit.

It was not until 313 A.D, when Constantine lifted the ban on Christianity and created a civic religion when Christian symbols were allowed in mainstream life. Removed from the underground, the widespread popularity and ultimate acceptance of Christianity as official religion of the Empire was seen as reaction to the materialism and spiritual emptiness that was beginning to encroach upon Roman life, when in reality, the combination of Greek and Christian ideology caused a platonization that enabled everything to fit into a series of particulars. For Horsley, when Constantine converted the empire, Christianity became an endorsement and was used to legitimate empirical actions. Kelly Brown Douglas explains the way in which Constantine was able to convert the Roman Empire to Christianity in her book *What's Faith Got to Do With It?*⁷⁷ In a battle to gain ground for the empire, it has been told that Constantine saw a vision of God who told him to place the cross on his army and he would let him win the battle. When Constantine won the battle, he converted the empire and placed a special emphasis on the symbol of the cross, enabling the once powerless to become powerful. This focus on the cross placed an emphasis on the idea of Jesus and salvation, thus placing emphasis on the art of sacrifice. The merging of the political and religious facets of life legitimized the dominant order and created a drive to break away from the old tradition of idolatry and imagery of Caesar and instead provide a focus on the idea of images of worship dedicated to the Lord. The cross became the new Caesar, with images adorning multiple surfaces and creating a new identity for the Empire as the Holy Roman Empire.

The release of the heavily enforced ideas of iconography enabled artists to begin to move towards a new tradition of artwork, focusing on Biblical stories to educate old and new converts to Christianity. Many works were created in this timeframe as a means of translating old polytheistic ideas into monotheistic ones that depicted morals and traditions that were previously only passed down verbally. During this time period, few artists were known by name; not a single painting or fresco⁷⁸ bears a signature and only a few are documented as the work of a particular artist. This means that the work was being endorsed in large part by the empire and those in power; these endorsements often came from the aristocrats, for money in any day and age equals the power to influence. The most commis-

⁷⁶ Smith and Morra, *The Prosethic Impulse* pg. 25-26

⁷⁷ Brown Douglas, Kelly, *What's Faith Got to Do With It?* pg. 40-50. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005.

⁷⁸ Defined as mural paintings; large wall decorations that are integrated within the physical space and architecture of its setting.

sioned works of art were frescoes; which depicted the importance of religion and its connection to community values. The object of early Christian art was to confirm and express the spiritual goals of Christianity.

From frescoes, artists began working on miniature Christian churches, called reliquaries, that were to host holy objects or bones of saints. Reliquaries were known by their Christian iconography of the reliefs on the outer arenas; when previously Christian art was considered to be taboo and metaphorical, the merger of Empire and religion coupled with the empire's belief in divine providence, led to more literal depictions of Biblical stories. Von Ogden Vogt noted in *Art & Religion* that "the spiritual life of a time is depicted with inescapable exactness in its artistry."⁷⁹ As Christianity moved further away from its Jewish heritage and into the protected realm of the Empire, culture began to revalue its lost feelings and to seek them within the world of the arts. Vogt further notes that "art is not detached from life; it makes life and is made by it."⁸⁰ As religion and art are alike in their drive to recreate the world and that world's reality after the heart's desire, the empire had to step in and determine the ways in which the audience and the artist would be able to understand the narratives presented to them.

Jean Anovilh claims that, "Life is all very well. But it lacks form. It is the purpose of art to give it some." Similarly, *The Prosthetic Impulse* points out that the quest for perfection, for a beauty that looks immoral, any inner disequilibrium is able to bring about a collapse.⁸¹ This quest for perfection in art is often driven by an empirical desire to continue in its divine missions. These divine missions, often called providence, reflect the way in which both Empire and religion have, over time, become dependent upon each other for survival; without one, the other can be brought down and the cycle of power will continue without being checked. For Stephen Webb, God is a player in history and providence is the description of how God works within the world⁸². Many acts committed in the name of providence have led to the destruction of other cultural identities most recently through war and colonization economically or one country's physical presence within another. Throughout history, Christian missionaries have entered into other territories on behalf of both the Church and the Empire, using forms of imperial exegesis as a means of legitimizing their actions in other countries. While exegesis uses scripture to view current situations, imperial exegesis utilizes scripture to legitimate the actions of a nation or body of people. Exegesis can thus be applied to art; in looking at the hidden meanings within a successful work of art, the audience

⁷⁹ Vogt, Von Ogden. *Art and Religion*. pg. 9 New Haven: Yale UP, 1921.

⁸⁰ Vogt, Von Ogden. *Art and Religion*. pg. 10 New Haven: Yale UP, 1921.

⁸¹ Smith, Marquard, and Joanne Morra, eds. *The Prosthetic Impulse*. pg. 76. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006

⁸² Webb, Stephen H. *American Providence*. pg. 9. New York/London: Continuum, 2004

should be able to find a meaning that enables a contextualization of the situation. The problem with this is that everyone looks at scripture, and thus art, with biased eyes. Who is doing the looking determines who is getting out what is within. In exegesis, how compatible the looker is with what is being looked at determines the way in which the truth is presented,

When Empirical forces are the ones conducting the exegesis, it often results in the nation utilizing the symbols of the dominant religion as a means of authorizing national actions. Webb makes it clear to his audience that providence is not fate; this being said, there was a distinct change in the ways in which citizens of the empire began to conduct business in and outside of the empire. Providence allowed for citizens to chalk up their actions as something that God wanted them to do. It enabled them to believe that as long as God is a player in history, and thus in their actions within the world, than each little change in what would have previously been called fate became something on a much larger scale; there was something that was driving them to act morally or amorally and thus actions within the homeland and abroad were alright as long as they matched God's plan. One of the problems with this idea is the way in which Christianity, a religion of salvation, emphasized the inner, spiritual life, offering up a promise of life after death for the soul in an eternal Paradise. This idea of a Garden of Eden which was attainable only through death and repenting catered to those in a more marginalized position in society; as a result, those on the margins were often better able to interpret the Biblical stories as their current context closely matched that of Jesus' time.

The notion of Providence in an Empirical context led to a rise in Christian art. The expanding of institutions and hierarchy of the Church caused a greater demand for Christian artwork. From the sixth century up through the medieval period in Europe, Christianity developed a series of rites and rituals that came to be known as liturgy. Many works of art were constructed for the centralized positioning of the altar, drawing members of the congregation's eyes towards what was going on, allowing them to be placed in a state of awe produced by elaborate figures. The altar became a focus of ritual and Christian art as many artists tried to display the grandeur and mystery found within the service. H.A. Reinhold, in *Liturgy and Art*, and claims "the visual art leaves the Church, the Church becomes ineffective."⁸³ In early Christian art, visual representation was important for those members of society who were illiterate and wanted to be able to pass on Christian traditions throughout the community. Once the symbolic character of the liturgy was understood, artists were able to play off the ways in which liturgical art was

⁸³ Reinhold, H.A. *Liturgy and Art*. New York: Harper & Row. 1996

symbolic in its naturalism and, due to a high demand for liturgical art, were able to secure commissions through members of the Empire. Members of society would attempt to outdo each other with lavish sculptural and painted works to donate to their local congregation; this drive has been speculated to be one of the forces that caused the Church to fully merge with Empire and create a system of indulgences that allowed people to figuratively 'buy heaven.'

The hegemonic influences of the Empire combined with the growing power of the Church called for artists of all mediums to come together to create art that was 'spiritual' in its understanding and easily accessible. The importance of written texts emerged within this period primarily for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as well as manuscripts within Eastern religions; the lettering and decoration of the texts were considered to be acts of religious devotion in and of themselves. Illuminated manuscripts blurred the line between the artist and religion as the majority of all such manuscripts were produced by monks. While the work of the monks was important to the creation of a more literate society, there was also a class of artists labeled 'lay artists' who lived in cities and were not connected to a particular religion that would produce works of non-religious importance; these lay artists were among the first to organize and form guilds, thus removing them from the realm of 'artist' into the realm of 'artisan.'

These artisans are responsible for a majority of the works produced for the Empire throughout the course of the medieval period in Europe. Armed with the knowledge that faith brings salvation, these artisans were responsible for creating much of the architecture of the early Christian and Byzantine art. Early Christian architecture concerned itself initially with the construction of catacombs⁸⁴, choosing to decorate the complexes with marble sarcophagi⁸⁵ and mosaics. These catacombs often displayed the ways in which socio-economic powers were at play within the Empire by creating a 'sacred' space for those in power while opting for open, often crowded, traditional burial plots for the marginalized. As early Christian artists were challenged to express the promises and mysteries of their new faith, they worked to create the means to communicate the ideals of Christianity as it changed and became more public. Many of these artists were anonymous, simply aiding in the transition from the ancient to the medieval world.

One of the earliest forms of Christian architecture was that of the Basilican church. The simple, rectangular structure drew the congregation from the rear of the structure towards the front, with the front seats designated for those in a state of power and the back for those deemed socially undesirable. Often these struc-

⁸⁴ Defined as underground burial complexes which would eventually give way to the more modern cemetery.

⁸⁵ Defined as stone coffins typically adorned with scripture or inscriptions.

tures, such as the old St. Peter's Basilica, held inscriptions praising the work and endorsing the Empire. The one above the old St. Peter's Basilica reads, "Because under your guidance the world rose triumphant to the skies, Constantine, himself a victor, built You this hall." This clear intermingling of the Church and State served as a reminder of how Constantine brought Christianity out of persecution which, in turn, enabled them to become the persecutors. Drawing off the original Roman architecture, the Basilican structures allowed for a large gathering of people, enabling the Word of God, as well as Empirical ideals, to spread quickly to those in attendance. From the Basilican design, architects decided to create another architectural innovation in the remodeling of the centrally planned church. This model was often round with the alter taking up the majority of the central floor space; in this way, the congregation was supposed to be able to be on equal grounds with those around them, they were all going to be saved through the acceptance of Christ as Savior. The circular alter at the center was utilized by a series of priests and deacons, with the head priest standing at the top on a raised pulpit. By creating a space where individuals were to be treated more equally, the architect as artist was able to emulate the feeling of Christ's tomb metaphorically in a more economical way than the Basilican church could.

Stepping back from architecture, it is important to note that the reason that many of the artistic masters -- Van Gogh, Goya, Da Vinci -- all became famous due to their endorsement by Empirical forces. Those in power -- royalty, rich merchants, and other members of nobility -- would compete with each other well up until the modern era to see who could own a work by a famous artist. Each country held their own standards for art, but the most well-known and respected artists of the last two thousand years were trained and/or lived in Italy. Italian art was known for its portrayal of the dualism that rests between the human and the divine. Michael Wheeler, in *Ruskin's God*, notes the way in which visual delight leads to spiritual revelation.⁸⁶ Bill Viola, a contemporary artist, further notes in *Art & Spirituality* the ways in which creativity is not the sole providence and possession of the artist.⁸⁷ Many artists became pawns of those in power, creating sponsored works of art in an attempt to break away from poverty and elevate themselves to a higher social status. For many, the art produced stepped away from creating spiritually revealing works towards more commercialized works with religious and political undertones. One cannot look upon Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* without trying to determine the secret behind that mystery smile.

⁸⁶ Wheeler, Michael. *Ruskin's God*, pg. 141. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999

⁸⁷ Hall, Billy and David Jasper, eds. *Art and the Spiritual*. "Art and Spirituality", Bill Viola. Great Britain: University of Sunderland Press, 2003

As art began to split into two realms, the commercial and the religious, many communities and playwrights came together to produce a small series of works that sought to discuss the moral values of Christianity. One of these was a play entitled *La Danse Macabre* meaning 'The Dance of Death', in which the moralities of the Church were taught en masse to the town through the development of a rather simple idea. In an era when epidemics were sweeping throughout Europe, the performance of *La Danse Macabre* enabled the popular imagination to be brought back to the subject of death and its universalizing sway. The dance was born out of a desire of the more marginalized citizens to come to terms with the truth that all humans must die and should therefore prepare themselves to appear before their final Judge (God) through their actions in this life. Throughout the play, Death appears not as an apocalyptic, destructive figure, but instead as a messenger of God summoning human beings to a Paradise beyond the grave; Death, acting his part as the messenger, was the ring-leader of the day, calling for musicians, dancers, singers and others to join in following him in the dance of death. The play was usually set within the confines of a cemetery and opened with a sermon on the finitude of life and the certainty of humanities morality delivered by a monk. The sermon's closure resulted in a series of figures decked out as skeletons emerging to call forth their victims one by one; those in powerful positions such as Popes or Emperors were called first, followed by those of lower ranks to call to attention the various social and economic classes. The play closed with a second sermon that preached the ideas and lessons that were to be found within the work itself. These plays would later give way to a series of engravings, lending its influence to artists of all mediums throughout the ages. This allegory on the universality of death was used as a means of uniting the masses. The personified death, followed by a series of skeletal figures from all walks of life, were produced to remind people of the fragility of life and the vanity and materialistic nature of the glories of earthly living.

These lessons, superimposed into the artwork created from approximately the fourth century onward, would continue to find their way into all genres of art due to the way in which they were able to universalize spirituality without removing the private realm. It is with this that I return to G.W.F Hegel's quote, "Art has the vocation of revealing *the truth* in the form of sensuous artistic shape, of representing the reconciled antithesis, and therefore, has its purpose in itself, in this representation and revelation." Through a variety of mediums, artists were able to take their revelations about God and the universe and present them to the public in hopes of revealing the truth. While many artists fell into the trap of working solely

for Imperialistic and religious purposes, many were able to find their own voice and create works that spoke of the way in which God is present within the world.

Section 2: The Modern Split Within the Artistic Realm

“We are [also] children of the royal consciousness. All of us, in one way or another, have deep commitments to it. So the first question is: How can we have enough freedom to imagine... a real historical newness in our situation?”

Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, pg. 37

I begin with a reflection on a phrase used to describe a biblical passage “... where the imagination stays not at the outside, but dwells on the fearful emotion itself.”⁸⁸ For me, this phrase speaks eloquently of the ways in which there has been an artistic split since the late 1800s in terms of what is considered ‘fine art’ and what is ‘commercial.’ While the commerciality of some artists is viewed as a lesser art form, the creator still needs to be able to imagine an alternative to what is currently presented to the world. This contemplation, called by John Ruskin as “seeing with the Temple of the heart,”⁸⁹ of the ways in which art, as a whole, has divided itself according to the whims of the Empire, while still remaining unified in its desire to create an object of higher understanding.

It is often said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but when many of those eyes have been manipulated from a young age to look towards ideals of the Empire, we find, as *The Invisible God* quotes Balbus that “nothing is more difficult than to divert the mind from the habit of reliance on the eyes.”⁹⁰ Kwok Pui-lan illustrates the ways in which the modern community needs to be able to free itself of past colonial and Imperialistic endeavors in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*.⁹¹ The problem with society today is that many of us acknowledge the ways in which to truly know is a struggle; knowing, that is facing the current situation labeled as ‘reality’, means that one needs to break away from the dominant consciousness they are accustomed to and question the ways in which society is constructing our visions of reality. Returning to Brueggemann’s quote at the beginning of the section, we are all children of the royal consciousness; in order to free ourselves from our comfort zones, we need to be able to imagine an alternate way of living.

This is where art enters the picture. As stated earlier, art has currently been

⁸⁸ Ruskin’s *God*, p.65 on a discussion concerning the *Songs of Solomon*

⁸⁹ Ruskin’s *God*, p. 59

⁹⁰ Finney, Paul C. *The Invisible God*, pg. 29, New York/Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994

⁹¹ Pui-Lan, Kwok. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox P, 2005

broken into two distinct realms, that of the commercial and that of fine art. I believe that in order to understand this split, one needs to look at the reasoning for producing a work of art; W.G.F. Hegel, in *On Art, Religion, and the History of Philosophy*, breaks down this drive into three principle categories.⁹² To begin with, man creates in order to imitate nature; art as representation is able to present ordinary objects in extraordinary ways depending on the way in which the artist is looking at his/her subject matter. Pure imitation, delivers to the viewer exactly what the artist is seeing, be it biased or 'perfected.'⁹³ The second principle of creation is that it is the artist's task to bring into contact the audience's senses, feelings, and inspiration in a way that will hopefully elicit a form of emotion. This principle moves outside of the elementary stages of art and into a further realm in which the artist is able to create a body of work that will have the audience asking questions and imagining new answers. The final principle of creation is the power to present any possible subject matter in whatever artistic form the artist so chooses, reflecting the power of manipulation and the ways in which the ends can be justified. This third level of creation, for me, deals with how the artist is enabled to think of the ways in which his/her ideas, traditions, and morals can be placed inside of a work so as to grant the audience a form of narrative, however brief.

As such, art holds the unique ability to present religious and spiritual matter in a way that is decisively both overt and subtle at the same time. Often, the most religious work of art is the one that elicits the most questions concerning reality and, especially the question, "what if?" If a work of art is able to help a viewer perform a double exegesis, to understand the truth of God's Word and the way in which it applies to the current situation, then, according to Horsley, the work is able to illuminate the mind.⁹⁴ This illumination of the mind is often a result in what Pui-lan describes as finding your own voice; when a work of artistic craft enables you to divest yourself from what you've been nurtured in, from what you've emerged in, then you will be able to discover the hidden truths of God's revelation.⁹⁵ His revelations never seem to appear in the midst of noise, one must be able to garner the courage and inspiration to step outside of the traditional societal molds. In finding your voice, you are then able to draw upon your experiences and your situations to create an identity for yourself within the community. This crafting of identity, much like the creation of art, begins to construct a narrative which shapes our reality through which truth and knowledge are able to become realized. It is

⁹² Hegel, G.W.F. *On Art, Religion, and the History of Philosophy*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Company, Inc. 1970

⁹³ Such imitation is currently being employed throughout South-East Asia as a means of generating economy through the use of low-paying labor that asks local artists to reproduce famous works of art for foreigners to purchase for their own personal use.

⁹⁴ *Jesus and Empire*. pg. 5

⁹⁵ Pui-lan, Kwok. *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. pg. 1-20

important to remember, though, that as far as our identities go, who we *were* isn't necessarily who we are *now*. It is through the use of imagery and symbols that we are able to grasp a sense of who we are and who are aren't. The idea in both Imperialistic and religious terms is that the mantle of tradition doesn't fit forever; we are going to constantly have to adapt to the changing times or run the risk of being deemed irrelevant.

In our postmodern age of globalization, Empire, and mass-communication, one would think that we would be able to remain in the know about events occurring within different communities. The reality is that our drive towards installing a hegemonic economy has created a form of a soft barrier through which ideas fly and connections between individuals are broken down by electronic barriers. This widespread globalization, brought on by the quick spread of the Internet, has both aided in providing information at a quicker pace, while at the same time systematically creating a generation that does not know how to function without technology. In chapter three of *The Prosthetic Impulse*, Marquard Smith introduces the term techofetishism, described as the widespread and well-known series of cultural practices that are acted upon by scholars, writers, artists, and others who fetishize technology in their artistic endeavors within the confines of their intellectual communities and within everyday life.⁹⁶ This fetishism of technology has led to the creation of a 'post human' living in a postmodern world. The post human subject is described further in *The Prosthetic Impulse* as a hybridization, a collection of heterogeneous components whose boundaries undergo continuous phases of construction and reconstruction.⁹⁷ While Smith and Morra meant for the term to be taken into account as an understanding of the use of prosthetics and technology in the body, I believe that the term perfectly describes the ways in which many humans are living in this postmodern age. Vivian Sobchack continues on Smith and Morra's tangent in her essay "A Leg to Stand On: Prosthetics, Metaphor, and Materiality" by pointing out the ways in which the current displacement of people create a sense of an out-of-body experience.⁹⁸ She quotes Paul Ricoeur as saying, "If there is a point in our experience where living expression states living existence, it is where our movement up the entropic slope of language encounters the movement by which we come back this side of the distinction between actuality, action, production, motion."⁹⁹ This suggests that in order to return to our bodily states, we must perform tropological phenomenology; that is, use the scriptures as a source of moral guidance by utilizing an approach that concentrates on the study

⁹⁶ *The Prosthetic Impulse*, pg.43

⁹⁷ *The Prosthetic Impulse*, pg. 17-41

⁹⁸ *The Prosthetic Impulse*, pg. 17-41

⁹⁹ For further reading, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, Ricoeur

of consciousness and the objects of direct experience.

This approach to analyzing the dominant consciousness is something that both Mark Lewis Taylor and Walter Brueggemann explore in their ideas of Prophetic Spirit and Prophetic Imagination. The role of the prophet, for both authors, is to 'nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception' that is radically different than the one presented to us.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Taylor adds that the role of Prophetic Spirit, a secular image, is to discern and call out the prevailing order to create a sense of hope and inspiration in working towards a new future; the Prophet is there to energize and criticize the ways in which the powers that be have created a system that mainly benefits the few in power.¹⁰¹ The idea of utilizing the imagination, something that Empire is often fearful of, is something that allows for whiffs of Prophetic Spirit and Imagination to emerge in works of art. Flannery O'Connor states that Prophetic Spirit and Imagination especially when placed into a visual and/or tangible form is able to challenge the royal consciousness by noting, "...Concrete, passionate, and imaginative, prophetic in its form, prophetic speech is nonetheless 'a sharp sword,' conveying a vision 'designed to shock rather than edify.'"¹⁰²

This desire to create a shock effect is something that stems from our national and even global mistrust of absolutes and metanarratives. As we live in a pluralistic society that strives to commodify everything, a multiplicity of 'truths' leads to a confusion over the way in which met narratives, or social constructions, survive; we prefer to believe that truth is not something relative, just something that is. The problem with a pluralistic approach to reality is that people become disconnected with reality and instead begin to fall into the apathetic trap of the dominant consciousness. When you commodify everything, nothing truly becomes sacred. As the post-human is supposed to cherish spirit over adversity, so too does the postmodern human seek to construct a wall of falsified information. Trying to pick through the 'truths' often results in the pluralism breaking off into a dualism; it is hard to create a paradox when outside forces are driving the two objects into conflict with each other. Art, in this sense, is no different. As the strain between attempting to satisfy monetary and creative needs increases many artists found themselves venturing into the commercial realm in order to the gain the capital necessary for them to hold some form of influence.

When art enters into the commercial realm, the artist needs to make sure that the imagery and symbols he/she chose are going to be able to hold up on their

¹⁰⁰ Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. pg. 39

¹⁰¹ Taylor, Mark Lewis. *Religion, Politics, and the Christian Right*. pg. 9

¹⁰² Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. pg. xv

own. Empire often has a way of adopting traditions, imagery, and symbols to use for its own purposes, but as long as the artist, equipped with Prophetic Imagination and Spirit, is willing to struggle to keep their ideas out of the dominant consciousness, then the imagery and symbols can be used against the Empire. Often what happens is an artist will design a simple graphic such as the Coca-Cola logo that is, in turn, marketed, commodified, and plastered throughout the world in as many forms as possible in an attempt to engrain the brand name on a potential consumers mind. The artist, upon selling the image over to the global economy, has primarily said 'hello' to a sum of money in exchange for the feeling of holding power over those who continue to remain marginalized and 'goodbye' to the usage and meaning of the symbol.

Our postmodern society has given rise to multiple generations of young kids all seeking material fulfillment through the very products that artists have designed for the Empire without recognizing the ways in which their lives are incredibly manipulated. I once read that the global market does not want everyone to enjoy the same exact things as it reduces the need for competition and creates a market that folds in on itself due to lack of consumer motivation. The same concept applies to the realm of commercial arts; without individuals stepping up and producing work that drives the audience to do more than question where to buy it, the artist would be able to take back the public sphere that the work itself is being exploited in. What often occurs within the commercial realm is that the artist him/herself becomes a commodity, utilized only to create more symbols for the increasingly global Empire and ignored when the artist attempts to venture into other mediums. In this way, the artist is forced to work between two realms of art: one personal and often more along the lines of what can be considered 'fine art', the other productive often classified in the realm of commercial art that enables an individual, or group, to gain some form of political, social or economic power within society.

These two realms are based loosely upon the ideas found in Kathryn Tanner's book, *Economy of Grace*¹⁰³. Tanner primarily begins with the central idea that theology is economic; it is with this idea that I argue that art, in a sense, is also primarily economic. While many artists are not constantly preoccupied creating with work for monetary value, oftentimes the artist is forced into commercial venues as a means of gaining access to the basic human right of livelihood. As the global economy is primarily exchange driven, the artist needs to be able to produce in order to keep up with changing technologies and the whim of the customer. Instead of focusing on the way in which art began as a communal activity, with the

¹⁰³ Tanner, Kathryn. *Economy of Grace*. pg. 2

secrets of the trade passed from generation to generation, the Empire prefers to have aspiring artists trained in large schools that focus primarily on the development of technique and the creation of an individual instead of fostering creativity and imaginative ideas that allow for a sense of community. At a young age we are instructed to share and to give wholeheartedly to those around us who were in need, yet as we grow older we are told that our creative genius is something that is for individual use, only to re-emerge in the public realm if we are granted a commission. Instead of treating the signs of creative genius as a gift from God, our society tries to shut down the imagination if it isn't easily marketable as a way of keeping members of society in check and plugged into the global network.

Globalization, defined by Cynthia Moe-Lobeda as the [economic] interconnectedness of nations that weakens the transitional, national and continental boundaries, plays a large part in the ways in which the art has been taken under the wing of the Empire for its own purposes.¹⁰⁴ As globalization is another form of Empire, the artist needs to be aware of the social erosion that is taking place due to the intense commodification and universalizing of Eurocentric ideas. According to Moe-Lobeda, if one were to practice moral agency (the ability to embody love and to put it into action through the orientation of life around the community, prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable in order to instill a sense of hope), one would be able to gather a sense of the indwelling God who leads those willing to take a change towards a futurizing and energetic present reality.¹⁰⁵

Globalization, like Empire, has been both a bane and blessing for the artistic community. While sources such as the Internet allow for a wider audience to exhibit work to, the bleeding of cultures often results in an assortment of hybridized ideas that can, if used creatively and with knowledge of the influences' origins, potentially be good or could prove detrimental such as when ideas are forced upon a country in an attempt to Westernize and create a more 'unified' one dimensional world. This impulse, be it through marketing and economical, media-based, or military actions, to impose Westernized views upon other cultures has led to strong resistance from other cultures sometimes resulting in violence such as seen on September 11, 2001.

With a sweeping rise in patriotism following the events of September 11th, many artists were commissioned to create monuments to the victims. What occurred in the aftermath was a widespread emotional attachment to ideas of the state and various religious sects resulting in the creation of works that inevitably glorified the Empire instead of the individuals they were originally supposed to

¹⁰⁴ Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia, *Healing a Broken World*, pg. 3

¹⁰⁵ Moe-Lobeda, Cynthia, *Healing a Broken World*, pg. 2

commemorate. This rise in 'super patriotism,' as Taylor refers to it, gave the government permission to steal back previous symbols of the Empire as well as create new ones; the government then utilized these symbols as a means of creating a scare tactic to control the nation. What occurred in the months following September 11th, was, along with an overwhelming emergence of patriotism mixed with the fear of another attack, a dramatic rise of the Christian Right and its symbols to power. The enmeshments of the US churches with the domineering global community, in addition to the easy accommodation of faith and the way in which the consumer-driven economy has set up a practice of commodification, are forewarnings of the way in which people need to begin to find the truth provided through imaginative revelation. The hegemonic powers of the dominant consciousness, especially in the last decade, have created a system in which identity, heritage, and imagination are being stripped away from us as a means of protecting the ideals of the Empire. Brueggemann explains that, "The royal consciousness with its program of achievable satiation has redefined our notions of humanness... It has created a subjective consciousness concerned only with self-satisfaction. It has denied the legitimacy of tradition that requires us to remember, of authority that expects us to answer, of communities that calls us to care."¹⁰⁶ Brueggemann goes on to further explain the ways in which the royal consciousness has captured the present circumstances, thus negating any hope of a new and promised future by reclaiming the language, especially, as Pui-lan calls it, 'writing back.'¹⁰⁷ In writing back, both literally and figuratively, the artist is able to take an oppositional stance to the Empire, effectively biting the hand that feeds him/her, at the same time creating room to speak of his/her current position be it found within the Biblical tradition or not. The role of the commercial artist is to be able to garner what is going on around them in terms of division and accumulation of power and utilize that information to shatter people's ideas of reality, willing to take up the fight and begin to imagine the new future Reality.

While, due to economic issues and the high desire within large corporations for those who can think creatively, Empire can be a blessing, it also holds the negative connotations of functioning as a bane for art. On the one side of the artistic duality lies the realm of commercial art; on the other, the realm of fine art. Those artists who fall into this category include writers, actors, musicians, architectures, artists, even graphic designers if they are in the profession for the love of it and not for monetary gain; each individual is working for the love of his/her craft, understanding that he/she is a member of the easily dispensable section of society.

¹⁰⁶ Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. pg. 37

¹⁰⁷ Pui-Lan, Kwok, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*, pg. 125-126

The realm of fine art is protected by a set of barriers. On one hand, the modern notion that art is a privilege associated with the knowledge of 'up-and-coming' artists has created an elitist feel to those patrons of the artistic community. Each century has their particular go-to artist, the one whose works, regardless of the subject matter, often go for copious sums of money. This exchange of goods, and in a way services, provides both parties with a necessity. For one it is the knowledge of a secure paycheck, for the other, it is the knowledge that they hold an original artwork in their grasp, thus elevating their social status slightly at the club. This idea that only the truly elite members of society could know about 'good art' stemmed from previous centuries in which the only ones who could afford the art were the upper class. With the creation of the first gallery space, artists were able to reach a wider demographic and thus begin to share their ideas with the world. In more recent times, the prestige associated with attending gallery openings has faded due to the construction of thousands of galleries all across the country. By opening up to the public, powerful and marginalized alike, galleries became able to generate more business and found that they could draw larger crowds, thus creating more advertisement specifically through word of mouth. In this sense, the fine arts were able to work in tandem with the Empire, oftentimes without having to give up any personal property such as identity, drive and creativity in the process. Many times, within the protection of the gallery space, the artist is able to speak of his/her sexual orientation, gender issues, or problems with authority in a way that engages the audience in a series of discussions concerning the nature of the piece. While many larger galleries still censor what is shown, the emergence of smaller galleries throughout the world has allowed artists to continue taking chances in their art and still be able to show them regardless of content. It is this kind of support from the community that enables an artist to create out of his/her situation in a manner that expresses the dynamics that make up the identity of the artist.

With so many people connected worldwide to the Internet, artists have often had to utilize it as a means of proactively marketing themselves to gather credentials and job possibilities. Many artists are opting for the creation of a website through which potential employers and/or patrons can view the work and contact the artist with further questions. While the idea of millions of people being able to see your work does sound appealing, it certainly has its drawbacks. The artist is responsible for the upkeep of the website, ensuring that the bandwidth and images are all up and running, all the while trying to generate a buzz about their work and keep their private life out of the public sphere. With the internet comes the inevitable rush of people being able to access information about you and trying to uti-

lize your talents; there are ways in which an individual can become 'Net Famous' so that the individual's rise to fame occurs with little face to face interactions. The Internet may be a great source of inspiration and research for artists, but this lack of real interaction is one of the leading causes for the break down of community the world over.¹⁰⁸ While initially the idea of reaching virtually everywhere may sound appealing, in the long run the bleeding of cultures across thin wires, coupled with the ease in which people are able to steal your work leads the artist to resort to extreme measures to ensure ownership as well as determine how to protect their work from being used to support the Empire.

Unfortunately, as artists do need access to livelihood, they often will have to work alongside Empirical ideas to generate enough money to continue with their own personal work. This understanding between the artist and those in positions of power is often a struggle to determine who will control the language and the artistic inspirations; while they belong solely to the artist, once the artist begins to give up hope in how Prophetic Imagination and Spirit are to 'free' the world from its chains, the Empire has won. The artist needs to be able to surround his/herself with creative energy and love in order to produce work that will be able to articulate the artistic ideas that went into the creation process. This being said, it is important for the artist to recognize the situation and to draw upon it without internalizing it as a way of checking the Empire's grasp on the idea of reality.

Conclusion: Inspiration to Depart With

I have always been struck by the way in which my understanding of the artistic realm was presupposed for me since my birth into an artistic family. My experiences throughout life, both inside and outside of the ideas of Empire, have led me to come to terms with the way in which art has enabled me to find an understanding of God. I believe God is within artistic expression, guiding the artist through their struggles, breathing a burst of fresh breath into an otherwise stagnant environment to give the artist courage and hope for a future where the life choices and styles of humanity aren't pre-determined by birth, socio-economic status, political stance, or the influence of any other outside sources. This is why when Vogt concludes his chapter on 'The Cleft Between Art and Religion' stating that, "religion is more than beauty, and worship is more than art," I can breathe a sigh of relief for the hope and knowledge of future generations to come.¹⁰⁹ If a religious scholar is able to see the beauty in life, then I can draw inspiration from the understanding that as an

¹⁰⁸ The suburban sprawl also is a significant factor in this community breakdown.

¹⁰⁹ Vogt, Von Ogden, *Art and Religion*, pg. 47

artist I am to be captivated by the life of beauty.

Inspiration can come from any source; for some it is an intrinsic emotion that arises out of a deep desire to express themselves; for others it comes from stepping back and remaining a bystander for most of their lives. Many people receive some sort of inspiration, be it good or bad, from their parents that drive them to focus their energies and engage themselves in a creative task. When John James Ruskin sent his son, John Ruskin, a letter in 1829, he designated upon his son a divine commission to go out into the world and cultivate his talents. So it is with these extraordinary words from a father to his ten-year-old son that I leave you.

You are blessed with a fine Capacity and even Genius and you owe it as a Duty to _____ the author of your Being and the giver of your Talents to cultivate you powers and _____ use them in his Service and for the benefit of your fellow Creatures. You May be doomed to enlighten a People by your Wisdom and to adorn an age by your _____ Learning. It would be sinful in you to let the powers of your mind lie dormant _____ through the idleness of want of perseverance when they may at their maturity aid _____ the cause of Truth and of Religion and enable you to become in many ways a Benefactor to the Human Race...¹¹⁰

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¹¹⁰ Wheeler, Michael. *Ruskin's God*, pg. 3, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999

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