



FORUM

A Journal of Classical Humanities - September/October 2013, Year 7, Number 10

LEGIONARIES OF CHRIST
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, CHESHIRE, CT, USA

FORUM

Summer 2013 • Year 7, Number 11

CONTENTS

ART HISTORY



The Ache

Reflections from the Desk of a Lover of the Arts

Jonathan Flemings, LC Page 3



Deep within the Marble

An Exposition of Michaelangelo's Time, Life, and Style

Peter Fagan, LC Page 5

HISTORY



1550 vs 1900

Ideas and Consequences of the Enlightenment

Joshua Gregor, LC Page 8

FROM THE BLOG



When Broken Means Forever

Joseph Mernagh, LC Page 10



Can I be Faithful?

Reflection on the Consecrated Life

Eric Gilhooly, LC Page 11

Editorial

In this latest edition of Forum we are pleased to present some of the most outstanding writing from our students over the past few semesters since the publication of our previous edition. From reflections on the beauty of the arts to a blog article on fidelity to one's vocation to analysis of the history and works of arguably the greatest artist of the Renaissance, we hope the contents will serve as a source of cultural enrichment to all who read them.



LEGION OF CHRIST CHESHIRE

NOVIATE AND COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES OF CHESHIRE

© FORUM 2013

FORUM

The Ache

Reflections from the Desk of a Lover of the Arts

Jonathan Flemings, LC

Light diffuses itself gently on high, cream-colored, plastered walls and the worn, wooden floor from somewhere up above, filling the gallery with clarity. The hushed sounds of gentle footsteps on hardwood and the murmur of conversation somewhere in a distant atrium are an audible backdrop to the silence in the gallery where I'm standing *contrapposto* opposite a masterpiece. Everything else in the room recedes into a fuzzy blur round the circular frame before me. The trio of figures on the canvas seems to exist in an eternity of their own which has just opened to admit a lone visitor. In that quiet hall something about Rafael's creation, the *Alba Madonna*, captivates me, playing my soul like a cello in the hands of Pablo Casals. Gazing on the serenity of those faces and forms—the silent exchange between Mary and Jesus and John the Baptist, the motionless yet meaningful composition—is an experience

of beauty.

Inexperienced students in the Legion's humanities program often question the value of studying art, or at least miss the main point at first. Just last year I had some students who had not yet taken courses in art tell me they visited the National Gallery and



cruised through all the halls in about forty-five minutes. The longest time they spent in front of any particular work was two or three minutes. They might even have snickered at my quasi-mystical description of that contemplative pause before the *Alba Madonna*. But moments like that pause illustrate what studying the arts is all about.

Art is communication. It is the transmission of something powerful. People say artists are "inspired"; I just call that the Ache—it's the same thing. Every human soul instinctively longs for beauty. Wounded by a glimpse of

beauty, an artist will labor for days to incarnate the vision of some deeper reality, a vision of something more that makes the soul vibrate to its depths. That longing, that vision, is the Ache. Sometimes you do not feel the Ache; and some people feel it more acutely than others. But it is something proper to humanity to react to beauty, to feel the Ache. And it is inspired. Great works of art communicate the Ache.

The longing for beauty, the Ache, is part of what makes man man: it is hardwired into us. It is an unquenchable aspiration and quest for we-know-not-what-but-it-wounds. No one is impervious to beauty. Who does not quiver at the sight of a lovely face, a majestic sunset, an exquisite flower? Who does not thrill at the nobility of a hero, the magnanimity of a generous soul, the goodness of a saint? Somehow, somewhere, beauty—physical or spiritual—always gets to people because instinctively we know beauty and happiness are related. It is impossible to be indifferent.

However, the ability to *deeply* resonate with the Ache is acquired. Not everyone has the capacity to discover beauty in all the places where it lies hidden. I have had students tell me that art says nothing to them, or at least it is obvious: this is pretty; that is ugly. The soul has to be tuned, so to speak, until its strings hum even at the slightest brush of the bow. Tuning the soul to resonate with the Ache requires contact with and study of the great works of art and literature, the study of things that are beautiful,

like Rafael's *Alba Madonna*. You must study it to understand it. And once you understand, you will want more and more, and you will find more and more.



Yet beauty seems to have its drawbacks. Spend as much time with beautiful things and beautiful people as you want, you will never find enough. Discover beauty in things you never found it in before—an insect, a snowflake, a person, a relationship—and you still will not be satisfied. That is why I call it the Ache. By its very nature beauty compels you to search for more. Beauty always wounds us in this way; it always leaves us wondering and desiring. It turns our hearts outward on a quest.

It wounds because it leads us to God. "Nothing can set the will of man to rest but universal good which is not found in anything created, but in God alone.... God alone can fill the heart of man." (*Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 2, a. 8) And so it is for beauty as well. No beauty will heal the Ache but Beauty itself.



So by tuning a man's soul to the Ache, the study of the arts not only attunes it to beauty, but awakens him to who he is in the plan of God. It shows man that he is made for beauty, actually for *Beauty*; and all of creation is a score, a vista, whose beauty is meant to awaken the Ache and lead him to God. Reaching that understanding, but even more that experience, is the ultimate reason for why we study the arts.

the arts.

Deep within the Marble

An exposition of Michelangelo's time, life, and style

Peter Fagan, LC

Human beings drive history, and so every great age and epoch of our past has great men associated with it; men who either shaped it with their own hands, or embody the values and ideals of their time. For the High Renaissance, this man is Michelangelo. Who would not recognize him as the creator of *The Pieta*, the *Sistine Chapel*, or the dome of St. Peter's? How can such a man be studied? Well, through his art. His cultural background, artistic style, and personal life can be seen in *David*, *the Awakening Slave*, and *Moses*, a studious endeavor on which we now depart.

Michelangelo's *David* embodies the Renaissance ideals of beauty. The posture, at once lively and at rest, exudes harmony. The proportions: head to body, hand to arm, and torso to leg, match reality and please the eye. The musculature of the figure neither shrinks with leanness nor overpowers



with massiveness. Everything is right, he is the perfect human being.

Born in 1475, Michelangelo found himself amid the renewal of classical arts and letters that was the Renaissance. This return to antiquity prompted a new focus. Men placed their race at the center of the universe and history, everything revolved around the human being. In fact, the geocentric model of the solar system still prevailed at this time. Man, indeed, stood at the center of the cosmos. In his work, *The Dignity of man*, Pico Della Mirandola wrote "Nothing is more admirable than man" (1497). One aspect of *David* illustrates this anthropocentric worldview: the fact that he stands fourteen feet tall! The sculpture dwarfs

everything nearby, leaving the viewer with no choice but to contemplate man in his greatness.

Returning to the harmony described two paragraphs

previous, the balanced perfection which characterizes *David* also captures the aspirations of Renaissance men. In Michelangelo's day a Pope who could also lead a state skillfully was not hard to come by, neither was a philosopher who also practiced law, or a nobleman who loved the arts. The cultured men of the Renaissance strove for high, multifaceted ideals and called themselves humanists. This trend of developing multiple talents and bringing them together harmoniously in one human being is quite unlike modern society where most learned men choose a career and focus on that area alone. Michelangelo's work combines many elements into a single, unified whole. The left leg relaxes while the right bears the weight. Reversed for the upper body, the left arm is drawn up with the sling while the right hangs loose. Upon analyzing it, the observer notes the stark contrasts that rest together so perfectly in the sum total. So it was with the Renaissance man.

Life and Personality

Two different impressions are made by this *Awakening Slave* from the hands of Michelangelo. One person might see an unfinished sculpture, while the other sees a man straining to emerge from a block of marble. Perhaps it depends on the emotional sensitivity of the person but both are legitimate, and both provide insight into the life and personality of Michelangelo.

Incompletion as a theme pervades Michelangelo's life. Sadly, he left many unfinished projects behind at his parting. He couldn't complete the Sistine Chapel to his liking. His work on tombs for the Papacy remained unfinished. His project to sculpt the twelve apostles got no further than an incomplete St. Matthew! The incomplete slave above provides a reminder of the limitations of time, money, and opportunity that frustrated Michelangelo throughout his life. That is not to say that he was a failure, quite the contrary is true. However, he always worked alone because of his passionate nature, and this left him limited in the scope of what he was able to accomplish. The

second impression of *The Awakening Slave*, that of an emerging figure, illustrates Michelangelo's personality. The man struggles to break free from the marble, seemingly held back by the mass which envelops him. Michelangelo experienced a struggle similar to this. Possessed of a passionate nature and educated in a court of Neo-Platonists, Michelangelo was an idealist. In fact, he was an unflinching perfectionist. His works always began as a concept, and with his paintbrush or chisel he sought to match his representation to that ideal. Passionate zeal characterized this pursuit. When he began the Sistine Chapel many famous painters came to give him friendly advice on account of his inexperience, but Michelangelo locked himself away in the chapel alone to work. Their ideas fell short of his lofty aspirations. While a project was underway he ate few and scanty meals, reduced to chewing a piece of bread while he worked. He even failed to change his clothes for weeks at a time, sleeping and living on the job site. The struggling figure of the slave captures this impassioned desire to make his perfect ideas a reality.

Style

Perhaps the first detail of *Moses* to strike the mind is the muscles of his arms. Large, rippling with power, flexed and taut to the point of strain, they convey a sense of vigor and manly strength. Few men would find the audacity to stand in the way of such intimidating force. Muscles form an important part of Michelangelo's style. Nearly all his figures, including women, possess them in abundance.

Being an artist, beauty captivated Michelangelo. He looked for it, loved contemplating it, and endured great pains to reproduce it in his artwork. He was especially fascinated by the perfection of the ideal male body. That does not prove the existence of homosexual attraction, only that he appreciated bodily beauty. Sensitive men can see the harmony, proportion, and excellence in a well-formed person, be it male or female. This love for virility, musculature, and strength must be the reason for depicting women

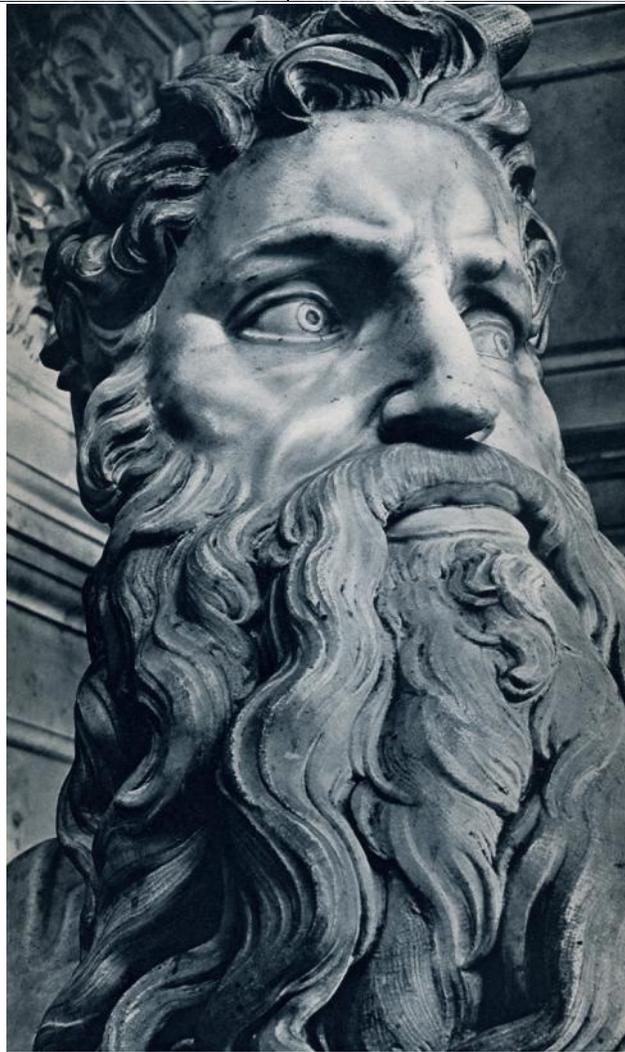
Related to bulging muscles, the size of *Moses* also speaks of another aspect of Michelangelo's style: Massiveness. This representation of the old Testament figure doesn't stop at a well-formed, fit, and strong figure, but overwhelms with weight and bulk. The protruding leg with its great proportions and massive muscles makes the viewer shrink back in awe. This element of style permeates all the rest of his works, and can be especially seen in the figures of *The Last Judgment*. Sometimes the extreme bulkiness even transcends nature. Nevertheless Michelangelo achieves his purpose: making a statement of sheer presence.

The last element of *Moses* to be seen is movement: twisting legs, straining arms, and a turned head. All of

Michelangelo's works exhibit some sort of motion. *Laocoon and his Sons*, the ancient Hellenistic sculpture unearthed during Michelangelo's time, certainly inspired him to represent emotive action. Perhaps also he learned to represent movement from Leonardo da Vinci, who captured organic movement through his study of the human person. Michelangelo shows the same ability to portray natural, organic motion, but without losing his emphasis on sheer size and bulk; an amazing synthesis of grace and power.

Conclusion

Michelangelo imitated the classical art of antiquity, loved the beauty of the human being, and mastered multiple forms of artistic expression. He was a true man of the Renaissance. The study of his life and personality through his art provides valuable insight into his day and age. *David* shows us its ideals of harmony and beauty, *Moses* teaches a love and respect for the human being, and *the Awakening Slave* reveals the personal conflict of perfection and imperfect reality. This provides evidence that the study of art is of essential value to understanding culture. Thanks be to Michelangelo for creating these windows into the past.

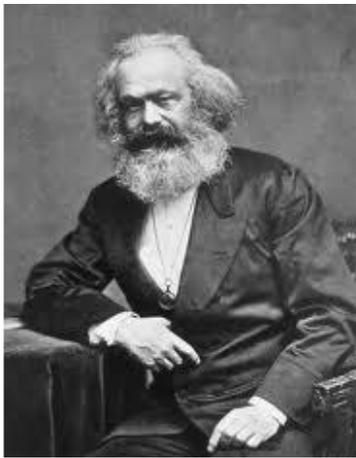


1550 versus 1900

Ideas and Consequences of the Enlightenment

Joshua Gregor, LC

The end of the nineteenth century in Europe was characterized by a certain questioning of traditional ideas about man, the world, and common belief, ideas that had formerly seemed fundamental to the Western world, even to the whole world. Such questioning



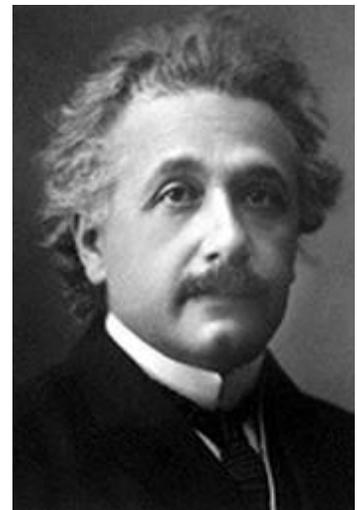
had been brewing for a long time, stirred up especially by the avant-garde thinkers of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. This change in thought had occurred in a strikingly short time within the big picture of

history, as seen when we compare it with the worldview of just a few centuries before, at the dawn of the Scientific Revolution.

First let's look at the view of man. In the 1500s people saw the world around them, indeed the whole universe, as a neatly contained, eternal system of incorruptible crystalline spheres. The earth, and hence man, stood at the center. How

could it not? That seemed to be the case, and it seemed only right that that should be the case, in keeping with the good old Greek teaching of Aristotle, Ptolemy, and all the rest. Man was central because man was special, and God was unquestionably in charge.

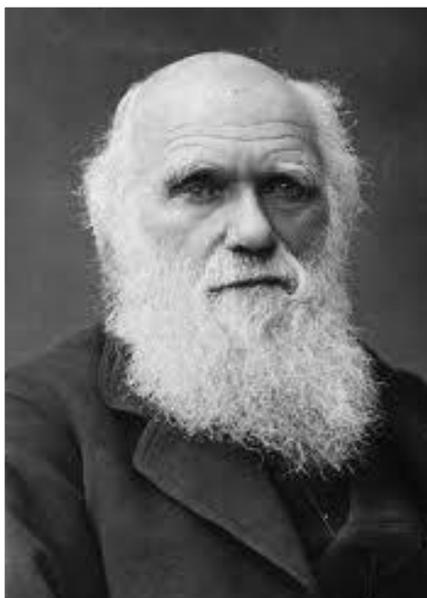
1900 saw an about-face of this position. The old ideas had broken down one by one. Copernicus and Galileo took the earth out of the center; Kepler squeezed the divine spheres; Newton showed it was all math. Then man's status on earth began to break down—religious dissidence and contact with other cultures led to the questioning of Europe's "correctness"; and then Darwin came along with *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) and showed that we're just smart apes with less hair. The psychological ideas of Pavlov and Freud



contributed even more to the notion that man is just a member of Animalia that got lucky. This view is even more prevalent today.

Another old idea was that of absolute truth and values. This too was called into question. The individualism and rights so dear to enlightened and liberal thinkers led some a little too far. Combined with the new ideas in physics around 1900, especially Einstein's relativity, this engendered an overemphasized individuality. For some, man now didn't know truth—he made truth. This was really radical compared with the 1500s. Subjectivism came to rule the roost.

Atheism and skepticism were also increasingly propounded as the centuries wore on—truly strange in the 1500s, such ideas went through Enlightenment deism (Fontanelle, Spinoza, Voltaire, Jefferson) all the way to big-name philosophy and political theory with Marx, Nietzsche, etc. Darwin's idea of "the survival of the strong" showed its impact in Nietzsche's "superman" and rejection of religion and morality as tools of the weak to keep the strong in check. And it trickled



Darwin's idea of the "survival of the strong" showed its impact in Nietzsche's "superman"



down to society and politics with social Darwinism and frenzied colonization.

With so many new and radical ideas out of the bag, even to say that cracks were forming in the foundational ideas of the West seems an understatement. To me it seems that the cracks were from the Enlightenment, and the new age of the turn of the century saw widening cracks and some initial crumbling. Not that all this breakdown of the old guard was bad—but too many intellectuals and thinkers, on seeing the old flaws, ignored the old good points as well. Ideas have consequences, and the ferment of ideas made the twentieth century a time of consequences, for better and for worse.

Can I Be Faithful?

Reflection on the Consecrated Life

Eric Gilhooly, LC

Can I be faithful? At times we all tend to wonder. When we experience our failures and weaknesses or when others aren't what we had hoped they would be, I think many of us in the Legion and consecrated life go back to the more fundamental questions, to *the* question at the root of the vocation. Will I be able to stay faithful to my consecration and to my priesthood no matter what? Others have fallen. I have fallen. Who am I to stay standing? Who am I to get back on my feet? Last September I made my perpetual vows, and there was one Gospel passage in particular that I prayed with. I'd like to share this reflection with you, keeping in mind that this is not exegesis, but a reflection about the vocation to consecrated life—using the Gospel to shed light on the vocation.

It's the passage when Peter walks on the water (Matthew 14:22-33). At first, the disciples are in the boat, rowing against the wind and waves. They see Christ, and Peter feels inside himself this call to step out of the boat and go towards Christ, this call similar to consecrated or priestly life. So he asks for and receives Christ's confirmation of the call: "If it is you, tell me to come to you on the water." "Come." With a super-human act of faith Peter begins a super-human and super-natural journey towards Christ over

the waters. Our vocation is supernatural in that very sense: above human nature and impossible if Christ had not called us.

So Peter starts walking, and he does fine until he takes his eyes off Christ. The key to our religious vocation is in looking at Christ. Everything else: the waves, the

wind, the boat etc., must be seen only insofar as reflected through Christ's eyes. Peter takes his eyes off Christ, gets distracted with the difficulties, and begins to sink.

In consecrated life the only thing we must persevere in is...

trust. Sure, we'll have our falls, our "sinking moments", but we need to keep turning back to Christ. Peter did. He did it again after denying Our Lord and yet again as he was fleeing Rome and Jesus appeared to him asking, "*Quo vadis?*" Peter called out to Christ as he sunk. That's what makes Peter great; that's what makes him a saint.

So the fundamental question is not, "Can I be faithful?" Will I have the strength? No. Will I have the courage to not turn back? No. Will I be able to live every moment of my life in perfect surrender to the Father's will? No. I can't do any of these things. The fundamental question lies elsewhere. *Are you my life, Lord? Will I gaze only at you and walk on water through the power of your grace?*



When Broken Means Forever

Joseph Mernagh, LC

Have you ever picked up a computer chip and wondered how that microscopic maze of wires works? Or have you ever sighed in exasperation over a simple toy or game that you couldn't figure out how to fix? If you're like me, in some forgotten corner of your house there's a pile of screws, plastic pieces, and assorted toy parts that were taken apart... permanently.

That's because while technology is off and away, soaring to new heights and tackling new challenges, you and I stay rooted here on earth in ignorant bliss of these complexities. And our ignorance doesn't lessen our enjoyment of the finished product. However, a recent study has shown that, while technology is booming, the number of technicians is actually decreasing. Soon, they prophesy ominously, there will be no one left to fix our broken iPods and iPhones. A growing market could crash, catapulting us back to the technological Dark Ages.

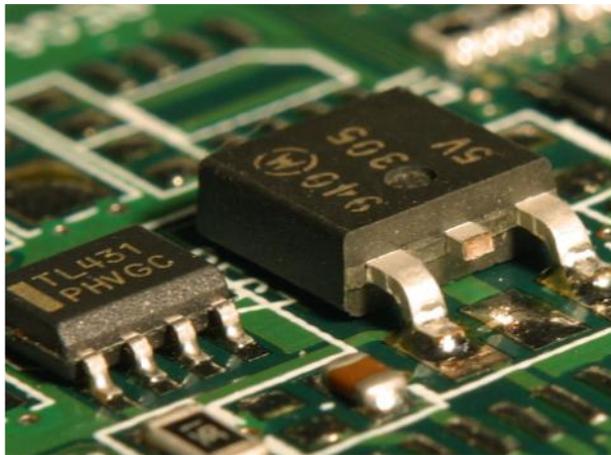
Perhaps Our Lord foresaw the decline of specialized workers when he begged his disciples, "Ask the Master of the harvest to send out laborers... the harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few." Perhaps he envisioned broken hearts, ruined lives, and souls that

simply couldn't be fixed: no one remained who knew how to. I can live without the latest craze: perhaps that would even be a blessing. But without Mass, Confession, and the example of saintly people, I know that my spiritual life would quickly collapse.

In a sense, we are both the harvest and the laborer. As the harvest, we feel the need for guidance, support, and encouragement through the twists and turns of life. As the laborer, we offer that guidance to others. There is really no limit to the amount of good we can and should do, leading souls to sincere faith in Christ by our teaching and witness. For *"how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim*

him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Rm 10:14-15)

How beautiful are the feet that bring Christ's message; the mouth that speaks his words; the hands that continue his saving and healing work! For broken need not be forever.





LEGION OF CHRIST **CHESHIRE**

NOVITIATE AND COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES OF CHESHIRE