

same limitations as ours. But there is a real danger in this, that in contrast to the humanness of the saints we should allow Christ himself to seem so exalted as to be almost inhuman. If the saints are real, then Christ is real with a much more vivid reality, and we must not let him vanish from the children's eyes in a cloud of doctrine which does not touch the heart. The human limitations and everyday circumstances of the saints' lives bring them near to us, make them not types but individuals. But when we teach children about Christ, he seems too often to have no individuality at all.

I have talked about reading and discussing the New Testament to discover what kind of people the first saints were. Surely it is even more important to use this method to make children see our Lord as a real person in a particular place and situation. He must not seem to the children merely supremely holy, wise and loving, because these things are in danger of remaining only words to them. They must learn to think of him as a person who walked in a particular way, whose nose was a particular shape, who had recognizable mannerisms, habits of voice, personal turns of phrase. The lives of saints should illuminate for us the life of God made man; not just Man with a capital M, but one particular man. They should lead back to him. If they do not, if they come to seem to the children more real and interesting than the Incarnate God of whose perfect humanity theirs is only a reflection, then our teaching of religion is upside down and we have failed in the task entrusted to us.



## THE MAKING OF AN IMAGE

MICHAEL CLARK

**C**HRISTIAN art in its broad sense is generally taken to mean any creative work done by an artist who is a professing Christian. Today I wish to consider a particular aspect of Christian art, that is work carried out for, and applied to churches, chapels, or schools, with particular reference to images of the Saints.

In the first place let us consider the attitude of mind the artist

should have in his approach to the problems of ecclesiastical art. It almost goes without saying that the Christian artist should have a sound knowledge of his Faith, and that he should be to some extent aware of contemporary Christian life and thought. In fact the visual arts must be part of this ever developing and active intellectual life of the Church, if they are to rise above the general level of the stagnant trade tawdriness of the work in many of our churches.

The Christian artist of his day, if he is true to himself, is part of the life of the Church, but is also moved by the contemporary secular art thought and practice. Is it possible to accept both, and marry them together in this work for the Church? This is not easy to answer. Contemporary art form has many origins and influences. It springs from chaotic thought, much of it non-Christian. In some of its manifestations it would appear almost evil in the sense that it reduces the human personality to the primal, ignoring and in some cases rejecting, Redemption. On the other hand a great deal is searching for truth which is brought out by the fact that it attempts to reduce expression to its essentials. It is necessary that the Christian artist should talk the language of his day if his work is to be a living expression of his time. He will not touch the spiritual life of those he lives with, if his work is merely a rehash of the past.

It seems reasonable that the Christian artist who works for the Church should understand and bear in mind the intentions the Church has in its use of images. As I see it there are three main reasons for images of the Saints in our churches:

Firstly, to give glory to God by honouring his Saints.

Secondly, to assist us in our spiritual life.

Thirdly, to give thanks to God for his gifts to man by adorning his house with offerings of our skill.

How is the artist to give glory to God through his work? He must make these objects with love and skill. Remembering that all his gifts come from God, he must pray that God will use him and work through him. This requires humility, a difficult virtue for most artists, who have been brought up to near worship of individualism.

How is the image which the artist is to make to assist others in their spiritual life? It requires as full an understanding of the particular Saint as the artist is capable of. It is not sufficient, if

for example the subject is St Paul, to know merely that St Paul wrote, and died by the sword. A piece of sculpture based on this meagre knowledge might be objectively satisfying, but it is hardly likely that it will be Pauline in content. Assuming that having read and thought about the subject, the artist has established a concept of the Saint in his own mind, he is then faced with the even more difficult problem of putting these ideas over through his work. Granted that some of the work done by artists today stands a better chance of being understood in heaven than on earth, there are many of us doing work that is not purposely obscure. When an artist undertakes to interpret a religious subject, he will attempt to capture some of the inner mystery of Faith. To achieve this he must be free to select and emphasize essentials and to use symbols. As a result his work may not immediately be obvious and appealing. The beholder is therefore required to take an active part in the relationship between himself, the artist, and the Saint. He must be prepared to look with an open mind and eye to see that which lies within. The artist for his part, if conscious of his responsibilities for others, will attempt to say what needs to be said with gentleness, but without injury to his aesthetic conscience.

Thirdly, how is this image to be a worthy offering of the skill and gifts which we have received from God? No church or chapel, abbey or priory, school or convent, is the individual gift of one man to God. It is a community gift whether from a religious community or parish. In the same way paintings, sculpture, and other works placed in our churches are not the sole concern of the artist and the donor. The artist is chosen to give visual form to the spiritual life of the community. His work is placed in the house of God as an expression of the creative powers and manual skill that God has implanted in us all.

Many outside the Church would protest that this application of the artist's work within the Church, involving directives and responsibilities, will curtail the freedom of the artist. This freedom, fast becoming licence and bordering on chaos, is entirely lacking in objective and is venerated to an absurd degree. This is borne out by the fact that not a few of its exponents in the realm of the visual arts are fast disappearing into the depths of their own unconscious. When human activity is subject to God's laws and inspiration, true freedom of the spirit will result.

Having talked of the attitude of mind of the artist in his general approach to ecclesiastical art, let us consider briefly the actual making of an image of a Saint. Being a sculptor, I will confine myself to the three-dimensional image, though many of the considerations will be the same for the other visual arts. It is to be hoped that in most cases a commission will be given to carve statues of the Saints for particular positions in specified buildings, be it a chapel, church, school or convent. It is therefore desirable to visit the place and study the position chosen. If the statue is to be on the exterior of the building, the following points will have to be decided on. The material, size, and direction, which can be arrived at by considering the surrounding architecture, prevailing weather, approaches and view-points. If it is an interior position the considerations are the same, with the addition that the light must be carefully noted. The strength and direction of the light is of vast importance where sculpture is concerned. This visit often provides an opportunity to discuss the subject with the client, which is very necessary. He knows his community and parish and the particular aspect of the subject it is desirable to stress to them.

However well one may think the subject is understood, it is vital to refresh one's memory by reading and a certain amount of thought before making even mental compositions. The subjective task of the visual artist is complicated by the fact that he can make only one statement, as opposed to a writer who can build many mental pictures in one book. One cannot have a Saint preaching, feeding the poor, and being boiled in oil at one and the same time. The crucial point of the holiness of the Saint and his mission have to be discovered and the conception built on this. A mystic may have suffered martyrdom, but in this case to portray the martyrdom might miss the real significance of his life. In establishing the subjective guide to the design it is all-important to discover the underlying reality of the Saint.

Now to the design itself. There are many methods. In my case I prefer to make a sketch model in a plastic material such as clay or plasticine, about one quarter the size of the intended statue. This is rather like making a very rough sketch but in three dimensions, the advantage being that the model can be kept loose and rough, gradually assuming solidity and form as the idea develops. When these basic ideas and forms reach a suffi-

ently satisfying definition in the model it needs taking no further. Details such as features are unnecessary at this stage. From this model the measurements of the block of stone or wood for the final figure are then worked out and the block is ordered. The block is then 'pointed', a mechanical process which reproduces the rough form of the sketch model enlarged in the final material. From then until the completion of the work the model is referred to less and less. The features are usually left until last, as it is important that the pose of the figure should express the idea which one is attempting to convey. The facial expression of the carved features should merely emphasize that which is already there.

Having dealt in a very limited way with the approach to and the making of images for our churches, I would conclude with the plea that when we make these offerings to God in honour of his Saints, they should be worthy offerings. To be worthy, surely, they must be conceived and executed for a particular place for which they were intended. They should be an expression of the activity of the living Church, an offering of the mental and physical gifts to God which he continues to pour upon us all, even to this day.



## COMMENT

### NON-CATHOLIC BAPTISM

**M**IGHT I take up a point raised in your January number, which was devoted so sympathetically to the question of Christian Unity? It is an important point and one, I think, not much considered. The first of the questions raised by the Lutheran theologian, Dr Asmussen, in the article printed by you concerned the validity of baptism administered by non-Catholics.

He wrote as follows: 'To begin with our baptism. It is no secret that in the case of converts, baptism is usually repeated, arousing deep dismay on the Evangelical side. In my opinion there is no justification for this. There seems to be no doubt that,