conquerors through our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we always have the victory. This may cost them success in the world, or their job, and even other afflictions, such as hunger, imprisonment and even death. With them we continue to pray, “Come, Lord Jesus, yea, come quickly.”

Rev. C. Hanco

ART EDUCATION
IN THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

There are many reasons why art is an important subject, and we as students, teachers and parents must understand these. The world has much to say about art, but we as Christians ought to know what we mean when we say “art.” So let us begin by looking at some common misconceptions of why we study art and what it is. Then let us see what art actually is, why we should study it especially in a Christian school, and therefore see how this applies to all of us whether we’re in education or not.

First of all we find that the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 is often used to explain why we should develop our artistic abilities, but developing our abilities is not the point of the passage. Rather, it means we “receive a certain place in the kingdom of God,” that we receive this place or talent according to our abilities, and that we must be content and labor in that place to which God has called us.¹ Now it is true that we do have a responsibility to develop the abilities we’ve been given, and if we have been given the place of artist then indeed we must labor in that, but there has to be more. If this were all we based art education on, then only those already gifted with artistic abilities need study art. Now there may be more interest shown from some students than from others, but whether it seems one is gifted or not, art is connected to everyone’s life.

Art may be the painting in the museum, the music you heard at the concert, or the poem in your literature book, but what about the

¹. Herman Hoeksema, Chapel Talks on the Parables of Matthew, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1972, p. 113.

33
painting on your wall and the pictures in your magazines, the music
from the radio, or the novel you read last week? All of these things
may be art, and more. But maybe not. It depends on how you define
art. If we say that art must be pleasing to behold, then many of the
things mentioned will be art to some and not to others. If we say that
it's art if the artist says so, then at least the first three things men­
tioned, the fine arts, will be art, and I might add that there are many
who would agree with this. But neither of these definitions seems
true, for both involve subjective standards.

Instead, we find that there are objective standards or principles
which art complies to. These principles, for example, rhythm, balance
and unity, work together not only to make the work pleasing, but to
communicate. This then is a point I want to emphasize — art is a means
of communication. So let's look a little closer at what this means.
First, many authors and art educators state that a work of art tells us
something:

"... any art work is ... a statement about the human condition,"
(Foshay). 2

"The arts specialize in forms of knowledge that can not be translated
or expressed in any other way ... " (Rockefeller). 3

"... and it certainly is a truthful claim — that art is, among other things,
a very important language," (Feldman). 4

Especially consider this quote:

"It is the function of art, then to make values vivid and persuasive as
no other medium can," (Smith and Smith). 5

So art does say something, and what it tells us is fairly agreed upon
too — the human condition, ideas, emotions and values. Now just as
mathematical formulas are the best way to express scientific laws, so
too art can be the best way to express these things which we might
call subjective knowledge. Let me illustrate this. A few weeks ago
there was a poem called "Tomorrow" in our church bulletin, which

Development and Evaluation in Art Education, Hardiman and Zernich, ed.,
Curriculum Development, p. 49.
p. 77.
5. Smith and Smith, "Justifying Aesthetic Education," Foundations for Curri­
culum Development, p. 89.
brought across an idea that had never struck me before. Although it could have been expressed in everyday language, because it was a poem it necessitated attention, had a lot of meaning in a few words, and therefore was a more powerful means to express the idea. Here is the last verse:

I have nothing to do with tomorrow
Its burdens then why should I share?
Its grace and its faith I can't borrow
Then why should I borrow its care?

Poetry is an art form which is closer to the means of communication we're most familiar with in our culture, so we might understand that before we would understand a painting or a symphony, yet all of these forms are worth our attention. All of them say something.

Now we must realize that there are some serious implications when we understand that art communicates. First of all let us note that what art tells us, subjective knowledge, is as important as objective knowledge. I mean that our thoughts, ideas and attitudes must be taken as seriously as our ability to do mathematics or read a history book. We are called to love God with all of our being, and that includes what we study intellectually as well as what we know inwardly. Our thoughts and emotions, our values and priorities must be ruled by His word too. And in fact did not Jesus in the Gospels emphatically teach and warn us through the Pharisees that our hearts, and not only our outward life, must be pure?

Secondly this means that art, which can communicate what is in the heart, cannot be left to the whim of the artist, but his work "...must have at its center and heart the revelation of God and the truth concerning Him."\(^6\) This is important, for here we differ with the world and even all of those authors earlier quoted. They say that when a piece obeys the principles of art, and when it is meaningful and says something, then it is art. Now that's true, but that's not enough. We are citizens of a different kingdom, and we have been given spiritual eyes to see that. Some say that an artist is "...outside the jurisdictions of moral imperatives as his work needs to justify itself only by aesthetic standards and cannot be 'right' or 'wrong' ethically."\(^7\) But we must exercise our spiritual eyes, and then not only by those principles of

---

art do we judge, but also according to another, spiritual standard do we see art, and we do say it's right or wrong.

To show how this is true, let us consider the familiar statues of "The Discus Thrower" and "Venus de Milo" that came out of classical Greece. Now these figures are certainly according to the principles of art, and in that sense they are beautiful. Neither are they meaningless, for you can see the strain and strength of "The Discus Thrower" and the graceful femininity of the "Venus de Milo." But the Greeks were thoroughly man-centered and worshipped human-like gods, and so also the proportions of these statues are "ideal" and are a little bigger than life-size for the purpose of glorifying man. We might be able to appreciate them in the sense that they remind us that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made," but be aware that the artist intended the opposite. From this we see that art can be contrary to Scripture, but this also illustrates the point that Prof. H. Hanko made in talking of a reprobate artist, "...he knows the truth and incorporates it in his work of art whether he believes it or not." 8

Here we are led to the importance of studying art in the Christian school. We have to learn to be discerning when perceiving art. And not only do we consider what's in art museums, but we had better have an idea of what the novels we read, the pictures we see in ads, and even the architecture of our churches are saying. There is artwork which is unacceptable to us as Christians, yet that the world considers to be "beautiful." Now if we had one of these pieces in our living room because at first glance it looks as if it's fine, what do you think? Is ignorance innocence?

Open your spiritual eyes to your immediate environment — maybe it doesn’t tell you anything profound, but it might tell you the interests and concerns of the people who live there. Open your spiritual eyes to the environment outside your window. See the trees and the sky, the lakes and the mountains — how great is our Father, the Creator, the Artist! You see, it’s these things which are important in studying art. And not only do we learn to see, we also have to answer the question of how we make art to glorify God and reveal His truth. This takes technical skill, a knowledge and sensitivity to the principles and elements of art, an understanding of how art communicates, and most importantly a knowledge of His truth. We are all involved in some way with these things, and this must be involved in art education too. May we consider this in whatever area we study or teach. Let us see the work of God and praise Him.

Connie L. De Vries