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## **Art and Morals**

**by Fr. Alfredo Panizo, O.P. Ph.D.**

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*Philippine Studies* vol. 2, no. 3 (1954): 301–302

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ART AND MORALS. Address Given in the Opening Exercises of the Academic Year 1954-1955 at Santo Tomas University. By Fr. Alfredo Panizo, O.P. Ph.D. University of Santo Tomas Press, Manila. 1954. Pp. 113.

Dante Alighieri called art the "grandson of God." But Dante lived in the ages of faith when men's artistic creations mirrored the beauty of the Divine Creator. Modern art hardly merits so noble a title. Much of it is at best a prodigal "grandson." It has forgotten its divine lineage, shaken off the restraints of its Father's house, squandered its patrimony in riotous living, and has ended up, as prodigals usually do, sitting in hunger among the husks.

"Our age," Father Panizo says, "divorced from the eternal truths of religion, from fundamental moral principles and human values, has produced an art which is essentially skeptical, superficial, changeable, passionate, sensational, voluptuous and pathetic." This degenerate type of art has exercised an influence extremely detrimental to the standards of culture and morality in the modern world. "Art continues to seduce our senses and imagination, to stir our emotions and passions beyond the limits fixed by reason, and against the order established by moral law."

This is due in great part to the artist's failure or refusal to recognize the correct relationship which should exist between art and morality, a relationship which springs from the very nature of art itself.

Art has for its intrinsic purpose to express beauty in sense-perceptible media. It is not essentially an instrument for elevating moral standards or propagating a moral code. It enjoys a certain independence. Art may justifiably be said to be for art's sake, in the sense that its primary purpose is, not to promote observance of the Ten Commandments, but to create works of artistic beauty.

But art's independence is limited by moral considerations in two ways. First, a work of art which is immoral either in itself or in the effect it produces on its beholders, will be less a work of art insofar as it is immoral. Immorality involves disorder, and disorder is always destructive of beauty. Furthermore, immorality in art will disturb man's conscience, and thus destroy or lessen that serene delight in the contemplation of the work of art, which is the characteristic of true aesthetic pleasure. Immoral art, therefore, is always bad art.

Secondly art has a social aspect. The work of art possesses a power peculiarly its own of influencing men's actions, mold-

ing their minds and forming their characters. Consequently, although in theory it is not essentially subservient to morality, yet in actuality it will almost always be an instrument either for good or for evil. And an artist may not be indifferent to this power which the work he creates possesses. He is in conscience bound not to produce works of art which would have a foreseeably bad moral effect upon himself or others.

This second bond linking art to morality also provides justification for properly authorized censorship. If the individual artist refuses to acknowledge his moral obligations to society, then the State should step in and for the sake of the common good prohibit the display or publication of his morally dangerous productions.

Such in brief is the relationship Father Panizo establishes between art and morals. This summary does not do justice to his treatment of the subject, for it omits, as a summary must, many important explanations and distinctions. Separate sections in the brochure are allotted to such delicate and difficult problems as "Evil in Literature," "Art and Sex," "Nudism in the Plastic Arts," but it is beyond the scope of this review to discuss them in detail.

In general it may be said that the author's conclusions are sober and sound. They are based on scholastic philosophy and theology, and a wide acquaintance with the best modern Catholic authorities on aesthetics.

Artists may quarrel with his analysis of the nature of art and beauty, with his concentration on what may be called the sensuous type of art—since not all modern art can be thus classified—and with his lumping together in one category the fine arts properly so called and such things as comic books, pulp magazines, and cheap moving-pictures. But what Father Panizo has said needed very much to be said, and he has said it forcefully and convincingly.

Unfortunately it is necessary to warn the prospective reader that if he wishes to derive enjoyment as well as profit from the perusal of this book, he will have to prescind from the errors in English and typography which he will meet on practically every page. The author is evidently writing in a language not his own, and therefore deserves admiration for his effort and indulgence for his mistakes. Faulty English, however, often robs his thought of clarity and precision. Moreover, typographical errors which occur with frequency do an added injustice to the author's achievement.

J. J. KAVANAGH