

The Unholy Ikons

War on Light: The Destruction of the Image of God in Man Through Modern Art, by Margaret Elizabeth Stucki, *Orlando, Florida: Freedom University Press, 1975. 42 pp.*

A DISSERTATION is not necessarily a mere exercise in scholarship; it might also contain an important message. This is the case with the paper submitted by Mrs. Margaret Elizabeth Stucki for her degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Christian Education at Freedom University in Orlando. The subtitle reveals her theme: *The Destruction of the Image of God in Man Through Modern Art*. The author, a well-known and successful painter, has cleverly illustrated her volume (the dimensions of which are three times the area of a normal format) with a number of sketches proving her point. Her thesis, needless to say, rests heavily on the Scriptures; but though her fundamental inspiration is religious, one also discerns a very strong political significance. Indeed, there can be little doubt that much of modern art is inspired by the political Left, above all by the Extreme Left and the New Left, with roots going back to the earliest years of this century.

Mrs. Stucki's thesis is very well documented. She insists that man has been created in the image of God, which means not only that God in a certain sense is anthropomorphic, but also—which is equally important—that man is theomorphic. Thus whoever assails the image of man in an all-out radical way, whoever is anti-Humanist (taking the term in its classical connotation), whoever distorts, denigrates, perverts, disfigures, and vilifies the human body also attacks God indirectly and sides with the forces of darkness, with Satan himself.

It is refreshing to encounter in our time a thinking person who is convinced of the reality of Satan, who considers him a real

being and not just a symbol of everything evil. That there is a demoralizing, dehumanizing, and "agonizing" aspect to a very large segment of modern art, especially in the fine arts, no one can doubt. Further, as Mrs. Stucki points out, a great deal of merely decorative art today parades as fine art. If, for example, I had a very large room with a big white wall, I might, to relieve the monotony of the white expanse and to put a bit of life into it, hang on it a non-objective painting consisting of, say, two strong black strokes and one red disc—but this would have nothing to do with fine art. Nevertheless, the mass media and contemporary educational curricula do give an undue emphasis to the decorative arts; they also foster and abet the work of satanists and the frequently insane psychologism of the abstractionists. (Mrs. Stucki's book has interesting passages on the rôles of the mask and of darkness.) It is obvious that the pornographic element in modern art with its demonic undertones tries to strike at the very roots of life, degrading sexuality and with it Eros. In certain schools the satanic rebellion assumes the forms of the age-old Manichean protest against the Creation—and therefore the Creator.

Mrs. Stucki shows us that modern art presents a challenge that we are not permitted to ignore. In all fairness, however, I must say that some of her conclusions I am unable to accept. I am satisfied, for instance, that Georges Rouault, so far from having been a fellow-traveler, was a profoundly Christian artist; after all he had been deeply influenced by his friendships with Léon Bloy and Jacques Maritain. Rouault had a deep sense of holiness and a horror of the baser aspects of human nature. As for Salvador Dali, he was doubtless something of a satanist in his earlier years, but I think he was always conscious of it and that this helped him to climb out of his negative faith. Anyway, the fact that this staunch supporter of the Franco régime is still a clown, is no proof that he is an evil man.

Another point on which I must disagree with Mrs. Stucki is her simplistic equation of Leftism with (Russian Bolshevik) Communism. Leftism assumes various forms and the National Socialists were as much opposed to modern art as are the orthodox International Socialists (*i.e.* the Marxian Communists). Picasso—a diabolist, no doubt—was a confirmed Communist, but the Soviets have always frowned on his art. Political Leftism, we must bear in mind, has a two-phase character. First there is the stage of subversion and destruction in order to eliminate the existing establishments. This creates the illusion of an "ultra-liberal" and permissive attitude. But then comes the frozen stage of a new conformism, very "bourgeois" in the most pejorative sense of that term and profoundly hostile to imagination, the wellspring of all great art. (Remember "Socialist Realism"!.) Both Hitler and Marx were frustrated artists: Hitler as an aquarellist, Marx as a poet with pre-Nietzschean undertones. Neither was a really bad artist, but both were mediocre. They failed and then took their monstrous and murderous revenges.

Practically, this means that today Moscow favors much of modern art *in the Western World*—and there only because it breaks the ground for Soviet aims. Only in this sense may we call a sector of modern art "communistic"; in the U.S.S.R. itself artistic modernity is in the nature of a protest against the Red tyranny—even abstract painting is a protest there. (The immense political, economic, and philosophic ignorance of so many of *our* "progressive" artists and their patrons is another matter. They are "useful idiots" in the sense that Lenin used this term.)

But these strictures do not invalidate Mrs. Stucki's inspiring and forcefully written essay. Whoever is looking for some of the deeper implications of certain contemporary schools of art should profit from her insights, valuable information and analysis.

Reviewed by ERIK VON KUEHNELT-LEDDIHN