

## Reclaiming the arts (Deacon James Bryant)

[Ξένες γλώσσες](#) / [In English](#)

Image not found or type unknown



*All-Merciful Saviour Monastery – Vashon Island, Washington*

***“There is an unseen order, and our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting thereto.”***

***William James O***

Ever since entering architecture school I have had a vague sense of dissatisfaction with most of modern architecture and modern art. Very little of it had or has any real coherence or continuity let alone harmony or innate beauty. Traditional or classical architecture and art were appealing, but have been dismissed as archaic and beneath the dignity of our modern industrial and hi-tech age of new materials, engineering advances, and technology. In time I learned to accept much of it, but the undefined dissatisfaction never entirely departed. Not until making a mature profession of faith did I even begin to come to terms with that dissatisfaction. The

principles delineated in this paper are a result of investigation and discovery over a period of years. The perspective and understanding of what is set forth herein came only as an Orthodox Christian Biblical perspective and world view developed. Having been a practicing architect for well over 30 years, it is what I know best in the field of the Fine Arts, and the focus of this paper will tend to be in that direction.

The Arts have been for over a century philosophically and ideologically bankrupt. They are an index of the flow of thoughts of the ages. Western civilization, until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has functioned on a Christian world view with a Creation based perception of reality. Prior to the scientific advances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and particularly Darwin's theory of evolution, there was a common acceptance that there was a Creator of all things. This included the presuppositions that there exist absolute moral and ethical standards together with right and wrong ways to live and to accomplish both the tasks of life and the works of art, and that there is an underlying order to all things. Man does not invent the absolutes, standards, or order, but discovers them. The well being of civilization depended upon discovering that order and adhering to it. This view was the basis of the creation of all works of art, including architecture, literature, music, and crafts. Similarly, non-Christian cultures of the world both ancient and modern, literate and non-literate, took their cues for form and beauty from the natural or created world. For at least 35 centuries or more, this had resulted in a progressive realization of how to create an order and harmony of form in daily life. With this realization came an astonishing variety of forms and expressions. From the pyramids to the Parthenon, from the Pantheon to the Paris Opera, as well as all other works of art, there existed a recognized underlying order.



*All-Merciful Saviour Monastery – Vashon Island, Washington*

Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the presuppositions of a Creator of all things, absolute standards of right and wrong, and the acceptance of an underlying order were gradually abandoned. In our own time they are for all practical purposes no longer operational. With this abandonment, the emergence and ascendancy of Modern Art and its purveyors have discredited and destroyed 35 centuries of accumulated technical wisdom and tradition. As a result, we have been deprived of our rightful heritage, and potential artists have been prevented from realizing the full scope of their talent. The essentials of this heritage have not been taught in our schools for a hundred years or more. There is emerging, however, a dissatisfaction on the part of many with the current state of affairs, and a desire to rediscover the rich heritage of our past.

In the last 20 years there have been springing up private ateliers which offer a classical education in the Arts, but they are referred to by the mainstream schools as mere teachers of “crafts”. One in Minneapolis, Atelier Lack, represents an unbroken line to the classical era handed down from master to apprentice. From this one several others have come into being. In the late 1980’s Thomas Gordon Smith established a traditional and classical curriculum at the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture. Smith, a product of UC Berkeley, which has been on the loony fringe of the modern movement, rebelled against the modernist and post-



modernist movements and established himself as a classicist. The school and its graduates have been categorized by the prevailing architectural community as dangerous radicals who have dared to challenge the modernist architectural establishment. In England the architect Quinlan Terry, who in the 1950's apprenticed himself to one of the last surviving classicists, presides over a thriving practice of traditional architecture. Terry is also a Christian and has written an interesting treatise on the Temple of Solomon and how it prefigured Greek classical architecture.



*All-Merciful Saviour Monastery – Vashon Island, Washington*

Are you intimidated by modern art, modern architecture, modern music, and modern literature? What you are experiencing or observing is not a new order or some sort of cosmic understanding of reality. What you have in fact encountered is ruin, the lowest common denominator of a culture out of touch with the Creator. This is a culture in which individuals are striving to remake the world in their own image, without restraint and without boundaries, and at the same time attempting to bury the memory of any religious heritage. Underlying it all is despair, and the existential fear that for everything there is no meaning or purpose. Modern Art tends to reinforce this despair and fear and bring culture even lower in a progressive downward spiral.

The calling of the Orthodox Christian is not to transcend the material or secular world, living in some imagined mystical isolation from the “profane.” We are to transfigure the material through the spiritual by our life and actions. We are to

bring to bear in our immediate environs the Kingdom of God, and thereby assist in remaking the world in His image, and not our own. Alan Bloom in his much vilified (by the intellectual establishment) work *The Closing of the American Mind* gave a quite Orthodox definition of art and civilization. "Civilization or, to say the same thing, education, is the taming or domestication of the soul's raw passions – not suppressing or excising them, which would deprive the soul of its energy – but forming and informing them as art."<sup>1</sup>

1. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Simon and Schuster, Inc, New York, New York, 1987, p. 71

Deacon James serves with Fr. James Bernstein, at [St. Paul's Antiochian Orthodox Church](#) in Brier, Washington. He has been a practicing principal architect for 38 years, and has designed several Orthodox churches, including The All-Merciful Saviour Monastery. Visit Deacon James, and his work, at his own architecture company, [The James Bryant Group LLC](#), or email him directly here: [jebryant@frontier.com](mailto:jebryant@frontier.com).

Photographs taken from a Deacon James work on Vashon Island, Washington, USA, at All-Merciful Savior Monastery.