

## THE INFLUENCE OF ARTS IN TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT RELIGION

**Susan Dingba Anthony, PhD**

Department Of Visual And Creative Arts  
Federal University, Lafia, Nasarawa State

&

**John Ishaku**

Department Of Christian Religious Studies  
Kaduna State University, Kaduna  
08035104096; Johnishaku73@gmail.com  
DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.21448.03842

### **Abstract**

*Religion is as old as mankind likewise arts design plays an important role in religion because different religious designs have a symbolic interpretation just like the sign of the cross in Christianity signify the death of Jesus Christ and the design facilitate religious teaching among children and makes the story to be very easy for them and also to be convinced since there is design as a proof to what the teaching is to teaching his pupils.*

### **Introduction**

Arts design and Religion are related in all ramification since religion is as old as mankind and artistic is as old as mankind like the story of Moses and the ten commandment in the Bible, the art design made teaching to be easier for the teacher to give religion stories and show the picture to the attracting and also convince the pupils about what the teacher is teaching. This paper will focus on the concept of religion and arts, common types of religion arts, purpose and cost of religion arts, religion arts of antiquity, other religion arts, why not teach children about religion arts and teaching the story through art keep them alive and has the potential to understanding inclusively a step closer and conclusion

### **The Concept Of Religious Arts**

However, on further analysis, these definitions relate to religious "content", rather than religious "quality". For example, a painting of a crucifixion scene which drew attention to some fundamentally weird or blasphemous physical attribute of the dying Christ would hardly merit the description religious art. Furthermore, certain religions (Eastern Orthodox, Islam) have certain rules circumscribing the type of art permitted: a sculpture of Muhammad would be regarded as a blasphemy, rather than a piece of religious art. Thus, to qualify as "religious", the painting, sculpture or architecture concerned must have some

recognizable moral narrative, that imbues the work with the necessary sacred "quality." As with the assessment of all art, determining whether or not this moral attribute is present, is essentially a subjective exercise, although in most cases the answer is likely to be fairly straightforward. Therefore, our suggested definition of religious art goes like this: Religious art is any work whose theme supports the moral message of the religion it purports to illustrate. In this context, religion means any set of human beliefs relating to that which they regard as sacred, holy, spiritual or divine - whether or not deities are involved.

### **Common Types Of Religious Art**

Since Antiquity, the most common type of religious art has been painting and portable sculpture. However, the form of religious art with the greatest visual impact is undoubtedly architecture. From the Egyptian Pyramids to the Stonehenge stone circle, from the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul to the Umayyad Great Mosque of Damascus, from the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem to French Gothic Cathedrals, from St Peter's basilica in Rome to the Taj Mahal, religious authorities have consistently turned to architecture to awe and influence their congregations. Interior and exterior artistic decorations for these Christian, Islamic and Buddhist churches typically include a wide range of decorative arts, including: calligraphy, ceramics, crafts, icons, illuminated manuscripts, metalwork, mosaic, stained glass, tapestry and wood-carving.

### **Purpose And Cost Of Religious Art**

Evans and Wixon (1997:10), noted that, the function of religious art, directly or indirectly, is to win converts. Architecture is therefore the principal form, since a cathedral can inspire, teach and house a congregation. Public statuary can also inspire, while interior mosaics and stained glass can illustrate divine stories - not unimportant in ages where illiteracy was the norm. By expounding the message of an ordered Universe under God, Christian art also contributed to the creation and preservation of social order. But it came at a price. Thus in their attempts to revive the grandeur, beauty and prestige of Rome with the finest architectural designs, sculpture and frescoes, Pope Julius II (1503-13) and Pope Leo X (1513-21) nearly bankrupted the Church. In fact, Papal overspending on art was an important cause of the Reformation, as it led to higher taxes on the common people, and greater corruption among the officers of the Church. Even so, during at least the nine centuries between 800 and 1700, the Church of Rome was by far the largest patron of the arts.

## **History of western religious art**

### **Earliest prehistoric religious art**

No one knows for sure when man first started creating specifically religious art. We do know that various types of religious images began to appear during the era of Neolithic art: examples include: the "Enthroned Goddess" terracotta figurine (6,000 BCE) unearthed at Catal Huyuk, in Anatolia, Turkey; and the sandstone therianthropomorphic figure known as the Fish God of Lepenski Vir (dated to 5,000 BCE), found at a Danube settlement in Serbia.

### **Religious Art Of Antiquity (C.3,500 BCE - 400 CE)**

Egypt was home to a significant amount of religious art. The role of Egyptian artists was to exalt their Pharaoh - a secular King who was worshipped as a divine ruler, supposedly the incarnation of the god Horus. The main focus of Egyptian art was the pyramid - the tomb of the Pharaoh and his household - which was typically filled with paintings, sculptures and numerous other precious artifacts to help him survive and prosper in the afterlife. Temples were also built for the living Pharaoh, as they were for the gods of Ancient Greece and Rome, during the period 600 BCE - 400 CE. Religious Greek art is best exemplified by the Parthenon (dedicated to the Goddess Athena) and other temples on the Acropolis in Athens. Up until 400 CE, surviving sacred artworks are almost exclusively architectural or sculptural. Virtually all painting has disappeared. It was the same in Northern Europe, where ceremonial - possibly religious structures began to appear from the end of the fourth Millennium BCE, such as the Newgrange tomb in Ireland and Stonehenge in England.

### **Christian Art**

Christian art (mostly Biblical art) emerged some 150 years after the death of Christ. Initially early Christian art - including early Christian sculpture - was actually a type of Christian Roman art, combining Roman imagery with classical Greek motifs: the image of Christ in Majesty derives from both Roman Imperial portraits and depictions of the Greek God Zeus. Over the coming centuries, Christian iconography was gradually standardised, and harmonized with Biblical texts. For the world's most ancient illuminated Christian manuscript, see: the Garima Gospels (390-660) from Ethiopia's Abba Garima Monastery.

### **Byzantine Religious Art (C.400-1000)**

Byzantine art in Constantinople created a number of extraordinary examples of Christian architecture, including: The Chora Church, the Hagia Irene, the Church of St. Sergius and Bacchus, and the awesome Hagia Sophia (532-37). In addition, they built the Church of St. Sophia in Sofia, Bulgaria (527-65), and the Church of Hagia Sophia in Thessaloniki. Mosaic art was also common. For more, see: Christian Art, Byzantine Period.

### **Russian Religious Painting: Icons, Murals (C.950-1700)**

The technique of icon painting spread throughout the Eastern Orthodox area, notably to Kiev, Novgorod and Moscow. Indeed, it became a major feature of Russian medieval painting. For the greatest Russian iconographers, see: Theophanes the Greek (c.1340-1410), founder of the Novgorod school of icon-painting; his young pupil Andrei Rublev (c.1360-1430), famous for his masterpiece, the Holy Trinity Icon (1411-25); and Dionysius (c.1440-1502), noted for his religious icons for the Volokolamsky monastery. The Moscow School of painting (c.1500-1700) featured the Stroganov brothers, Procopius Chirin, Nicephorus Savin and Simon Ushakov (1626-1686).

### **Religious Art In Ireland (C.600-1150)**

Protected from Romanization and Barbarian invasion by its isolated position, Ireland became an important centre for early Christian art. Irish monasteries produced a number of outstanding illuminated manuscripts (eg. Book of Kells), whose illustrations drew upon designwork from the La Tene Celtic culture. Celtic metalwork art was also exemplified in a range of Irish ecclesiastical vessels, such as the Ardagh Chalice, the Moylough Belt Shrine, as well as processional crosses like the 8th/9th century Tully Lough Cross and the great 12th century Cross of Cong. The third type of Christian art produced by this fusion of monastic devotion and Celtic artistry was Celtic High Cross sculpture, which was produced in great numbers across Ireland during the period 750 to 1150.

### **Romanesque & Gothic Religious Art (800-1400)**

King Charlemagne of the Franks led the resurgence of Christian religious art from his court at Aachen. Carolingian art encompassed works of architecture, medieval sculpture, murals, illuminated gospel manuscripts, and more. Charlemagne's successors maintained these traditions during the era of Ottonian art - noted for its precious metalwork - supported by a revitalized Church based in Rome. Romanesque art and architecture followed from the

11th century until about 1200 when it was superseded by Gothic architecture (both Rayonnant and Flamboyant) with its soaring arches and glorious stained glass windows. Gothic sculpture was more evocative and expressive. The Gothic period witnessed one of the great flowerings of monumental Christian art, exemplified by a massive building program in France - see, for instance, Notre Dame Cathedral (Paris) and Chartres Cathedral - and thereafter across Europe. Gothic Cathedrals were built in Laon, Paris (Notre Dame), Chartres, Soissons, Bourges, Reims, Amiens, Beauvais, Auxerre and other cities. In Germany, the Gothic style is exemplified by structures such as Cologne Cathedral, while in England cathedrals appeared in Lincoln, Wells, Salisbury, Canterbury, Durham, and Ely, along with York Minster and Westminster Abbey. Underneath the architects, an army of stone masons and other craftsmen were employed to produce a mass of decorative holy artworks including column statues, mosaics and statue sculpture. The Late Gothic era was noted for its exquisite altar wood-carving, by craftsmen like Veit Stoss (c.1447-1533) and Tilman Riemenschneider (c.1460-1531).

### **Northern Renaissance Religious Painting (1400-1600)**

Altarpiece art was a regular feature of Netherlandish religious art during this period, as exemplified by The Ghent Altarpiece (1425-32) by Jan van Eyck (1390-1441) and Hubert van Eyck (d.1426), The Portinari Altarpiece (1475) by Hugo van der Goes (1440-82), The Isenheim Altarpiece (1515) by Matthias Grunewald (1470-1528) and The Deposition (1435), created by Roger Van der Weyden (1400-1464) for the Church of Notre Dame du Dehors (now in the Museo del Prado, Madrid). See also the extraordinary and compelling fantasy paintings Garden of Earthly Delights and The Haywain Triptych (1516) by Hieronymus Bosch, and the Tower of Babel by Pieter Bruegel the Elder.

### **Italian Renaissance Religious Art (1400-1600)**

Anticipated by Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel frescoes (1303-10), quattrocento Italian Renaissance art was financed by the Christian Church and also by secular leaders, like the Medici and Gonzaga families, as was the more conservative Sieneese School of Painting. However, a huge proportion of early Renaissance painting and sculpture had religious motifs or themes: famous examples include: Masaccio's Holy Trinity (1428) and Brancacci Chapel frescoes (1424-8), The Annunciation (c.1450) by Fra Angelico (1395-1455), and The Last Supper (1495-8) by Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519). High Renaissance painting included such religious masterpieces as the Sistine Madonna (1513-14) by Raphael (1483-1520), and the amazing Genesis fresco (1508-1512) and Last Judgement fresco (1536-41) in the Sistine Chapel, by Michelangelo (1475-1564).

## **The Most Famous Work Of Renaissance Architecture Was The Redesigned And Rebuilt St Peter's Basilica In Rome (1506-1626).**

### **Venice**

Venetian painting possessed a number of outstanding painters of religious themes, notably Titian (1477-1576) and Tintoretto (1518-94), as well as the colourist Paolo Veronese (1528-88) - noted for his huge Biblical banquet-scenes, such as Wedding Feast at Cana (1563, Louvre) and Feast in the House of Levi (1573, Venice Academy). See: Legacy of Venetian Painting on European art.

Renaissance religious art in the provinces is perhaps exemplified by the Assumption of the Virgin (Parma Cathedral) (1526-30) by Antonio Allegri da Correggio (1489-1534).

### **Religious Mannerist Paintings (1530-1600)**

The Roman Catholic Church had an ambivalent attitude towards the stylized Mannerism art movement. In Italy, for instance, following the Council of Trent, the stylized forms and artificiality of Mannerist painting was viewed as an unnecessary interference with the liturgical message. For an example of a Mannerist painter who changed his style in line with the Church's teaching, see: Federico Barocci (1526-1612). For more, see: Venetian altarpieces (1500-1600). In Spain, however, the expressiveness of the new style was seen as a perfect vehicle to depict intense religious experiences.

One major development at this time, thanks to the likes of Antonello da Messina (1430-1479) and Caravaggio (1573-1610), among others, was the use of more realistic human forms when depicting the Holy Family and other Biblical figures. See, for instance, Christ Crowned with Thorns (Ecce Homo) (1470) by Antonello da Messina. Religious Renaissance architecture is exemplified by the Dome of Florence's Cathedral, designed by the architect and artist Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446), and by the rebuilding of the 1,100-year-old church of St Peter's in Rome (1506-1626) by Bramante, Raphael, Sangallo, Maderno, Michelangelo and Bernini. This project extended beyond the High Renaissance into the Baroque era.

### **Spanish Renaissance School (16TH CENTURY)**

The Renaissance in Spain lagged behind that of Italy and elsewhere. Even so, Spanish piety and devotion to the religious dogmas of Rome was absolute. Not surprisingly therefore, their artists were heavily involved in propagating and illustrating the Christian message. They included: Alonso Berruguete (c.1486-

1561) the greatest of all Renaissance sculptors in Spain, whose masterpieces include: the altarpiece for the monastery of La Mejorada Valladolid (1526), and the choir stalls in Toledo Cathedral (1539-43). Also, Juan de Juni (1507-1577), the famous French Mannerist sculptor, who specialized in religious themes and in the dramatic expression of emotion, as exemplified by his two groups of the Entombment of Christ (1544, Valladolid Cathedral) and (1571, Segovia Cathedral). Spanish religious painting of the Late Renaissance period is exemplified by the Mannerist painter El Greco (1541-1614), whose major works include: The Holy Trinity (1577); The Disrobing of Christ (El Espolio)(1577); The Burial of Count Orgaz (1586-88); Christ driving the Traders from the Temple (1600); The Opening of the Fifth Seal of the Apocalypse (1608); The Adoration of the Shepherds (1612-14); The Repentant Peter (1600); and Christ Carrying the Cross (1600).

### **Baroque Religious Art (1600-1700)**

Following Martin Luther's Reformation (c.1517), and the emergence of the new forms of Protestant Reformation Art, - the Vatican launched a vigorous campaign of Catholic Counter-Reformation art, designed to win back its wayward congregations in Europe. Painting, as well as painterly techniques such as Caravaggism, was a key element of this religious propaganda campaign. The church wanted to communicate its message directly to the faithful and demanded from its artists an uncompromising clarity. To comply with this, paintings had to be, above all, realistic, and Caravaggio's brand of unsophisticated realism was absolutely tailor-made for the Counter-Reformation campaign. By stripping away, the intellectual and stylistic pretensions of late Mannerism - a style which had become appreciated only by an educated minority, he gave to painting the instant inspirational impact demanded by the church of Rome. Examples of his religious realism include: The Calling of St Matthew (1600), The Martyrdom of St Matthew (1600), Supper at Emmaus (1601), The Crucifixion of St Peter (1601), Conversion of St Paul on the way to Damascus (1601), Death of the Virgin (1601-6) and The Entombment of Christ (1601-3). Another type of art favoured by the Catholic Counter-Reformation was quadratura church fresco painting, designed to inspire congregations with illusionistic devices. See for example: Apotheosis of St Ignatius (1694) by Andrea Pozzo. In Spain, the devout Francisco de Zurbaran (1598-1664), strongly influenced by Spanish Quietism, produced holy paintings for numerous monasteries and Religious Orders (Carthusians, Capuchins, Dominicans, Jeronimites, among others), as well as Cathedrals and other ecclesiastical authorities. Among his noted works are Christ on the Cross (1627), Apotheosis of St. Thomas Aquinas(1631), and Adoration of the Shepherds

(1638). The great Diego Velazquez(1599–1660), while famous as a virtuoso portraitist, also produced a number of holy paintings like *The Immaculate Conception* (1618), *Joseph's Coat* (1630) and *Christ Crucified* (1632). Spanish Baroque religious sculpture is well represented by the Seville artist Juan Martinez Montanes (1568-1649), who was dubbed the God of Wood for his carving skills, sculpted mainly wooden crucifixes and religious figures. His best known works include *The Merciful Christ* (1603, Seville Cathedral) and the *Santiponce Altarpiece* (1613); and also by the explosive Alonso Cano (1601-1667), known as the "Spanish Michelangelo", whose masterpiece is *The Immaculate Conception* (1655, Granada Cathedral).

In Flanders, the greatest exponent of 17th century religious Flemish painting was Rubens (1577-1640), the undisputed leader of the Flemish Baroque school, following in the footsteps of earlier religious artists like Robert Campin, Hugo van der Goes and Hans Memling. In Italy, home of the Roman Catholic Church, painters like Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665), and Claude Lorrain (1600–1682) received numerous religious commissions. The greatest exponents of Italian religious sculpture were the incomparable Bernini (1598-1680) - see his *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (1645–52), created for the Cornaro Chapel of the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome - and his great rival Alessandro Algardi (1598-1654), both of whom were given numerous Papal commissions. The Catholic Baroque style gave rise to an emotional style of architecture, exploiting to the full the melodramatic potential of the urban landscape. This is exemplified above all by *Saint Peter's Square* (1656-67) and its approaches, in front of *St Peter's Basilica* in Rome.

Protestantism had its own religious art. 17th Century Dutch painting features some outstanding Old Testament works by Rembrandt. In addition, Dutch Realists like Harmen van Steenwyck (1612-56), Jan Davidsz de Heem (1606-83), Pieter Claesz (1597-1660), Willem Kalf (1622-93) and Willem Claesz Heda(1594-1681), introduced a genre called *Vanitas painting* (based on Ecclesiastes 12:8 "Vanity of vanities saith the preacher, all is vanity"), whose principal theme was the ephemeral nature of life and the absurdity of human vanities. See also the church interior paintings of Emanuel de Witte (1615-92) and Pieter Jansz Saenredam (1597-1665). It was during the period roughly 1650 to 1750 that the nature of the European art market began to change. Up until 1650, most art had been public art aimed at the masses - mostly in the form of architecture and sculpture, and most of it religious. By 1750, this type of public art had been superseded by portable easel art - mostly paintings for commercial customers. The era of large-scale spending by Church authorities was over.

### **Decline Of Religious Art (1700 ONWARDS)**

The 18<sup>th</sup> century was the era of absolute monarchs, whose despotic rule was based on the so-called 'Divine Right of Kings' appointed by God. However, these monarchs, like Louis XIV, Louis XV, the Russian Romanovs, and the Austrian Habsburgs, were too concerned with exalting their own secular status and propping up their creaking empires to invest money in religious painting, sculpture or architecture. Furthermore, except in the Iberian Peninsula, where Spanish piety never slackened, the power of the Roman Catholic Church had been severely weakened by the destruction of its monasteries during the previous two centuries. This combination of secular and ecclesiastical weakness meant that - with odd exceptions, such as the Catholic commissions awarded to Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770) in Bavaria and Venice - there was a significant reduction during the 18th century in the amount of money devoted to religious art. Moreover, this period saw a huge increase in demand on behalf of merchants and land-owners, for portraiture and topographical landscapes. As it was, the period ended with the French Revolution, which heralded a change in sentiment across Europe. Henceforth, art would celebrate people rather than deities. The 19th century produced even less religious art. Although the Industrial Revolution created significant surplus wealth for both nations and individuals, it wasn't invested in Christian art. Instead it went into the development of social and public services. The only regular commissions offered by Church authorities were for free-standing sculpture to commemorate deceased Bishops and other clerics. And while a few painters continued to paint Biblical scenes, the demand for religious compositions slumped - a trend which continued into the 20th century. But see *A Burial in Ornans* (1850) by the realist painter Gustave Courbet, and the strange symbolist works of the Belgian painter James Ensor (1860-1949), notably *Christ's Entry into Brussels*.

### **20<sup>TH</sup> Century Religious Art**

A feature of modern Christian art in the West has been the temple architecture of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Its development - from the simple church-like design of the Kirtland Temple (constructed 1830s), to the intricate Gothic styles of the early Utah temples, to the mass-produced modern temples of today - chronicles the evolution of modern religious architecture itself. The most recent postmodernist churches include the Community of Christ Temple in Independence, Missouri; Unity Temple, the Unitarian Universalist in Chicago designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959); the Pietro Belluschi-designed Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption (San

Francisco); and the Jose Rafael Moneo-designed Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels (Los Angeles). Sadly, the 20th century has also witnessed enormous destruction: many beautiful churches and other religious works of art were destroyed by the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe. As far as sacred painting is concerned, 20th century painters have, with a few exceptions, ignored it, preferring to cater for the more secular modernist and contemporary art collector. Exceptional modern religious paintings include: Christ on the Cross (1936) by Georges Rouault (1871-1958); Ecce Homo (1925) by Lovis Corinth (1874-1925); Christ at Emmaus (1963) by Patrick Caulfield (1936-2005); Crucifixion 3.85 (1985) by Antonio Saura (1930-98); and the strange abstract work St John (1988) by Gerhard Richter (b.1932). Meantime, postmodernist religious sculpture is surely exemplified by Virgin Mother (2005) by Damien Hirst (b.1965), which stands in the Plaza of Lever House, New York City.

### **Themes Of Christian Art**

Painters and sculptors have been commissioned by Popes, religious and secular authorities to illustrate a very wide range of scenes from the Bible. The choice of scenes may be determined by religious politics, as well as the type of art form and media involved. One of the most famous themes of religious sculpture, for example, is David and Goliath: witness the three David's sculpted by Donatello (1386-1466), Andrea del Verrocchio (1435-1488), and Michelangelo (1475-1564). Leonardo handled the difficult theme of the Immaculate Conception in his beautiful Virgin of the Rocks (1484-6, Louvre, Paris). Occasionally, artists specialized in certain biblical themes: for instance, the female Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1656) painted 'Judith Beheading Holofernes' several times.

### **Popular Art-Subjects from the New Testament Gospels**

- Annunciation
- Adoration of the Magi
- Ascension of Jesus
- Assumption of the Virgin Mary
- Coronation of the Virgin
- Crucifixion
- e.g. The Crucifixion by Tintoretto
- Descent from the Cross
- Kiss of Judas
- The Lamentation
- The Last Supper
- The Last Judgment

- - Madonna and Child - Maesta
- Mocking of Christ
- Nativity of Jesus
- Noli me tangere
- The Parables
- e.g. Return of the Prodigal Son by Rembrandt.
- Pietà
- The Raising of the Cross
- Transfiguration
- e.g. The Transfiguration by Raphael.
- Popular Art-Subjects from The Old Testament Gospels
- Adam and Eve
- Cain and Abel
- David and Goliath
- Bathsheba with David's Letter
- Genesis
- - John the Baptist - Judith and Holofernes
- The Prophets
- Sacrifice of Isaac
- Flight of the Jews into Egypt
- Scenes from the Life of Moses
- Wedding Feast at Cana

### **Why Not Teach Children About Religion Through Arts?**

Sauchel, A (2006:17), said that, I have always been skeptical about the position of religion in schools. Teaching the stories of saints alongside more provable subjects makes those stories, and the belief systems that lie behind them, less open to question: it's an obvious issue when it comes to our more variegated society.

Religious education is not simply teaching about a set of beliefs. It's also about inculcating those beliefs. Even comparative and world religion classes have the underlying agenda of one faith being right, and the rest being merely interesting.

Aside from that, whatever they're doing in religion class, they don't seem to be making it very stimulating. A recent UCC study (by professors Áine Hyland and Brian Bocking), found that only 3 per cent of students take religion as a Leaving Cert subject. So what about simply removing all religious teaching from schools, and leaving it up to the churches and individual families, away from curriculum time? The secular problem with this is, quite simply: what

would be lost? Whatever your own belief system happens to be, religion forms the cultural backdrop that shapes a society.

Taking a look at that seldom-studied Leaving Cert curriculum, you find that some of its aims are: “to foster an awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples of all ages and at all times”; “to explore how this search for meaning has found, and continues to find, expression in religion”; and “to identify how understandings of God, religious traditions, and in particular the Christian tradition, have contributed to the culture in which we live”.

Given the scandals that have beset Ireland as a result of the Catholic church’s historical hold over many aspects of society, learning all the above might seem like a good thing – until you come to another stated aim, which is “to contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the student”. So you’re learning how the Christian tradition has shaped our culture, and you’re also learning that it is fundamental to your own moral development. Teaching about ideas is vital in education, but teaching beliefs through the prism of a particular belief system is another matter entirely.

### **Belief Systems**

Still, understanding the shaping forces of religious beliefs on culture is vital, even more so as we all have to learn how to share social spaces with people of other belief systems. So here’s an alternative thought for the teaching of comparative cultural beliefs through the world and through the ages: teach them through the stories art has left as a legacy. From ancient pagan carvings, in places such as the Lough Crew Cairns, which involve shapes and patterns that recur through abstract art today, we can learn a great deal about what peoples have believed in, what they have obsessed over, and what they have elected to adore.

Through art, you can learn about the awesome power of God, as well as man’s propensity to narcissism and self-aggrandizement, in Michelangelo’s paintings in the Sistine Chapel. You can discover the humanity of Jesus through da Vinci, and explore the rise of secular humanism as the Dutch masters moved away from painting saints and sinners in the 1600s. You can see and feel the twisted moral prudery that shames the body while obsessing over it writ large in paintings of the martyrdoms of the saints: Saint Agatha and Saint Sebastian being favourite examples through art history.

Charlene, S (2000:72) noted that, teaching those stories through art keeps them alive, and has the potential to bring understanding and inclusivity a step closer

Then there's the pure abstractions of Islamic art and decoration. Islamic belief prohibits images of sentient beings ("aniconism"). The gloriously decorated mosques and carpets that are covered in geometric arabesques and calligraphy can lead you into exploring how figurative images, and the destruction of them, have proliferated through the eras of Christianity as well as Islamism.

### **Common Humanity**

Explore more and discover power structures shown through art, including ceramics and carpets said to be so beautiful only monks could look upon them. Seventh century Tang Dynasty *mi se* celadon-glazed porcelain was kept exclusively for the Chinese Imperial family and for its religious leaders (*mi se* means secret colour). Indeed, it was so secret that, until the discovery of hidden chambers of it at the Famen Temple in Shaanxi, China, over a thousand years later, people considered it a myth.

Veith, G (1983:20), state that, more prosaically, but still beautifully, in the Renaissance, Gozzoli famously painted figures from the ruling Medici family into his *Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem*, in the Medici Riccardi Chapel in Florence. *Mi se* was about excluding, while the Medici were about revealing, but looking at these linked impulses to elevate and to control, through art, brings you to the humanity (and the flawed humanity) behind them, rather than to conclusions about the inferiority and superiority of the different belief systems that backed them up.

Spend time in the [Chester Beatty Library](#) and this sense of a common humanity becomes even stronger. Get into the rich visual languages of their wealth of scrolls, objects and paintings and it becomes increasingly impossible to think of the peoples who created them as "other".

Getting rid of the teaching of religion would mean getting rid of the stories that shape our societies. But teaching those stories through art keeps them alive, and has the potential to bring understanding and inclusivity a step closer. Imagine.

### **Conclusion**

Since Arts work is as old as mankind and religion is also as mankind. Arts design help children in understanding the teaching of religion very fast, that arts as influence the teaching of religion in all ramifications.

## Reference

- Charlene S (2000). [The Spiritual Dynamic in Modern Art : Art History Reconsidered, 1800 to the Present.](#)
- Evans, H.C. & Wixom, W.D. (1997). [The glory of Byzantium: art and culture of the Middle Byzantine era, A.D. 843-1261.](#) New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Hill publishing, London, Kindy Press.
- Hein, David (2009). "Christianity and the Arts." The Living Church, May 4, 2014, 8-11.
- Morgan, D (1998). [Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images.](#) Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Sauchelli, A (2016). The Will to Make- Believe: Religious Fictionalism, Religious Beliefs, and the Value of Art. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 93, 3.
- [The Vatican: spirit and art of Christian Rome.](#) New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art. 1982. [ISBN 0870993488.](#)
- Veith, G.E, J (1983). The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press.