

XI. - The dominion of Art.

The voice of the zither players and of the singers and of the flute players and of the trumpeters shall be heard no more in you, and no artist of any art shall be found in you. REV. 18:22.

Of all the life-governing influence which emanates from the present metropolis to what lies beyond its gates is typified by the book of Revelation in this succinctly summarized expression: "By your witchcraft all nations have been seduced". It is an actual bewitching power, the working of which no one can fully explain. It is a power that has a far deeper impact on life than the power that Babylon, Tyre or imperial Rome ever exerted. It is a power that not only subjects and rules, but at the same time transforms life in its spirit, reshapes mankind according to its own model, and thereby tries to leave its mark on our human development, instead of the mark of nature and history. Her apostles cry out that they have replaced the Christian ideal with the ideal of humanity. It is mankind that is pushed to the fore, mankind with its supremacy over nature, mankind with its almost universal presence, mankind with its ever-pervading knowledge. And this powerful, exalted man created the seat of his glory in the metropolis, loosened the bonds of nature in order to replace them with the new unity of decency, fashion, "high life", or however one wants to refer to the newborn type, This new type of man has its own magic formulas, its own objects of fascination, its own language and art of words, and in part even its own ideals, and among these ideals, it is not becoming like Jesus but like Ceresus that is at the top. Fortune is the silently worshipped goddess. And even if, as a new phenomenon, the organized proletariat rises up against the idol called Capital, child of the goddess Fortune, that proletariat too is driven in its innermost guts by nothing but the thirst for gold. And again, and again it is Man who goes up, Man who presents himself in his royal highness, Man who steps on nature, spans the entire world, and is almost omniscient in knowledge, who thrones in the metropolis as in the seat of his Lordship. Here, too, a king of man, as Christendom worships in her, but before the Jerusalem that is above, a Babylon on earth, before being crowned by God Almighty, the self-crown; and instead of the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of gold and money, which subjugates everything to itself. Not the man-king at God's right hand, through whom and in whom God is great, but the man-king who, satisfied with himself, plays with fortune, and has cut off the ties between himself and the Creator of Heaven and Earth. Thus, the opposition to the Kingship of Christ has become an absolute one. It is not kingship that has been abandoned, but Christ that has been dethroned, and

as a true Jacobin modern man has elevated himself to the throne and pressed the crown upon his head. And this process was not carried out arbitrarily, but with the urge of an inner necessity. Man cannot do without a king, and when once for the glory of Jesus' Kingship the eye was turned, there could be no other result, in consequence of the nature of sin, in connection with the disposition of our human nature, then that man himself, with the aid of purely worldly factors, proclaimed himself king over nature, king over the world, king over the whole of our human life.

Yet he who thinks that all the higher, ideal traits of human life have disappeared with this is mistaken. Our creation in God's image means that this can never happen. It is possible with the lower part of the circle, which is completely absorbed in lower motives, but not with the higher part; and the constitution of our human race is simply laid down by God in such a way that, in addition to a stalk and the chaff on that stalk, there is also always a flower bud sprouting from the top. There always has been and always will be an aristocracy of the mind, an elevated circle that knows finer needs and cannot rest until those finer needs have been satisfied. I am not referring to the mystical absorption which also pervades modern life. This mystical absorption arises from dissatisfaction with what is in front of our eyes. It is in fact a break with the modern principle of life. A return to the connection with the eternal and infinite. And whether this mystical aspiration manifests itself in Spiritism, Theosophy or Buddhism, it is always the expression of an unsatisfied being with the treasure of this earthly life. It is a groping for higher things, an enjoyment of what lies above and beyond our worldly life. This therefore remains an exception. A small mystical oasis in the midst of the arid rationalistic and materialistic wilderness. It never sets the tone. It lurks. It does not control life.

What does set the tone and is an instrument of government for the new king of mankind, however, is found in Art, and it is through Art that modern life tries to satisfy its thirst for the ideal. This is not strange. Rather, it is almost self-evident that where Religion is hidden, Art comes along to take its rightful place. Religion and Art are closely related, and both blossom best where they blossom together in mutual harmony. But if Religion is taken away, Art immediately takes over the whole field, washes up like a miracle tree through hypertrophy, and absorbs all the forces and juices that belong to Religion. After all, Art has this in common with Religion, that it lives by inspiration. Everything we can do through the power of our hands in the practical, or through the power of our minds in the rational, lies

trapped in the finite, and only art, like Religion, has the wings by which it raises itself above the finite. Religion finds its origin in our hearts through a higher purpose, which takes hold of our inner lives. Faith laughs at the bond of the sensible and the finite and, through all the mists, immediately grasps the infinite. And this is precisely what all higher Art does. It does not flourish in its lofty spheres unless there are two things involved: being seized from above, and itself immediately grasping what goes beyond ordinary life. Just as Religion, by faith, gives and possesses certainty on its terrain, so Art finds its strength in this awareness of certainty. It does not hesitate, it does not doubt. It is affected by the higher, it seizes the higher, and shows it or sings it out and plays it, and floats as a royal power over life. Hence all Art arose from the spheres of Religion, and first entered the world from that sacred sphere. First the temple, and then the monument and the palace. First the psalm and the hymn, and then first the anthem and the epic. It is therefore not something strange, but rather something entirely natural and necessary, that in a society that has abandoned religion and turned its back on it, Art takes its place.

Now there is serving and governing Art. One can seize upon art as a means of pleasure, rather than as a means to higher elevation. Already in the discussion of the modern type of Babylon we pointed to the giving in to sensual urges, to revel in what a lower art offered to stimulate the sensual passion. At first this was nothing but a grasping at the stimulus that was available in art. One looked for distraction, one looked for relaxation, one looked for diversion, and took the music as it was, the theatre as it presented itself, the song as it was sung, the novel as it unfolded a scene from life in honour and virtue. But, as goes without saying, this ordinary food could not satisfy the quickly over-stimulated taste. There was still too much high-mindedness and too little sense in it. And then began that reduction of Art, which made her the servant of passion. She did not just have to caress and steal, but to stimulate and excite. It had to perform the same service as alcohol: over-stimulate, and once it had over-stimulated, it had to become even more pungent, to satisfy the stronger passion. And so we arrive at the meanness of the stage, at the dominance of the naked and sensual in painting, at the cynical reduction of sculpture, at that hyper-erotic tone in song, until dirty realism in the novel, to that over-stimulated voluptuousness in the dance, to those excesses in music that shatter all senses, in short, to that bestiality in Art, which far exceeds anything that has ever been sanctioned in this respect in pagan countries. The real priest in the temple of Art covered himself with shame, and Art exchanged her divine nature for

a demonic imitation. And money wielded the scepter over her. Demeaning, demomish Art acquired the highest whore's pay, and, encouraged by this, expanded its circle further and further. A decent theatre doesn't pay. An orderly novel does not sell too widely. Cynical art, on the other hand, brings in treasure.

This is clearly stated, lest the all-sided expansion of the field of art, in its broad dimensions, be taken as proof of a more ideal sense. It is said. One hears it said. But there is nothing to it. The opposite is true. Degraded art degrades man instead of elevating him. Be on your guard. It is said that our time is so much higher because we, much better than an earlier generation, appreciate Art, and because Art has risen among us to become a powerful factor of popular development. Democratically, one wants to bring Art even to the lowest class of people. And all this has a beautiful appearance, but the high claim is belied by the outcome. In all such art that stimulates sensuality, it is not the high in us, but the low, the animal in mankind that seeks entertainment, sensual pleasure, passionate satisfaction and cynical enjoyment and does not think about a higher goal for Art. A realistic novel is devoured, not for its character portrayal, not for its beauty of style, but for the common elements it contains. The pages without the platitudes are flown through, the pages with the platitudes are read and reread. It is for the passion, not the Art, that it is all about. Not the height of the Holy, but the depth of Satan, in which you are allowed to peep. And the blame certainly lies with the public who are consumed with passion, but certainly no less with the artist who dares to display such products to the public out of his own passion in order to stimulate other people's passions, or even better, to usher them into the living room. In this sense, Art is no proof of a higher sense and more ideal intentions, but on the contrary is one more sign of our moral decline and decline in human worth.

And yet - and it is this that we were referring to - this is not where Art rises. On the contrary. There is also a small art circle which does preside over essentially higher intentions. A circle in which one is nostalgic for what wonderful, real Art has come down to us from earlier centuries; for what Art created when the Holy still drove the artist, and the Scriptural scene, the whole holy cycle of the Christ and the Virgin, of the Apostles and the Martyrs, and likewise the inspiration of heroism and chivalry, inspired the singers and sculptors. And although that circle is relatively small, it exerts, through the high position it occupies, an uncommon influence for the better. One wants nothing to do with the low atmosphere of Art, which diminishes itself and therefore the public, in that chosen circle. If one finds our century poor in products of the higher Art to which one refers, one withdraws

to historical territory in order to build oneself up from the products of the past and to derive higher inspiration. But own production is not lacking either. And building art, sculpture, painting and the art of music continue to astonish the world with their beautiful, exalted creations. Unlike their ancestors, they created them, yet very much in the style of their ancestors, adhering to their ancestors, continuing in the line of their ancestors. From our Christian point of view, we must not close our eyes to this. This is something we must warn against all the more because from time immemorial, and by no means wholly unjustly, pious people have always protested against the posturing of art. Criticism, of course, remains inadmissible. But wherever, in the field of human life, a higher drive, a nobler ambition manifests itself, this continues to have a claim on our appreciation. And as rightly as we detest the degraded art, it is equally right and proper for us to appreciate the high development that is expressed in the love for nobler, higher art. For us, love for our human race also goes hand in hand with its furthest derivation. And even though we know, and even though we profess, that only the return of the prodigal son to his Father, who is in heaven, can bring salvation, conclusive salvation, our higher calling commands us to rejoice and be glad about every revelation of a more ideal sense that we are allowed to observe. These phenomena also appear under a higher order, and they are a balm poured by the higher hand into the spiritual wound of the presently living generation. It is true that our eye must remain clearly open for the one-sidedness that prevails in this artistic circle, for the blindness with which the heroes of this circle are often smitten by the Holy Spirit, and for the idolatrous worship of Art, which has become the order of the day with many of these men. But even after deducting everything that is harmful in this movement and which must be condemned without condemnation, the fact remains that the people of this circle do not kneel before Mammon and do not sell their souls to the aroused passion, but that they strive, that they are inspired, and that their never slackening effort is for a higher good, a lofty ideal, an inspiration from above.

Having acknowledged this without reservation, however, it remains a duty to look at this phenomenon in the context of its time; and then, unfortunately, a less favourable judgement cannot be avoided. Art is related to Religion because both live from a higher inspiration. But even though that inspiration for art always comes from Above, and even though it can flow to the artist from no other source, it by no means follows that art itself recognizes and understands this. The opposite is true. Speak to any artist you like, and only very exceptionally will you find an artist who prays for his inspiration and also gives thanks for his inspiration, and

much less an artist who, after the completed expression of his emotions and the successful objectification of his inner vision, publicly pays homage to God as his inspirer, exhorting the public to give glory to God and not to him. On the contrary, complacency and a thirst for the incense of talent are by no means strange phenomena in the circle of artists, even our best men. Altar after altar is erected, bowl after bowl of incense is lit, but almost invariably only for the priest in the temple of art, and not for God, whose humble priest he must be. Now let us not be too hard on our artists. The same phenomenon can be observed among our men of science and our men of action. Vanity and the pursuit of honor lurk in all hearts, and envy of one by another stimulates all to be pleased with themselves. It is precisely for the man who has received rich talent, much genius and abundant gifts that remaining humble takes double trouble. Although we acknowledge that we are dealing with a general phenomenon here, it is hard to deny that especially in the circle of artists this glorification of themselves and each other is particularly present, and that especially in this circle the homage to Him, from whom the inspiration came to the artist, is almost always lacking.

If this is already worrying for the builder, sculptor, painter and artist, it is doubly worrying for the poet and for the man of letters in prose. For him it is necessary to pour his inspiration into images, those images into words, and those words into a conscious art form. His is the world of thoughts, and in that world of thoughts one has to account for what one experiences, finds inside oneself, absorbs and produces. That is why, precisely in this circle, the question: Where did my inspiration come from? cannot remain unanswered, and why the artist in this field, who has renounced all belief in the living God, needs a substitute for the renounced God. This is sought mystically in Pantheism, and in the slogan that in fact everything is divine and God. All of nature, all of the world, all of mankind, and all expressions of human life. But one cannot stop at this mystical general feeling. The builder and the artist of music, but not the artist of words. An inspiration that will lead to conscious art in words must itself start from something that is conscious of itself. The all-God must therefore be specified. And since the inspiration, which animates the artist, pushes and drives him towards the beautiful, he can come to no other conclusion than that in the all-Godly of the universe the Beautiful, the Beauty is the fundamentally Divine. Thus, one arrives at the idea of Beauty, of the Beautiful as the Divine, later as its God, and the worship of Beauty passes automatically into the worship of Beauty. But that too remains vague and uncertain, as long as the conscious life has not been concretely discovered in that

Beauty. Beauty without more has no I, and yet, only from a conscious I can higher, inspiring inspiration emanate. And so, it cannot be otherwise, then that the artist must look for this conscious revelation of Beauty in a human being, and then of course in the artist, in the artist himself. He who does not recognise a master above him who formed him, ends up worshipping himself, and sees in himself the self-revelation of Beauty, of the God of Beauty, while a lesser and lower artist finally finds his God in the more powerful artist who formed and animated him.

Thus, here too the King of kings in the field of art, "the Supreme Master Builder and Artist", is dethroned, and the artist-man establishes a throne for himself, from which, as a higher spirit, he wants to reign.

Will the artist, who has become an idol himself, now recognize a higher law? Perhaps in his art products themselves, in so far as he tries to conform to the law of the beautiful, which forces itself upon him from the art schools of the past. Yet also to that law never completely. This would be to acknowledge a power over him and above him, to which he had to submit, and this precisely conflicts with the basic idea of the self-inspiring artist-god, who wants to be god and priest at the same time. But above all he can never and will never acknowledge that there is a law of the Holy One, which also has to govern his art or at least set a limit to his art or direct it in the choice of its goal and the use of its means. And here is the point, where even the more ideal art reaches out to the self-defeating art. Everything, including the law of the Holy, must recede before Art. Art must rule, rule over all areas of our human life.

Now consider how widely this veneration of art has taken hold of hearts, minds and souls, even in our best circles. So much so, that those who frolic with art, cry out for art, sacrifice for art, are the select few in the highest circles. And how could it be otherwise than that this one-sided elevation of an art thus understood and thus practiced must increasingly loosen the threads of the transmitted faith, weaken the respect for the Holy One, and thus also in this way undermine the Christian foundations on which the building of state and society has rested for more than a thousand years.

The pretended royal rule of Art, too, in its most ideal conception, is increasingly detracting from the Kingship of Christ.