

'The arts are the best way of expressing religious ideas.'

I believe that arts are the best way to express religious ideas. I have several reasons for thinking this. Firstly, art may be the only way for some people to express their faith. For example illiterate people would be able to paint a picture of those they admire, as a way to connect and pay tribute to their faith.

I also believe that many pieces of artwork can make people feel awe and wonder. For example 'Rublev's Trinity' is a beautiful piece of artwork, which many people have admired, especially in those days when such colours (used in the painting) were a rarity. But it could be argued that with such paintings there is a danger of idolatry, meaning instead of people worshipping the Christian God, they actually begin to worship the painting itself. This would be wrong and a distraction from their faith. Many Christians and Buddhists, among other religious groups value their paintings and statues very highly, because the pictures represent something special in the same way that a picture of one's mother would be very special. But statues and paintings are representations and as such are valued, but should not be mistaken for the real holy being of whom it should remind them.

For instance 'Lesser Brethren', is a picture of a fairytale Jesus, where animals surround him. This particular painting is not in line with the gospels. Jesus is painted with too much sentimentality. He seems too 'Walt Disney' like, and it portrays his character wrongly, which is dangerous as people could misinterpret it. Unfortunately through artwork, there is a danger that the original meaning of the gospels may be lost, as too much work goes into what they think Jesus looks like, and they forget what he really would have looked like, an Arab. However this painting may provide reassurance for some Christians as it lessens the pain of life after death. The fairytale image encourages them to be good in order to ensure a place in heaven, where nothing seems to go wrong.

The positive benefits of using art in religion can be seen in 'The Lion of Judah: Masai Jesus' where Jesus is portrayed as a member of a completely different racial group - Masai. Having Jesus portrayed in such a way means that many more people can relate to him by visualising him as one of them, therefore making an individual connection with him. Jesus is painted as a Masai warrior suggesting that many Masai would like to follow in his footsteps, which would have probably been to fight the evil.

The act of showing Jesus as a member of different racial groups can be interpreted in two ways; a positive interpretation would be that the missionaries were trying to spread the word about Jesus' teachings.

The other, less positive interpretation is that in some paintings, Jesus is painted in a stylised way, therefore losing the historical context.

Many times when we hear a story of a certain holy being, it becomes easier to relate to them, by putting a face to their name. 'Thangkas' in Buddhism, are silk paintings of Bodhisattvas or Buddhas hung on walls. By having the painting visible for Buddhists, it encourages them to follow in the footsteps of their idol, and can inspire them to develop their quality.

Art is an excellent way of connecting with your emotions, for instance a mantra in Buddhism. The mantra often belongs to a Bodhisattva who has a certain quality. By chanting the mantra Buddhists can hope to bring out that quality in themselves.

Overall I believe art is beneficial to religion and there are examples in every faith. Art is a way to express things that you simply can't with words. As they say 'a picture paints a thousand words'. Mantras are another way of expressing feelings that are otherwise difficult to put into words. Mantras are sound syllables that do not have a literal meaning, and can only be really used when the meaning is understood. Artwork is something that everyone can admire regardless of your age, background and racial community.