COM 944 The Influence of Art on Culture and Society

Museum of the Bible Excursion

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February 28, 2023

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**Directions:**

The Reflective Course Learning Journal should be 5-7 pages in length and include the following sections:

1. Introduction – Describe the expectations of the graduate program and the in-person excursion component of this course. Summarize the intent of the course, how it fits into the graduate program as a whole, and the relevance of its position in the curricular sequence.

2. Personal Growth - Describe your personal growth related to the following subpoints: (a) how the exhibits at the Museum of the Bible stretched or challenged you; (b) how the museum visit enhanced your appreciation of the Bible in culture; and (c) what new spiritual insights you gained.

3. Reflective Entry - Add a reflective entry that: (a) describes the contextualization (or adaptation and relevant application) of new learning into your professional field; (b) how might an added appreciation of art and culture manifest in your professional field; (c) how the exhibits and experience changed or enhanced your worldview in any sphere of your personal life or thinking, and (d) identify specific exhibit(s) at the Museum of the Bible which made an impression on you or caused you to reconsider history and/or society from a new perspective.

4. Future Expectations - Continue the journal by addressing questions and concerns you now have relating to the graduate program expectations.

5. Conclusion – Synthesize the three body sections of the assignment evaluating the effectiveness of the course in meeting your professional, religious, and educational goals.

**Introduction**

The design of this course is for students to explore the impact and influence of the arts on the values, thinking, behavior, and practices of culture and society. This excursion was taken at the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C. Special emphasis is placed on how the Bible influenced society through the fine arts, specifically painting, sculpture, ceramics, music, architecture, and photography. The objectives of the course are:

1) To explore the interactive dynamic of the Bible on culture and society.

2) To allow scholar-practitioners to consider opportunities to positively influence culture and society through the influence of the Bible.

3) To help the student see the world through the lives of individuals and societies impacted by the Bible.

4) To develop a comprehensive perspective on the Bible’s influence on civilization throughout history, especially when that influence is not explicit or appreciated.

**Personal Growth**

The Museum of the Bible exhibits stretched and challenged me in unexpected ways. Beyond appreciation lies personal identification. My visit provided an avenue to connect with those who came before me from various cultures and historical eras as if I were a descendant of each one. Students of history can gain an appreciation for different cultures than their own after learning of the human story contained in the development of that society. But to identify with that culture requires more than learning and studying. Perhaps some would take a different opinion on this matter. I would suggest that my ability to connect with such diverse cultures is because we share a common faith heritage that is not culturally bound. My connection to this faith heritage became alive as I walked the museum halls. Profoundly, Hebrews 11 took on new meaning for me that day.

**Reflective Entry**

Several exhibits made an impression on me. Two exhibits had a particular impact on me during this visit, the Watchman Nee and the Washington Revelations exhibits. First, the Watchman Nee exhibit. Watchman Nee was instrumental in spreading the Christian faith and establishing the indigenous Christian Church throughout China and the entire world. Watchman Nee founded the “Local Church” movement in China, the first native Christian movement in the country. On April 10, 1952, Watchman Nee was arrested by the new People’s Republic of China officials. The Chinese Communist Party labeled Watchman Nee an enemy of the state. He spent 20 years in prison, where he endured harsh conditions and was denied nearly all contact with his family and access to the Bible. He died as a martyr of the Christian faith on May 30, 1972, at a labor camp in Anhui Province.

The Watchman Nee exhibit was located in a section called “Personal Stories.” I love how this man’s life and death testify to the power of the Gospel. Nee’s faith is one testimony among many, and his life story gives courage and hope to many Christ followers. Watchman Nee is regarded as one of the most influential Christians of the twentieth century. Parts of his story were told by his fellow inmate, You Qi Wu, who, upon witnessing Nee martyred for his faith, decided that he would also become a follower of Christ.

The second exhibit was called Washing Revelations. The Washington Revelations is a multi-sensory, 3-D tour of locations in the Capitol where Bible verses are etched, carved, or presented for public view. The number of places this virtual tour traveled to was too many to count. Some specific places are worth noting. First, the Supreme Court has a statue of Moses holding the Ten Commandments. As our nation seems to be careening toward the moral cliff, a historic Supreme Court decision was made during our research trip at the LOC. The Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973), stating that abortion is not protected under the Constitution but rather a decision for each to make with its citizens. As the statue of Moses stands atop the courthouse, justice was upheld on this issue, correcting an egregious error fifty years ago.

How appropriate that the scripture chosen for the Library of Congress was Leviticus 19:18 “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” A library stands as an institution devoted to celebrating the lives, ideas, creations, and stories of others. Humans were created to cultivate healthy communities. Jesus summarized the law of Moses as love for God and love for others. The Leviticus scripture upholds the true purpose of the Library of Congress, which aligns with a Christian worldview.

Walking past the U.S. Capitol was a somber experience. The front of the building was rigged with scaffolding and fencing due to the damage from the demonstrations on January 6, 2022. Regardless of which side of the political spectrum one finds themselves, this image of the U.S. Capitol in partial ruins greatly affects the spirit. The scripture on the Capitol building is “Preserve me, O God, for in thee do I put my trust” (Psalm 16:1). As our nation has aged, we have placed less and less trust in God to preserve us. The image of a Capitol in ruins is partly a prophetic reminder to the remnant that God is the only one able to preserve a nation.

A few other notable places where Holy Scripture can be found in the nation’s capitol are at the: a) Lincoln Memorial “That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth” (John 3); b) Museum of the Bible “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105); c) Washington Monument “Praise be to God” (Psalm 146:1–2); d) Union Station “The truth shall make you free” (John 8:32); e) Holocaust Memorial Museum “You are my witness” (Isaiah 43:10); and f) Confederate Monument “And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks” (Isaiah 2:4).

**Future Expectations**

I have no pertinent or pressing questions or concerns regarding the OGS program. I look forward to entering the dissertation phase of the program. Hopefully, I will soon receive candidacy upon completing my proposal defense.

**Conclusion**

 I have always considered myself a student of varying interests. Possibly this is due to my twelve years of Catholic school education. Annually the school would take students on trips to museums, dramatic plays and musicals, orchestra performances, and tour art galleries, both local and national. I recall one particular trip to various Catholic cathedrals, shrines, and monasteries from Ohio to Washington, D.C. These multi-sensory experiences created a hunger and appreciation for how the arts influence and reflect a culture’s values. So, this excursion to the Museum of the Bible aligned with these early childhood experiences. The quality of the exhibits and the opportunity to spend an entire day perusing the museum was a fantastic opportunity in the doctoral program.