
Let's Get Real! Magritte and the Nature of Reality
A Response by Steve Lemke to
“Putting God in a Frame: The Art of Rene Magritte as Religious Encounter,”
by C. Scott Drumm

Introduction

Dr. Drumm has not only *presented* Magritte to us today, but he has *played* Magritte for us to some degree – he has confronted us with something that strikes us as very strange! However, he has done us all a favor by challenging us with material outside many of our disciplines, and yet relevant to all that we do. I had not studied Magritte’s work carefully, so I have been enjoying getting to know Magritte better over the past few weeks in order to do my best to respond to his proposals in what will be partly philosophical, partly art criticism, and partly sermonic.

If I understand him correctly, Dr. Drumm is proposing that contemporary secular art in general and Magritte in particular are valuable to Christians for at least two key reasons:

- (1) Secular art reminds Christians of questions that the secular world is asking that we may not be hearing or answering adequately.
- (2) Secular art is “religious” in the sense that it asks ultimate metaphysical questions, and as such is a medium of natural revelation.

While Drumm describes Magritte’s quest as incomplete, he suggests that Christians can engage in a dialogue not unlike what Paul Tillich called the “method of correlation” – addressing the existential questions which arise from the human situation with answers from the Christian

faith.¹ In addition to examining the theological value of Magritte's work, Drumm proposes that the church reconsider its iconoclasm and rediscover the use of symbol. I would like to respond first by addressing several fundamental questions which confront us in Magritte's works, and by suggesting the answers which arise from Scripture, especially in the Prologue to the gospel of John. I would then like to comment on the use of symbol in the contemporary church.

The Ontological Question: What Is Real?

Perhaps the most fundamental question that Magritte confronts us with is the ontological question – the nature of reality itself. As a philosopher, I applaud those who ask such metaphysical questions. When I became the first philosophy professor on our campus in about forty years, news circulated quickly on campus when the first assignment I gave my Introduction to Philosophy class was to write an essay on the question, “What is a chair, really?” What I was trying to get my students to think about, and what Magritte is obviously challenging us to consider, is the reliability of naive realism. Naive realism is best expressed in the truism “Seeing is believing.” Naive realism unreflectively privileges the truth value of empirical epistemological evidence.

In the world of art, the corollary of naive realism is the issue of representation. Idealist art is interested in representation of not the imperfect material world but the perfect world of ideas. Realist art is interested in representation of the created world with the clarity and precision of a photograph. Impressionist art is interested in representation of the blurry, momentary world of sense impressions. Expressionist art is not interested in representation of the external world,

¹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1:60-66.

but in expressing the artist's internal world of feelings.

Magritte's work is described as "surrealism" or "magic realism" because he delights in juxtaposing realistic images in an absurd or surreal way that seems unsettling and disconcerting. His paintings place ordinary objects in extraordinary positions. Magritte himself defined surrealism as "the knowledge of absolute thought."² By this definition I believe he meant that confrontation with the absurd pushes us out of our comfort zone and provides us the opportunity to rethink our mundane daily experience. For example, in *The Empire of Lights* series (pictures 1-5), the scenes look very realistic at first blush. However, closer examination reveals that the lights are on in the midst of broad daylight, and the shadows from the lights are not where we expect them to be. Likewise, in *Time Transfixed* (picture 6), he incorporates two common items which are uncommon when joined together – a train and a fireplace. Magritte delighted in finding mystery in the mundane.

Surrealism is usually associated with Juan Miró and Salvador Dali.³ Perhaps two of the best known surrealist works are Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*, in which he also deals with the topic of time, and Miró's *Constellation: Awakening in the Early Morning* (pictures 7-8). Note how much more realistic Magritte's works are than these more paradigmatic surrealist works. Magritte consciously diverges from surrealism at three important points:⁴

² Cited in "Rene Magritte: A Gallery of the Surreal," at ebbs.vt.edu/hthl/etuds/brown/matritte.html.

³ You may have noticed *The Last Supper*, a surrealistic rendering by Dali in silver sculpture in the Frost Building hallway upstairs near my office.

⁴ Abraham Marie Hammacher, *Rene Magritte*, trans. James Brockway (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1974), cited in www.artchive.com/artchive/M/magritte.html.

- (a) While he had some interest in the preconscious mind (especially when awakening from sleep), Magritte had low regard for the Freudian psychoanalysis of the subconscious which played an important role in the work of other surrealist painters.
- (b) Magritte painted things in the real world with meticulous precision, avoiding the use of fictional creatures, distorted images, or the fantasy world.
- (c) Magritte not only rejected the use of symbolism that was typical of many surrealists, but he steadfastly refused to apply any meaning to his works.

Perhaps Magritte's clearest philosophical statements are in his *This Is Not a Pipe* series (pictures 9-12). The pictures clearly depict Meerscham pipes, but the captions proclaim that they are not pipes. Michel Foucault, one of the key architects of postmodernism, was so struck by these paintings that he wrote a book about them.⁵ A frequent correspondent with Magritte, Foucault admired the way Magritte's pipe paintings erase the perceived link between objects and the language that refers to them. Foucault contended that there was no contradiction in the paintings because a contradiction must be between two statements, and the paintings contained only one statement. Indeed, Foucault argued, the statement "This is not a pipe" is not false, because the drawings are merely a depiction of a pipe, not an actual pipe. Nonetheless, a word or

⁵ Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). Foucault's postmodernism view of epistemology and language is expressed in Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972); *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977); and *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988). In the latter two works Foucault argues that mental illness has no reality as such, but is merely the creation of the medical profession in league with the power brokers of society. In a similar vein, postmodern sociologist Jean Baudrillard, with whom I have had the opportunity of dialogue while sharing a meal, argues that the Gulf War was not real but merely a creation of the American media. See Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

images is a similitude which “like a sovereign makes things appear.”⁶

Two of Magritte’s other paintings attempt to unite apparent opposites – *Hegel’s Holiday* and *In Praise of Dialectics* (pictures 13-14). Hegel’s well-known dialectical method merged opposing elements, the thesis and the antithesis, into the synthesis. In *Hegel’s Holiday*, Magritte sets up a play of opposites – the solid, dark umbrella, which normally functions to repel and shield against water, is itself shielded by the opaque, light glass, which normally functions to accept water. In Magritte’s *In Praise of Dialectics*, we cannot discern if we are outside looking in or inside looking out. We face similar confusion in *Reproduction Prohibited* (picture 15), in which we do not see the image that we expect to be reflected in the mirror, and in *Clairvoyance* (picture 16), where the artist is looking at an egg but drawing a bird.

What worldview emerges in Magritteville? The world Magritte depicts is one that rejects any logocentric unity or metanarrative, opting instead for a confusing and chaotic world that has lost its center of meaning. Magritte offers us ontological shock treatments to jar us out of our metaphysical slumbers, but proposes no satisfying alternative. By embracing the postmodern doctrine of the slippage of meaning between sign and referent, Magritte depicts a world devoid of meaning and truth. He poses important ontological questions but offers no meaningful answers.

It is in the beautiful symbolic language of the Prologue to the Gospel of John that we find the answer to Magritte’s questions about the nature of reality: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

⁶ Ibid., 46, cited in Rex Butler, “Sovereign Stain: On René Magritte’s *Hegel’s Holiday*,” at www.arts.monash.edu.au/visarts/globe/issue3/hegels.html.

All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.”⁷ John describes a world that is not only unapologetically logocentric, but the Logos Himself is the clue to reality and meaning. The Apostle Paul explained to the philosophers on Mars Hill that “we live, and move, and have our being” in Him (Acts 17:28). Paul writes eloquently in his epistle to the Colossians, “For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist” (Col. 1:16-17). In the Christian worldview, Jesus Christ is the center of reality because He created the world and holds it together. In Christ we understand where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going. Apart from Christ, the world makes no sense.

The Epistemological Question: How Can I Know the Truth?

As Dr. Drumm shown us, Magritte utilizes such devices as windows and curtains to bring out the perspectival nature of human sense perception. Works such as *The Human Condition* (pictures 17-24) remind me of *Parson Weems’ Fable* (picture 25), a painting by American artist Grant Wood, perhaps better known for painting *American Gothic*. *Parson Weems’ Fable* is an elaborate ruse on the legend of the boyhood George Washington cutting down the cherry tree. The scene is framed by a curtain, whose hanging fringe is echoed in the cherries hanging from the tree. Wood paints in a hyper-realistic style similar to that of Magritte, with George Washington’s face being not that of a child but a copy of the famous Gilbert Stuart portrait of Washington as a President, still utilized on our dollar bills. Parson Mason Locke Weems, who created the “cannot tell a lie” legend in his book *The Life of George Washington*, points

⁷ John 1:1-3, all biblical quotations KJV unless otherwise noted.

approvingly to the scene, his green coat buttons echoed in the trees in the background of the picture. Painted in 1939, the sarcastic iconoclasm of *Parson Weems' Fable* against the father of our country was a bit of a shock to an America bound up in the patriotism of that era. Magritte likewise challenges us to question long held beliefs by seeing a new perspective on reality.

The concept of “enframing” is central to postmodernism. We do not discover truth; we create truth from our own vision of reality. Postmodern thinkers such as Lynda Sexson argue that “we must fabricate, make up our sacred stories as we go along. . . . [W]e do make/create ourselves, . . . we are indeed goddesses and gods insofar as we repeatedly determine the Enframings toward which and through which everyday realities are experienced and reenvisioned.”⁸ This perspectival enframing is derived in part from the postmodern doctrine of historicism – the view that we are essentially helpless pawns conditioned by the contingencies of our lives. No one has an objective viewpoint on reality; the world we see is radically shaped by the accidents of history. As postmodern thinker Richard Rorty puts it, “Our language and our culture are as much a contingency, as much a result of thousands of small mutations finding niches (and millions of others finding no niches), as are the orchids and the anthropoids.”⁹ The profound insights of great thinkers in history was not due to their breakthrough discovery of a truth about reality, but due to the accidents of their lives. “For all we know, or should care,”

⁸ Lynda Sexson, cited in “Within and Beyond the Picture Frame,” by William G. Doty, *Picturing Cultural Values in Postmodern America*, ed. William G. Doty (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 28.

⁹ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 16. By the way, Rorty was an analytic rationalist thinker before he converted to postmodernism.

Rorty asserts, “Aristotle's metaphorical use of *ousia*, Saint Paul's metaphorical use of *agape*, and Newton's metaphorical use of *gravitas*, were the results of cosmic rays scrambling the fine structure of some crucial neurons in their respective brains. Or, more plausibly, they were the result of some odd episodes in infancy--some obsessional kinks left in these brains by idiosyncratic traumata.”¹⁰

Magritte's painting *Personal Values* (picture 26) not only raises perspectival issues, but also suggest a Nietzschean transvaluation of all values. The composition and photographic realism of the painting is reminiscent of a still life, a basic genre in the repertoire of many painters. But in *Personal Values*, ordinary utilitarian objects such as the comb and glass are radically resized, becoming disconcerting strangers rather than familiar objects. This work is similar in some ways to the works of the trompe l'oeil school of American painting, especially by William Harnett and John Peto. Illusionist or trompe l'oeil works were so named because they looked so realistic that they tricked the eye into believing they were real. In works such as *My Gems*, *The Old Violin*, *The Letter Rack*, and *The Poor Man's Store* (pictures 27-30), ordinary objects – often things that were of symbolic value to the person who commissioned the work – were carefully placed in the painting. Despite the similarities in utilizing the format of still life and including objects of personal interest, the differences are marked between Magritte and the trompe l'oeil artists. The trompe l'oeil artists utilized their precision to precisely imitate reality at every point; Magritte's near photographic accuracy magnifies the ontological shock of the unexpected juxtaposition of these otherwise realistic images. The collections of personal artifacts utilized by trompe l'oeil artists leave us with a sense of tradition and home; Magritte

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

leaves us unsettled and off balance. Like most postmodern thinkers, Magritte goes beyond merely decrying naive realism to challenging whether anything can be known with assurance. His works suggest that everything is perspectival and subjective; no one has the inside track on truth.

Postmodern thinkers such as Richard Rorty assume that while there may be a real world out there, we can never know anything about it with certainty. He believes that the postmodernist doctrines of historicism and contingency have “helped free us, gradually but steadily, from theology and metaphysics--from the temptation to look for an escape from time and chance [T]he novel, the movie, and the TV program have gradually but steadily replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress.”¹¹ While Rorty asserts that “truth cannot be out there,”¹² he is also aware of the dilemma of relativism – that to assert that there is no truth is to claim that there is at least one objective truth. So he says that one should not assert that “out there, there is no truth,” but rather to realize that saying something is true is merely “an empty compliment,” and that “our purposes would be served best by ceasing to see truth as a deep matter, as a topic of philosophical interest”¹³

Thankfully, most evangelical Christians haven’t given up on truth. Of course, it is true that we suffer from the same conditioning of socio-economic, psychological, and genetic factors that anyone else does, and we do” see through the glass darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12). But we have what Magritte and Rorty overlook – a revelation of objective truth from Him who transcends space and time. As John puts it, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

¹¹ Ibid., xii, xvi.

¹² Ibid., 3.

¹³ Ibid., 8.

Later in John's gospel, Jesus describes Himself as "the Light of the World" (John 8:12). Light brings clarity to that which was in darkness. Jesus is ". . . the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man" (John 1:9, NASB). Only Jesus can provide a trustworthy light to illuminate our darkness; only Jesus is the key to truth. As Jesus Himself said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one comes to the Father but by Me" (John 14:6, NASB). Jesus didn't just come to teach the truth; He is Himself the key to truth and meaning. God's revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ and in Scripture provides us with epistemology from above, not epistemology from below. Only divine revelation has a transcendent and objective description of reality that affords an escape from the perspectival limitations of human experience.

The Antropological Question: What Is Human Life All About?

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of Magritte's paintings is his portrayal of human beings. As Dr. Drumm rightly points out, a number of Magritte's works depict human figures with cloth over their heads, such as *The Lovers 1*, *The Lovers 2*, and *The Central Story* (pictures 31-33). It does appear obvious that the traumatic event of the suicide of Magritte's mother with her night clothes wrapped around her head made an indelible impression on his mind, and was a central moment in the story of Magritte's life. *The Ordeal of Sleep* (picture 34) portrays a woman in troubled sleep with her night clothes by her bedside. Other works such as *Memory* and *The Great War* (pictures 35-36) depict female figures in grotesque or strange ways. As Dr. Drumm mentions, Magritte replaces the human figures in two popular European portrait paintings of bourgeois society, Jacques-Louis David's *Madame Recamier* and Edouard Manet's *The Balcony*, with caskets (pictures 37-40). This brutal and macabre portrayal of human life reminds one of Picasso's painting *Guernica* (picture 41), which depicts the gruesome horrors of

the Spanish Civil War.

A few of Magritte's early works such as *Military Tattoo*, *Head of a Man*, *Self-Portrait*, and *Georgette at the Piano* (pictures 42-45) are expressed in the cubist style. Cubism is a style usually associated with Picasso, for whom each of the shards of color in cubist style was a momentary sense impression of an ever-changing scene. Magritte and Picasso sometimes address the same subjects in similar style (pictures 46-49), however, in the light of the emphases in Magritte's other paintings, it may be that the cubist shards in his works hint at the fragmentation and brokenness of his human subjects.

Magritte's numerous paintings of men with bowler hats also suggest the impersonal anonymity of contemporary urban life. The men are portrayed with either their backs facing the viewer or their faces obscured (pictures 50-57). Magritte's bowler hat men are reminiscent of Gustave Caillebotte's similar portrayals of the vacant looks of disengaged commuters in Parisian urban life in his *On the Europe Bridge* and *Rainy Day: Paris Street* (pictures 58-59), or of Edgar Degas' depiction of detached men in *The Cotton Exchange in New Orleans* (picture 60). The anthropology that emerges from Magritte's works is a tragic vision of human life as an ordeal of personal anguish in a very anonymous and impersonal world. His characters are tragic victims with no hope.

In contrast, John's anthropology gives us every reason for hope. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the foundation of this hope. John writes not of Magritte's absent deistic God, but a God who took on all the pain and suffering of human existence. As the Prologue words it: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Central to the message of the

incarnation and the teaching of Jesus is that God identifies with and cares deeply for the pain and suffering not only of humanity, but of all sensate created beings (Matt. 6:26; 9:36; Luke 12:6-7, 24, 27). From Herod's murderous infanticide in and around Bethlehem occasioned by Jesus' birth, to the Savior's painful execution between two thieves, Jesus experienced the same pains and temptations that we face (Heb. 4:15). As Isaiah foretold, the suffering servant was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3, c.f. Matt. 8:17).

Yet Jesus not only identified with human suffering, but he provided the way to victory over suffering and death. The Prologue says it best: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (John 1:11-12). God had created humans in His own image as the height of His creation, only a little lower than the angels (Gen. 1:27, Psa. 8:5). But sin distorted that image of God within humankind, and we found ourselves in need of salvation because we were unable to overcome sin on our own. Faith in Jesus Christ provides for that salvation, elevating us to the exalted but undeserved status of children of God. So the anthropology of Magritte and Jesus stand in stark contrast: in one humans are defeated and hopeless in an anonymous, impersonal world; in the other humans are victorious and hopeful in a purposeful, personal world. Jesus not only offers us victory over despair, but He models for us the ideal of what humans were designed to be. As for me and my house, we'll go with Jesus!

The Question of Worship: What Role Is There for Symbol in Worship?

I am very much in agreement with Dr. Drumm in his proposal that we discover ways to utilize symbols in our worship. Recently reading Robin Margaret Jensen's excellent survey of

the use of symbols in the early church in *Understanding Early Christian Art*,¹⁴ I was struck with the poverty of the use of symbol in the contemporary church in contrast with the early church. The daily lives of early Christians were punctuated with Christian iconography in their homes and in churches. However, Christianity has also had iconoclastic movements from the Council of Elvira in 305 A.D. to the Protestant Reformation. Anyone who has been on a tour of European cathedrals has witnessed the transformation of churches once luminous with symbolism and imagery to the whitewashed sepulchers of the Protestant era.

It seems to me that we are entering into a new age of iconoclasm, not for the fear of idolatry that motivated earlier iconoclasts, but the fear of irrelevance. It seems to be the vogue in cutting edge contemporary churches (such as those following the Willow Creek tradition) to remove Christian symbols altogether for fear they would be hindrances to secular persons. Church architecture is consciously designed to imitate shopping malls rather than traditional churches. While it is certainly appropriate for some seeker-focused churches to use this approach, it can hardly become the norm for all Christendom. The cross will always be scandalous to unbelievers (1 Cor. 1:22-24), whether in the first century or the twenty-first century. There would appear to be an integrity problem, a sanctified version of bait-and-switch, to lure people in under a false flag of worldliness. The danger of sanitizing the church of its unique Christian symbols is that we too easily forget who we are and why we are here. The church needs to rediscover decide what our message is and fly our flag proudly.

In a day that major corporations spend millions of dollars to design logos that adequately

¹⁴ Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

communicate their corporate identity to customers, why are we so hesitant to use Christian symbols in the church? Some denominations have expunged references in their church hymnals to Christian images such as the Fatherhood of God and the blood of the Lamb. My home church recently relocated to a new building which is overall very attractive and functional. However, I was disturbed to see that the art work in the hallways surrounding the sanctuary were secular prints devoid of any obvious Christian symbolism, such as one might normally see in a furniture store or a dentist's office. The message of these prints appears to be more about the church's identification with the bourgeois values of upper middle class life rather than with the sacrificial commitment required by the Lord. We worry when people are too heavenly minded to be any earthly good; should we not also be concerned when the church is so worldly minded that it can be of no heavenly good? Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon may describe the appropriate Christian role in contemporary life in the title of their book, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*.¹⁵

Symbolic images can be powerful tools to communicate the gospel. It was important to have pictorial representations of the story of Scripture in the early church because so few people could read or afford a Bible. While copies of Scripture are now available to people in most countries, we communicate less effectively when we fail to use visual communication tools. Incidentally, the emphasis on the necessity of visual communication for the MTV generation is overblown. The MTV generation was climatized to visual media as an accident of history; had they been born in any other era they would have had to learn like anyone else. But educators

¹⁵ Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

have been saying for many decades that we all learn better when at least both audio and visual means are employed. This point was driven home to me at a presentation at a recent meeting of our accreditation agency, SACS. The presenter, who was a middle aged faculty member at Towson State University, remarked in passing how much she hated sermons because she disliked having to sit and listen. She looked forward to participating in liturgy or any other way that she could read as well as hear. She was not in the MTV generation, but she found herself losing interest in a single media worship service. I suspect that she is more the norm than the exception, and that greater interest and retention from multimedia presentations is a human trait, not merely a Generation X trait.

Multimedia presentations are the norm in biblical worship, not the exception. God gave specific instructions to the Old Testament temple builders to design the implements of worship with elaborate imagery. Both the Old Testament prophets and Jesus utilized enacted parables and object lessons to proclaim their message. The festivals and holy days of Old Testament worship such as the Passover were specifically designed with object lessons to provoke questions from children and provide the opportunity to explain to them how God had intervened in history for His people. And, of course, Scripture itself is replete with many symbols and images of the kingdom of God. If the people of God have always utilized multiple media in this way, we should seek ways to use symbolism and imagery in the contemporary church – through multimedia presentations, dramatic monologues, Christian drama, Powerpoint sermon outlines, banners, baptistries, stained glass windows, object lessons, film clips, and many other ways.

Dr. Drumm also raised in his paper the pragmatic issue of the value that art works such as those of Magritte might have for the church. While I absolutely agree that Magritte raises some

of the most important questions of human existence, Magritte poses these questions with an implied answer that is quite contrary to the Christian message. Dr. Drumm is probably more optimistic than am I about the effectiveness of Magritte for art evangelism. Personally, I am about as skeptical of the religious value of Magritte's ontological shocks as I am of *satori* experiences of Zen Buddhists to achieve *nirvana*. While we should maintain contact with contemporary culture in order to witness to the hope that is within us, somehow it doesn't seem that it would be productive to post evangelists with tracts at major museums in order to lead the viewers from Magritte to the Master.

Asking the right questions does little good unless we can be pointed to the right answers. Art that includes Christian symbols or depictions of biblical events is more likely to facilitate faith. The illuministic realism of the Hudson River School can serve such a purpose, in dramatic portrayals such as *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* by Thomas Cole (picture 61). However, if your tastes are more contemporary, Jewish painter Marc Chagall's *Adam and Eve Expelled from Paradise* (picture 62) addresses the same narrative in the expressionistic genre.

The best use of art for sharing the gospel of which I am aware, however, takes place in St. Petersburg, Russia, through the ministry of the Temple of the Gospel. This innovative Baptist church has an associate pastor who had earned a graduate degree in art from the University of Leningrad. It happens that over 80 percent of Russian art has religious themes. So he developed an art program that touches the lives of hundreds of school children. He does not preach; he simply leads tour groups of children through the museums and tells the Christian significance of each of these works of art.

One of my favorite works that my friend showed me in the Russian Museum was *The*

Tenth Wave by Ivan Aivazovsky (picture 63). The slide hardly does justice to the actual painting – an enormous work that covers a whole wall in the museum. While at first blush it appears to be merely a seascape shipwreck scene, discern the significance of the mast of the ship being in the shape of a cross. Only those desperate sailors who can grasp the mast/cross will survive. Aivazovsky provides us an important clue not only about the kind of art that is apt to facilitate faith, but a clue to keeping our lives in focus. If we keep our attention focused on the cross, we'll have the clearest picture of how to frame everything else in life.