

Here we end our treatise on the book of Exodus, because the things which were said and done concerning the construction of the temple we have already dealt with according to our ability at an earlier point. However, this we think should not be omitted, which Moses told the children of Israel: "Behold the Lord hath called by name Beseleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, from the tribe of Juda, and hath filled him with the spirit of God, with wisdom and understanding. Oliab also, the son of Achisamech, of the tribe of Dan. Both of them hath he instructed with wisdom, to do carpenters' work, and tapestry, and embroidery."¹³² Beseleel is also taken to mean "The Lord's shadow" because by his name he signifies, as has been said, the tabernacle, because he made it a shadow, that is a type, of the heavenly tabernacle. Oliab is also taken to mean "The Father is my protection," and signifies by this name that the protection of the Lord and his tabernacle may be hoped for as a reward by those who serve him. And since scripture says with divine authority that "the Lord called them by name" and "both of them hath he instructed with wisdom," who could doubt that these as well as all other arts of this sort are gifts from God? In like manner, in whatever man such useful and licit arts are found, they ought to be cherished, and skilled craftsmen ought to be admonished lest they devote divine skill to the pursuit of gain, for their talents are not their own, but bestowed on them by their creator, and that which he has given he will also require.¹³³

St. Bernard to William of St. Thierry: Ascetic Reaction

A new and sharpened sense of the incompatibility of secular and religious concerns was the cause as well as a result of the investiture controversy, which reached its critical phase between 1075 and 1122. A wave of puritanism led to the foundation of stricter monastic orders like the Carthusians, Cistercians, and Praemonstratensians. From their ranks came the ascetics of the twelfth century to whom the luxuriousness, the sensuality and the paganism of contemporary art seemed scandalous. The writings of these critics are often influenced by St. Jerome,¹³⁴ and one of them, the Carthusian Guiges de Châtel,¹³⁵ edited the letters of St. Jerome. The most eloquent among the enemies of romanesque art was St. Bernard of Clairvaux, whose critique is also the most perceptive.

But these are small things; I will pass on to matters greater in themselves, yet seeming smaller because they are more usual. I say naught of the vast height of your churches, their immoderate length, their super-

¹³² Exod. 35: 30-31.

¹³³ Rupert of Deutz, *In Exodum*, IV, 44, ed. Migne, *Patrologia latina*, CLXVII (Paris, 1862), col. 744.

¹³⁴ See above, pp. 37-40.

¹³⁵ Guiges de Châtel, prior of the Grand Chartreuse (1110-37).

fluorous breadth, the costly polishings, the curious carvings and paintings which attract the worshipper's gaze and hinder his attention, and seem to me in some sort a revival of the ancient Jewish rites. Let this pass, however: say that this is done for God's honour. But I, as a monk, ask of my brother monks as the pagan¹³⁶ [poet Persius] asked of his fellow-pagans: "Tell me, O Pontiffs" quoth he, "what doeth this gold in the sanctuary?"¹³⁷ So say I, "Tell me, ye poor men" for I break the verse to keep the sense, "tell me, ye poor if, indeed, ye be poor, what doeth this gold in your sanctuary?" And indeed the bishops have an excuse which monks have not; for we know that they, being debtors both to the wise and the unwise, and unable to excite the devotion of carnal folk by spiritual things, do so by bodily adornments. But we who have now come forth from the people; we who have left all the precious and beautiful things of the world for Christ's sake; who have counted but dung, that we may win Christ, all things fair to see or soothing to hear, sweet to smell, delightful to taste, or pleasant to touch—in a word, all bodily delights—whose devotion, pray, do we monks intend to excite by these things? What profit, I say, do we expect therefrom? The admiration of fools, or the oblations of the simple? Or, since we are scattered among the nations, have we perchance learnt their works and do we yet serve their graven images? To speak plainly, doth the root of all this lie in covetousness, which is idolatry, and do we seek not profit, but a gift? If thou askest: "How?" I say: "In a strange fashion." For money is so artfully scattered that it may multiply; it is expended that it may give increase, and prodigality giveth birth to plenty: for at the very sight of these costly yet marvellous vanities men are more kindled to offer gifts than to pray. Thus wealth is drawn up by ropes of wealth, thus money bringeth money; for I know not how it is that, wheresoever more abundant wealth is seen, there do men offer more freely. Their eyes are feasted with relics cased in gold, and their purse-strings are loosed. They are shown a most comely image of some saint, whom they think all the more saintly that he is the more gaudily painted. Men run to kiss him, and are invited to give; there is more admiration for his comeliness than veneration for his sanctity. Hence the church is adorned with gemmed crowns of light—nay, with lustres like cartwheels, girt all round with lamps, but no less brilliant with the precious stones that stud them. Moreover we see candelabra standing like trees of massive bronze, fashioned with marvellous subtlety of art, and glistening no less brightly with gems than with the lights they carry. What, think you, is the purpose of all this? The compunction of penitents, or the admiration of beholders? O vanity of vanities, yet no more vain than insane! The church is resplendent in her walls, beggarly

¹³⁶ Persius Flaccus, a Stoic poet (34–62 A.D.).

¹³⁷ Persius, *Saturae* II, 71–72.

in her poor; she clothes her stones in gold, and leaves her sons naked; the rich man's eye is fed at the expense of the indigent. The curious find their delight here, yet the needy find no relief. Do we not revere at least the images of the Saints, which swarm even in the inlaid pavement whereon we tread? Men spit oftentimes in an Angel's face; often, again, the countenance of some Saint is ground under the heel of a passer-by. And if he spare not these sacred images, why not even the fair colours? Why dost thou make that so fair which will soon be made so foul? Why lavish bright hues upon that which must needs be trodden under foot? What avail these comely forms in places where they are defiled with customary dust? And, lastly, what are such things as these to you poor men, you monks, you spiritual folk? Unless perchance here also ye may answer the poet's question in the words of the Psalmist: "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy House, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth."¹³⁸ I grant it, then, let us suffer even this to be done in the church; for, though it be harmful to vain and covetous folk, yet not so to the simple and devout. But in the cloister, under the eyes of the Brethren who read there, what profit is there in those ridiculous monsters, in that marvellous and deformed comeliness, that comely deformity? To what purpose are those unclean apes, those fierce lions, those monstrous centaurs, those half-men, those striped tigers, those fighting knights, those hunters winding their horns? Many bodies are there seen under one head, or again, many heads to a single body. Here is a four-footed beast with a serpent's tail; there, a fish with a beast's head. Here again the forepart of a horse trails half a goat behind it, or a horned beast bears the hinder quarters of a horse. In short, so many and so marvellous are the varieties of divers shapes on every hand, that we are more tempted to read in the marble than in our books, and to spend the whole day in wondering at these things rather than in meditating the law of God. For God's sake, if men are not ashamed of these follies, why at least do they not shrink from the expense?¹³⁹

ARTISTS AND PATRONS

An Exchange of Letters

The abbot Wibald of Stavelot was a prominent politician who

¹³⁸ Psalm 25: 8.

¹³⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Letter to William of St. Thierry*, trans. G. G. Coulton, *A. Mediaeval Garner* (London: Constable and Co., 1910), pp. 70-72. Reprinted by permission of Constable and Co., Ltd.

served three emperors, Lothair II,¹⁴⁰ Conrad III,¹⁴¹ and Frederick Barbarossa.¹⁴² He traveled widely and went twice as an envoy to Constantinople, where he died in 1158. He was also a famous patron of the arts. His correspondent may have been Godefroi de Claire, a goldsmith who worked, like Wibald, for the emperors Lothair II and Conrad III. Godefroi also shared Wibald's taste for travel, which led him as far as Sidon. He later returned to Huy where he died as a canon in 1175. The letters show the abbot urging the goldsmith to deliver his work and the goldsmith demanding his pay. To say that patron and artist treat each other as equals in these letters would probably be an exaggeration. Each, however, seems to assess his own position as well as that of his opponent carefully: the abbot finds it necessary to temper his imperious demand with politeness, while the goldsmith allows himself only an undertone of mockery. It is obvious that both men esteem each other, but that neither is willing to give an inch of what he considers to be his right or his prerogative.

Abbot Wibald to the Goldsmith G.

Brother Wibald to his beloved son G. the goldsmith greeting and blessing.

Men of your profession are often wont not to fulfill their promises, since they accept more work than they are able to perform, greed being the root of all evil. But your noble talent and your willing and celebrated hand avoid all suspicion of deceit. May good faith guide your craft, may honesty accompany your work, may your promises be fulfilled in time. And we believe that you should be reminded of your binding promises, especially since no suspicion of fraud and falseness can reside in the home of such a distinguished talent. Why then do we say these things? Namely that you may zealously concentrate on the work we have ordered you to do and not in the meantime accept another commission which might hinder the completion of ours. Know, that our desire is impatient and pressing and that we want quickly that which we want. As Seneca says in his *De beneficiis*: "He gives twice who gives quickly."¹⁴³ Later we intend to write you at more length about the care and management of your household, the government of your family and the supervision and discipline of your wife.

The Goldsmith G. to Abbot Wibald

To Lord Wibald by the grace of God abbot of Stavelot and Corbie his G. sends greetings and due reverence.

¹⁴⁰ Lothair II, German Emperor (1125-37).

¹⁴¹ Conrad III, German Emperor (1138-52).

¹⁴² Frederick I, German Emperor (1152-90).

¹⁴³ A medieval proverb, here ascribed to Seneca who expresses a similar thought in *De Beneficiis*, II, 1-4.

Early Medieval Art

300-1150

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