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## A SUPER-GRAPHIC WALL MURAL / SUPER-GRAPHIC STAINED GLASS A Spiritual Exercise

A Faithful reader, here's yet another – an eighth – in my on-going series of Spiritual Exercises. Previous Exercises in this series have included:

- B Essay 204 Signs of the Kingdom
- Essay 208 A Spiritual Autobiography
- Essay 211 A Discipline of Daily Prayer
- Essay 214 My Ten Greatest Hymns
- Essay 220 *Benedicite Omnia Opera AND Berachah*
- Essay 229 A wound map

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1 When I was Lutheran Chaplain at Syracuse University, we worshiped at first on Sunday mornings in the so-called Chapel House, in the renovated Chapter Room of a disbanded fraternity. The Chapter Room was simplicity itself. A door, no windows, and white walls, with stacking chairs that could be placed anywhere.

2 We took advantage of this flexibility and re-arranged the seating regularly. There were many years when we configured a different worship space for almost every Season of the Church Year. And with the help of a creative student in SU's Industrial Design program, we provided an "East wall" focus, behind the Parsons Table altar, for each Season. I recall two such super-graphic murals with special fondness.

3 The first was in Advent of, say, 1966. My Industrial Design team came up with a striking idea. We mounted large, square sheets of coloured paper, in Advent's hues of blue and purple on the white wall, in an abstract arrangement that recalled the artist Mondrian, around an eye-catching strip of reflective Mylar. We mounted the paper and Mylar with industrial strength double-stick tape. It was altogether smashing as backdrop to our Table, in this small one-room space.

4 The second splendid super-graphic wall treatment was in SU's Chapel itself, in the so-called Noble Room, when our Sunday worship had moved there. The Noble Room – named after a beloved previous Dean of the Chapel – was a handsome and well-used student lounge. Our East wall focus this year – say, 1974 – was smile-inducing.

5 I had discovered that, in those days, outdoor billboards were made of two-foot-square sheets of paper, pasted edge to edge onto the surface of the wooden billboard itself, like a jig-saw puzzle. And when the days of their particular promotion had expired, they simply threw the unused extra papers away. (The days before more scrupulous re-cycling!)

6 So I arranged to visit local Outdoor Advertising agencies in our city, and they gave me stacks of un-used paper promotional material. I found one enormous paper lithograph of *Smokey the Bear*, for example, and mounted it, in sections, with wallpaper paste, on our young daughter Sarah's bedroom wall!

7 But my prize was from *Burger King*: an enormous paper lithograph of a cheeseburger, in sections for pasting. No words, just this gigantic graphic image: Tomato slices as big around as wagon wheels! Sesame seeds like golf balls! We mounted this on our East wall during the Easter Season, as reminder that The Communion is essentially a meal!

8 On still another occasion, I was serving at our Seminary as Workshop Leader at a Youth Event. That brings me to the substance of this posting. Still another super-graphic inspiration. I had come across a craft idea that, in this case, yielded, not a wall mural, but a stained glass panel.

9 It was during the Epiphany Season. I found an inexpensive paper reproduction of an icon of the *Madonna with Child*: Mary holding the Infant Jesus in her embrace. The colour reproduction – from a church supply store – was lithographed on paper, perhaps ten by twelve inches in size. I bought two of them: one to cut into pieces, one to serve as "control".

10 I ruled a grid in pencil on the paper icon's surface, of about one inch squares. With a pencil, I carefully numbered each square, as unobtrusively as possible, in its lower left hand corner, top row to bottom row. Then with a scissors I cut the icon into what I will call tiles. (In mosaics, the individual pieces of stone or glass are called *tessera*.)

11 My workshop consisted of about a dozen youth, junior and senior high school kids. I invited each kid to take a handful of tiles, making certain every tile was accounted for. I distributed to each member of my group a selection of coloured markers: Wax crayons, felt-tipped Sharpies, coloured pencils, even trays of watercolours and tubes of acrylics. And I distributed sheets of ordinary 8 1/2 by 10 inch white paper, of the kind you use in your printer with your computer. One sheet for each tile, plus a couple extra sheets for each kid.

12 Their assignment? Render each tiny tile, as accurately as possible, on each of your larger sheets of paper, in colours and values – darks and lights – as close to their original as they could make them. The extra sheets of paper were in case they wanted to start over. The workshop participants were to number each of their finished products, in the lower left corner, to correspond to the numbers on their tiles.

13 And you were to utilize as many different media as possible. A different medium for each tile: Crayon, coloured pencil, felt-tip marker, watercolour, acrylic. The real challenge, in the exercise, was composition: If you start with a tile that features half a human ear, make certain, if possible, that it will match up with the other half-ear, on someone else's tile! Check with the "control" icon, or with a neighbor at your table.

13 (Aside: You might want to trim each blank sheet of paper into a square. On the other hand, leaving each sheet of paper as is would slightly distort the final image. But it would still be quite easily recognizable as *Madonna with Child*.)

14 By happy accident, our Seminary's ground floor hallways feature floor-to-ceiling glass walls. We mounted the finished sheets of paper edge to edge on the glass with double-stick tape: *Madonna with Child* now in gigantic scale! The image took up almost the entire glass surface! Daylight streamed through the paper, and voila! A window of stained glass!

15 And it was splendid! The various textures of the disparate media – crayons, markers, paint – made the whole image crackle and shimmer with surface excitement! We were all enormously proud. Passersby marveled at the finished image!

16 But a spiritual exercise? I like to think so. We were exercising the right side of the brain, the imaginative and associative and creative gifts that belong to *homo sapiens*. God-given and evocative qualities that church people don't often enough have chance to put into action in the service of the Good News!

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