



RELIGIOUS AWARENESS IN ART FROM PREHISTORY TO TODAY

**A Course in Art Appreciation
Lectures by Dr. Francis J. GREENE, Art Historian**

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Prehistoric Cave Art, Egypt, Greece and Rome

Simmonds: Good evening, and welcome to our lecture on “Prehistoric Cave Art, Egypt, Greece and Rome” the first in a series of four lectures by Dr. Francis Greene organized by Crossroads New York Cultural Center. The title of the series is “Religious awareness in art from prehistory to today” and reflects the idea that art is not separate from the larger drama of human history, but it reflects the broader human quest for meaning, and as such is intrinsically linked with religiosity. As it happens, the idea for this series was inspired by a seminal work of Msgr. Luigi Giussani’s, titled *Religious Awareness in Modern Man*, which was first published in English a few years ago in the international theological magazine *Communio*. In this book, Fr. Giussani, whom some of you may know as the founder of the Communion and Liberation movement in the Catholic Church, offered a very lucid discussion on the religious trajectory of Western civilization. We thought it would be interesting to ask a distinguished art historian like Prof. Greene to illustrate how the developments described by Giussani are reflected in the world of artistic creation. Of course, there is a deep link between the human need for beauty and the religious sense, and historically there has been a deep connection between Western art and Christianity. If it is true, as Giussani says, that some of the most important Christian words have become almost incomprehensible to modern culture, this process must be discernible also in the language of the visual arts. To provide some context, I would like to quote a passage from Giussani’s Introduction to the book:

The Religious Awareness of Modern Man attempts, first of all, to identify in today’s cultural and social situation those aspects that hamper an authentic religious awareness. Furthermore, it tries to outline what Christianity’s attitude is in front of this fact. We live in a time in which what is called Christianity appears to be something both known and forgotten. Known because it has left so many traces in the history and education of peoples. Nevertheless forgotten, because the content of its message seems to be hardly relevant to the lives of most people.

In the book, Fr. Giussani identifies the root of the problem in rationalism, the tendency of modern western culture to reduce the scope of reason to its most abstract faculties.

Interestingly, this means that also art is pushed radically outside the realm of reason, and it is no longer recognized for what it is, as an expression of reason's most important questions because in reality art is a form of knowledge consonant with reason, inasmuch it helps one recognize reality as a sign pointing to an overarching Mystery, to which reason tends but can never exhaust. This theme of the "reduction of reason" was brought up last year by Benedict XVI in his monumental Regensburg address, in which he called upon western culture to again "broaden" reason, in order to overcome the current separation between faith and reason, faith and culture, faith and art. It is also a major focus of Crossroads' cultural work.

Now to tell you a little bit about our speaker. Dr. Francis J. Greene has taught at St. Francis College since September 1968, serves as Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages, Fine Arts, and International Cultural Studies where he holds the rank of Professor. Dr. Greene was one of the co-founders of the College Honors Program, served as its first Director and continues to serve on the Honors Council and to teach Honors program seminars. Dr. Greene was chosen as Outstanding Professor in New York State for 1999-2000 by the Carnegie Foundation for Excellence in Teaching. He is a frequent presenter at academic conferences throughout the United States and has published extensively in journals such as *The French Review*, *The Modern Languages Journal*, *Measure*, and *Symploke*. Most recently, Dr. Greene co-edited a book entitled *Perspectives on 9/11*, published by Praeger. He wrote an essay for the editor on the proposed memorial for the site of the former World Trade Center. Let's welcome Dr. Greene.

Greene: Good evening, everyone. It's a pleasure to be here with you. I look forward to our exploring together the sense of religious awareness that one sees in art from the beginning of its formation. We can use as a point of reference the essay by Fr. Luigi Giussani, but what I'm going to do as an art historian is simply present objectively these works of art that we're going to look at. I haven't chosen them because they particularly prove a thesis, and I'm not going to interpret them in a way that isn't consistent with basic theories of art history today. The images that we're going to look at I would offer if I were speaking to any group of students or art historians and doing this kind of survey. So we are going to look at major monuments and figures and see what they tell us. We're going to have differences in view, and I hope that we'll have time, not only for questions and answers, but perhaps for some discussion. And we'll see what these works show us.

We begin with the cave period. I'm going to take you to Lascaux Cave in France. There are two principle examples of what we call prehistoric cave art among many other very important ones. One is in Spain, in the north, and the other is in France in a cave at Lascaux. Many others have been discovered, but these are the largest and the most interesting. Prehistoric cave art is really a new field of study. We really didn't know that this art existed before 1879. That's not very long ago. So it's an infant field of knowledge and we're learning more and more. The images I'm showing you date from about 25,000 BC down to 15,000 BC, which is late because we're finding more and more early images going back well before 40,000B.C. This art, mostly wall paintings and some sculpture, was created during the last ice age by human beings whose whole focus was the hunt in order to survive. If one didn't hunt successfully every week, one died. It was a very

rough life indeed, and yet they were creating art. It would appear that, almost as soon as human beings begin to gather, they created art. Art is one of the few central, continuing activities of the human race. There are very few such human activities that have been engaged in almost from the beginning.

When we look at these images, for example, of the horse and of the bull, we have to remember that there is, at this point, no written language. They didn't yet feel the necessity to have any written form of expressing their speech, but they had to create art. And, as you can see, these images are not just functional, they are beautiful in terms of artistic execution, and the later the art is created, coming down toward 15,000 BC, the more sophisticated the images become.

We are not sure of why they painted images of these animals, but we think we have a reasonable sense of why. First, obviously, there is the sheer the love of creating an image. Humans, from the beginning, wanted to replicate the world they saw. It's possible that this was being done to teach young hunters about the animals, but when we study the caves thousands of miles apart, it becomes clear, although we cannot prove it, that these paintings are being done to cast a magic spell over the animals so that they will bring about a successful hunt. And we see this for a number of reasons: The animals are always depicted in some way wounded, with a spear or an arrow, implements which they had at their disposal. By attempting to cast a spell, they are not leaving the hunt to chance because if there were an extensive period without a successful hunt, they would die.

We also see that they were very intelligent. If they went out and killed all the animals in one season, they would also die because there would be no young for a next generation, so to speak. And so very often the females are shown heavy with young. They were also concerned about casting spells for propagation. They really thought this out—that there were two needs that they had—not only the successful hunt, but future propagation. So very often you'll see the female heavy with young as well.

These are beautifully done—the animal in profile, and there is an attempt to show some contours, filling in the spaces. How did they paint? They used the natural materials of charcoal (for black) , blood from the animals (for red). They would grind the oxides out of rocks to obtain blue; dried leaves produced the color green— these different colors were the pigments, all derived from natural materials at hand. They would mix these pigments with a binder—the sticky material which would fix the paint to the spot where they placed it on the wall. Their binder were the fat drippings from those roasted animals they were always cooking. Their brushes consisted of a stick with animal hair attached.

Here at Lascaux we see of this large figure of a bull. It is over 18 feet long. Most of these animal images are larger than life. This is the point I would like to make: We cannot say that they believed in God; we do not know, but we do know that they believed in a power or a force that was not seen and that was basically benevolent, and upon which they could draw. We might call that “magic,” and a specialist in Religious Studies would most likely put magic in a separate category from religion, but it is the beginning, and I believe that we can say that there was a sense of awe and wonder before creation, and a sense that

there was a power beyond them. I would say there was a religious sense in the caves. Not as sophisticated as it will be in later eras, but they didn't believe in nothing.

In all these caves, whether it be in France or Spain, there are to be found almost no human images, almost never a human being. Wouldn't you think that artists who could create a bull with such mastery would want to create images of themselves, their relatives, their friends, the chief hunter, or of whomever? Almost never. This only reinforces our sense that, in theory, they were aware that this power, this force in which they believed, was not completely in their control, and they had better be careful. They simply thought it too risky to paint themselves because the spells they were casting might fall upon themselves. They had a healthy respect for that force, whatever it was. It is the only plausible explanation as to why a human figure was almost never depicted.

I am showing you some of the earliest depictions of a human being on earth in a small cave in Spain at the Valtorta Gorge. What has the artist done? We see a complex hunting scene with a herd of deer, male, female, and young, and with a group of hunters with bows and arrows. There's a male in the back and a female out in front, and the animals in the middle exactly as they moved, with bows and arrows. It shows the movement of the herd and reveals, by their positions that the hunters were in trees, although the tree branches on which they stand are not painted. There are probably "beaters" behind the advancing herd, moving the animals into an ambush, toward the hunters who await them, positioned up in the trees. A very organized and sophisticated hunting technique. and that there were beaters for moving the animals from behind. This painter, whoever he or she was, was a radical, a wild person, and risked depicting a human being. But not in very "life-like" images because they might cast a spell upon themselves. And so the artists depicts the animals in beautiful detail, but sketches the hunters in stick-like form if we just do a little stick form, clearly hoping that this sketchy depiction of the hunters will not bring a spell upon them. Nonetheless we have some of our earliest depictions of human. This is where it all begins in terms of painting, and I would suggest already there is a sense of what you and I would call "the sacred."

Let us look at one very early sculpture, of a female, called *Venus of Willendorf*, also known as *the Woman of Willendorf*, which is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. This is a rare depiction of a human being in sculpted form during the cave era.



We see a woman without facial detail, with the hair emphasized, exaggerated breasts and clearly she is pregnant. Evidently a spell is being cast to encourage much propagation, many babies, for the cave society, in order to survive, needed many offspring. The pregnancy and breasts suggest maternity, milk, life, nurturing, and most of all, fertility. Clearly it was created to bring about propagation among themselves.

The art of the cave era ends at around 15,000B.B. By this time the weather had changed, the ice had receded, and man became nomadic, following the herds rather than staying in one cave as a base of operations. We presume that they continued to make their “magic” images, but they were probably sketched on the ground and, with the rain and time, all have disappeared.

By 4,000 B.C. we have along the Nile the Egyptian civilization that has an uninterrupted history right down to the time of Christ. It has a fully developed religious belief—a belief system, a theology, ethics, gods, everything totally organized. In the brief time we have, we’ll focus on what is important to us—their absolute belief in eternal life, eternal life for everyone, not just the wealthy. It was a very democratic society in ancient Egypt. One could be born poor and end up an administrator to the pharaoh. It was a socially mobile society.

They developed early on a belief that to have peace in eternal life, the body had to be preserved. We think we know where this belief came from. They would bury the bodies in the hot sand, and putting a body in that roasting sand would dry it, dehydrate it; the skin would turn like leather sometimes. Sometimes yes, sometimes no. And what would happen is that the sand would shift, and they would see these bodies that had dried, had been preserved, and from seeing this phenomenon very early on they developed the idea that the body had to be that way. They must have also seen bodies that weren’t well preserved; they decided they would help the process along by mummification. Indeed they developed a very elaborate mummification process which took about 40 days, and sometimes it worked well, and other times not as well. And there were pharaohs whose mummification didn’t work too well.

Why all this effort? Because the *ka* of the individual had to be able to leave the body, rise to the heavens, and come back to rest in the body. That was the theological basis of why the body had to be preserved. Almost nothing from the body was discarded. Four organs had to be removed—the lungs, liver, intestines and kidneys. But they were put in Canopic jars.

The Ancient Egyptians believed not only in eternal life, but in the gods and goddesses who were fundamentally benevolent. They did not fear the gods and goddesses who were good to them. To name just a few, there was Horus, protector of the pharaoh, Hathor, goddess of motherhood, Osiris, the god of resurrection, and Anubis, protector of the body. The list goes on and on. Of course they believed in a moral code and in living a moral life. They also believed in the judgment of the soul after death.

In this scene from the Book of the Dead, a papyrus in the British Museum we see a man and a woman being brought to the last judgment, to the judgment of the soul. The man is brought in and we now see Horus in the form of a bird over a house, and he stands in this form before Anubis, the god of the departed. Quite visible is a scale and on the scale is his heart which heart had to be weighed against a feather. At the end of life, one's heart could not be burdened with sin or evil things because if it were heavier than a feather, the scale tipped and one was lost.

If you look at the totality of Egyptian art one gets the sense that the Ancient Egyptians believed that people were basically good. They did not develop an elaborate concept of "damnation" or hell. It is optimistic. However, if one failed the test, so to speak, and the scale tipped, one would cease to exist for eternity—there would be no eternal life for you. That was hell. Thus, we see, there was a clear theology of what damnation or hell would be—non existence. One lived with the gods forever or one ceased to be.

in this second scene from the Book of the Dead the individual, having passed the test of judgment, is now being brought a bodily into the presence of Osiris, the god of resurrection, to live a resurrected life forever. Thus it is an understatement to say that there was a highly developed religious sense in Ancient Egypt.

In this image we are looking at one of the first stone buildings in the world – what is called a mastaba; it looks to us today like a mausoleum—a one-story building with a flat top and sloping sides. It is slightly larger than what a mausoleum would be today—built so that the body might be preserved. This is the mastaba of Mereruka who was an official at the pharaoh's court. From their religious belief in eternal life and that the body should be preserved, come these first great stone buildings on earth which provide a place to preserve the body. The Egyptians used stone rarely; they had to go to central Egypt to get their stone and there was not a lot of it. Not one pharaoh in 4,000 years had a stone house. Rather, stone was used for the tombs; stone is for eternal life.

Thus a stone mastaba was built over the body to protect it. But what if something happened to the body anyway? Perhaps, they thought, if there were a statue of myself in the mastaba, then my soul could rest in the statue instead of my body in the event that something happened to the body. Thus we have the development of sculpture in early Egyptian history. But what if something happened to my statue as well? Perhaps if there were paintings of me on the walls of the mastaba, if something happened to my body and my statue, then my soul could rest in the painted images of me on the walls. Thus developed early Egyptian wall painting in the tombs. All three forms of art -- architecture, sculpture, and painting -- developed from and about their belief in eternal life. These art forms are about life and death, just as, in the caves, the images were about life and death, but in a different sense..

In this image we are looking at the first great (step) pyramid, that of the Pharaoh Zoser (Djoser) completed in 2,680 B.C. at the end of the Third Dynasty of the Old Kingdom. It was built by the architect Imhotep and is the first massive stone building on earth, over twenty stories high. It represents an architectural evolution from the mastaba in the sense that Imhotep has actually piled up a series of mastabas upon each other here, each one

smaller than the one beneath it. The result is a step pyramid. All the Egyptian pyramids are marvels of engineering, but we can get lost in the so-called “mysteries” pyramids and their construction. We must not lose sight of the central point: they’re about one thing—the preservation of pharaoh’s body for eternal life.

In the 4th Dynasty, just after 2680B.C. there follow the three “ great pyramids” of Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure. the so-called three great pyramids—the Great Pyramid of Khufu, the Pyramid of Khafre and the Pyramid of Menkaure, the tallest of which (Khufu’s) is over fifty stories high. Bur again, their primary purpose is the preservation of the pharaoh’s body for eternal life.

The great Sphinx reveals sculpture on a truly grand scale, quite different from the more modest figures found in the average mastaba. This is the face of Khafre, Pharaoh of the second of the three great pyramids. We note three stylistic elements. The figure is facing rigidly forward; there is no sign of emotion in the face, nor a specific sign of the pharaoh’s age. sign of age. AS to the issue of emotion, Egyptian sculptures are usually impassive—no trace of emotion is revealed. And, as we said, there is no detail that might suggest the age of the individual. We can say that it is an adult, but we cannot say it’s a 35 or a 60 year old. We’re going to see these characteristics in other sculptures. Here is Khafre again in a much smaller sculpture found near his temple. Once again there is no trace of emotion, nor any sign of specific age. The reason for this is that the sculptors eliminate any specificity. Egyptian sculpture depicts the individual, not here, but in eternal life. The individual is already in eternity. In order to suggest eternity they take away the specific. When I’m angry or sad or tired or bored, I’m rooted in the now, so the passive expression is beyond the limitations of this life. They’re not suggesting, by the way, that there’s no joy in heaven. But to be angry or smiling is to be right here now. That is also why it is an adult but not an individual 35 or 50 years old. That would be too rooted in the temporal order. The “ageless” appearance of the figure suggests that one is already in eternal life.

Here we have a wonderful sculpture you can see at the Metropolitan Museum, Memy Sabu and his Wife. They worked at the royal household of the pharaoh, probably in the 6th Dynasty and they apparently had enough money to have a sculpture made for their tomb, for their mastaba. This does not depict Memy Sabu and his Wife in this life, but rather in eternity,. Thus their faces are impassive—there is a lack of emotion. As to age, they are adults, but what age. It is difficult to tell. However, there is, as I am sure you notice, a little more naturalism and even more specificity because this isn’t the pharaoh, and the artist can take certain liberties here. But, once again what the sculpture is about is to depict the husband and wife in eternal life.

Stone was only used not only for the tombs and but also for the temples to the gods and goddesses. Among the most famous is the Ancient Egyptian temple at Karnak. We see the great avenue lined with sphinxes that leads one to the entrance area, the pylon or entrance area. After you came through the courtyard, one entered into the temple. Today it is all open to light because the roof has collapsed. There were two large interior halls that were filled with columns, and one processed slowly along the central aisle toward the

back. The columns in the first hall were enormous, several stories high, and in the second one they were higher, and as you progressed, it became darker and darker until, near the end, you could hardly see where you were going. They say it would be like being in a forest at night with no illumination. In this case one walked amid a forest of stone columns in almost total darkness. And as one proceeded to the back, suddenly, from a 2-3 story height, one entered a low-ceilinged, claustrophobic room, and there was the statue of the god or the goddess. One was face to face with him or her. The general public did not enter the temple, only the priests did. But an individual approaching the god left the world of the “everyday,” which was the world of sunlight and brightness, and entered a world that was alien; It was dark and became progressively ever darker. The massive stone columns towering above you and around you made the individual feel smaller and smaller (and less and less significant). As the columns became ever larger and the light diminished more and more, the individual was “completely thrown off,” so to speak, and it said that if you got off the main aisle, it would be hard to find your way back amidst all the columns. When, finally, one made it to the back sanctuary area suddenly the roof plunged down, and one was face to face with the god or goddess in a small, confining space. I do not want to suggest by that that the gods were generally fearsome to the Ancient Egyptians, but this temple experience suggests that they approached their gods in and through **mystery**.

I wish to conclude my brief remarks on Ancient Egyptian civilization and art by saying that, for almost 4,000 years, they loved their gods and, in their view, the gods took good care of them. They believed joyously in this life and in eternal life as well, but they dwelt in the mystery, and they never asked: “**Why?**” The confirmation of this is the Ancient Egyptian temple and its esthetic (and religious) experience. The further one plunged into the temple, en route to the sanctuary and the god, the less one saw, the smaller one felt, and the less one understood.

As regards Ancient Greece I am going to start with the Parthenon. I wish to begin with the Greek temple and juxtapose it to the Egyptian temple. The Greek temple almost always had the rectangular shape. It had a pitched roof and was lined with columns all around. Although most Greek temples had these same elements, it is said that the Parthenon was the most perfect in its proportions. You could say that when you’ve seen one Greek temple, you’ve seen them all since they all had these same fundamental elements. But that would be like saying: when you’ve seen one face, you’ve seen them all. But, of course, that statement is not true. Why? Well one could say that the face is always the same. We have a forehead, eyebrows, eyes and a nose, and so forth, but the proportions vary infinitely, the textures, the colors of the face, and so forth. And so it was with the Greek temple. The proportions of the various elements could vary widely, as could the type of marble used and even the height of the building. All these elements varied, and it is said no Ancient Greek temple was more perfect in its proportions than the Parthenon. We see that, today, the Parthenon is in a very damaged condition that was caused by an explosion in 1687, an act of war. The Parthenon did not collapse from the ravages of time. In any event it is extraordinarily beautiful even in its present condition. It is a matter of good fortune that the most important element did not collapse, which are the columns, because, even if it still had its roof and interior walls, we’d still be looking

primarily at its columns. They were the most important element. We observe the regularity of one column after the other, all those straight lines, all of those horizontal lines repeated in the fluting of each column, continued in the triglyphs and carried all the way around. All those verticals are balanced by the horizontal lines of the three major steps of the temple, but also by the horizontal lines of the entablature, containing the cornice, the frieze and the architrave. It is a study in mathematical precision. It is beauty itself, rational and clear.

In the 19th century the British mathematician Charles Penrose carefully measured every detail of the Parthenon, and the more he measured, the more he discovered in terms of proportions. They're not mysterious proportions, as in the pyramids, but, rather, clear Pythagorean mathematics and proportions, worked into the detailed elements of the building. The more he studied, the more he understood. That is the essence of the Ancient Greek approach to reality and to their gods. Things are understandable and clear. The more we look and analyze, the more we understand. And, to repeat, this is very important for understanding the Ancient Greek approach to religious experience. Its essence is in understanding. They were the first in the Western World to ask, "Why?" And so we say that the Greeks developed philosophy, the love of wisdom and understanding, not the Ancient Egyptians who, as we have seen, did other wonderful things. Yes, philosophy is the love of wisdom in which we ask, Why am I? What do I know? Do I know that I know? Or do I only think that I think? Is what you see what I see? Or are we seeing something totally different? In the Western World no people asked those questions before the Ancient Greeks. This is the beginning of philosophy, but it is also the exact opposite approach from that taken by the Egyptians. It's wanting to know and being able to know. And the Greek temple is the perfect expression of it in its order, mathematics and precision.

Let us compare the experience of an Ancient Egyptian temple to that of a Greek temple. In the Egyptian temple, I leave the world I know, which is sunlight, and I go inside to a world I do not know, which is darkness. The towering scale of the columns diminishes me, making me feel my insignificance. I proceed deeper and deeper into darkness until, suddenly, I come face to face with the statue of the god. In the Greek temple, I stay outdoors in the light of day. I look and the more I see, the more I understand. I do not dwell on or in mystery. I understand. Rationality is at the basis of my experience of the Ancient Greek temple.

It is said of the Greeks that they did not develop much of a theology, nor did they have a precise and developed deep moral code as one will find in the Bible, but for them the greatest sin was not to know, not to explore, not to understand. So they did have, in a sense, an ethic, and the ethic was that rationality is the hallmark of the human being.

So, in the Egyptian temple the columns are inside and experienced in the dark. Where are the columns in the Greek temple? On the outside in the light. In the Egyptian temple, the columns make me uneasy and as if I were nothing. In the Greek temple, I understand more and more. It is as if you took your winter glove, leather on the outside and lining on the inside, and you turned it inside-out, and now the lining is on the outside and the

leather is on the inside. Imagine taking an Egyptian temple; you reach inside and turn it inside-out to create a Greek temple. . Now the columns are on the outside in the light of day, and the walls are behind them. For the Egyptians it is the other way around.

To conclude the Parthenon we will consider, briefly, the metopes which form part of the frieze all the way around the temple. The metope is the sculpted piece which alternates with the triglyphs in the frieze. There were 92 metopes on the Parthenon and their theme was the Battle of the Lapiths and the Centaurs, a myth well known to almost any Greek of 432 B.C. when the Parthenon was completed. You probably know the myth, that the Lapiths were a fully human race like you and I, and the Centaurs, their neighbors, were half human and half animal. There was to be a wedding. The king of the Lapiths was marrying off his daughter. Graciously, he invited a delegation of the Centaurs to be his guests at the wedding. While the Centaurs got to the wedding feast, they decided to steal the bride. So there broke out this enormous battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs to rescue the bride. In 92 sculpted scenes this story was unfolded on the exterior of Parthenon, just above the columns. Why did they choose that story? In a sense it is very self-serving for the Greeks, but also very revealing. . The Greeks saw themselves as living in a world which, in their opinion, was more animal than human... They saw themselves as the only truly human force of order and civility. Isn't that interesting? And you can say, well, that's very self-serving. But that's how they saw themselves. And they saw themselves as being in great danger from the uncivil societies around them.

In this myth Centaurs had the intelligence of humans but also the strength of a horse. They had every reason to win and to beat the Lapiths. But who won? We know who won—the Lapiths, because reason and order were on their side. In the end, goodness, civility, and rational order won out over the uncivil, the barbaric, and the irrational. These metopes reveal that the Ancient Greeks saw themselves as bringing true humanity and rational order to a world that, at times, acted as if less than human.

There were also sculptures in the pediments, or triangular areas formed by the pitched roof. Among the most beautiful of the few to survive are these three female figures which may be seen in the British Museum in London. All three figures are missing their heads, but the bodies and drapery tell us their essential story. There are several different theories as to who they are, but I prefer the interpretation that suggests that they are the Three Fates. The figure on our left spins the thread of life. The second figure measures the length of thread (of life) allotted to each individual, and the third figure cuts the thread (of death). What a beautiful way to attempt to express itself, as well as the mystery of why some lives are longer than others. And this Greek sculptor made these issues or ideas incarnate the human bodies in the beauty of three beautifully graceful female figures. So we see that, in keeping with their emphasis on rationality, their approach to the mysteries of life, death and existence itself of life is expressed in and through the human form of these figures. This is their attempt, through examination of the human form, to make order of the chaos of existence.

In the three figures we have just examined it is the drapery which fully reveals the female form. In many other Ancient Greek sculptures nudity plays a major role. From the

Ancient Greek viewpoint the body is beautiful; there is nothing shameful about it. The earliest male sculptures (Of the Archaic period) were of nude athletes. The figures are nude because the athletic games were played in the nude, but also, they had discovered what a glorious thing it is to be human. This figure is called a Kouros, an Ancient Greek male figure from the Archaic period, between 600 and 500 B.C. We see immediately the Egyptian influence. His hair looks like an Egyptian *nemes*, or veil, from a pharaoh. The rigidity of the stance reflects Egyptian style. When the Greeks first begin to sculpt, what was the major civilization that they would know? Ancient Egypt. But soon they are going to break away from the influences of Ancient Egyptian sculpted style. .

In all these Greek Archaic sculptures, such as this one, the anatomy is very well developed, but the stance is rigid. So they placed a smile on the faces of most of these figures to imbue the figure with life, life here and now. They were not depicting the individual in the next life, as did the Egyptians. In this early (Archaic) period they sculptors invested the life, in a sense, in the smiles on the figures. But very shortly the Greeks would break with the Egyptian stylistic influences and bring life to every detail of their sculptures.

No sculpture better reveals this evolution than Myron's Discobolus of 450 B.C. In the Vatican Museum. We see an athlete competing in one of the many competitions of the Pan-Hellenic games. He is a discus thrower. Gone is any trace of Ancient Egyptian frontality or rigidity. Note the details of the rib cage, the smallest details of the bones in the ankle, the carefully developed musculature, and the young idealized face. Their preference is to show young men and women at the height of their power, idealized and perfect. This is not meant to be a portrait of, for example, Demetrius, the athlete. This is the ideal man, perfected in form. If the model had any little imperfections, the sculptor would remove them. The problem with "idealism" or perfecting is that you do not want to make it so perfect that it's not believable. This figure believable, but it's getting into the higher range of idealization. And so this is the Greek approach to the human figure, and it's not unlike Platonic thinking— Plato's ideal forms. In the Myth of the Cave and elsewhere, Plato starts with the specific and moves to the ideal form; this is the ideal human form in stone. The individual reflected the whole. In essence you are looking at Greece. The characteristics that you might perceive in this individual athlete reflect the characteristics of what it means to be Greek-- intelligent, concentrated, healthy, trained, disciplined—all these qualities and more. And once again the sculpture reveals Greek thinking as to what a glorious thing it is to be a human being.

I hope you that will be able to join us in the weeks ahead, because we are going to see next week how this culture provided fertile soil for the coming of Jesus Christ. These concepts which exist in a pagan culture prepared the way for the Christian experience and prepared some people to understand the idea of the Incarnation. It may not seem to be the case, but the Ancient Greek discovery that the human being is glorious plays an important role in this regard. Equally, their emphasis on rationality, as seen in the Parthenon, is indispensable in preparing minds to understand and accept Jesus Christ as the *Logos*.

Continuing our examination of Ancient Greek sculpture, we see the famous Apollo Belvedere, also in the Vatican Museum, dated at approximately 300 B.C. Once again we see the idealized young male, but this is the god Apollo. Yes, it is a depiction the god Apollo, but it is also a young Greek man. Even when they are depicting Aphrodite or Apollo, they end up depicting themselves. They are focused on the human and so, this is Apollo, yes, but it's also the young, athletic Greek person. One might well think that it is, therefore, not a very religious sculpture, but the human and the divine and intertwined and inseparable. In Judeo-Christian belief the human being is made in the image and likeness of God. In Ancient Greek thinking, the gods were made in the image and likeness of human beings. This concept is very important. Apollo is depicted as a glorious young Greek man, and Aphrodite as a voluptuous young Greek woman. In this Apollo sculpture we see again the idealized, young Greek face. This perfection is continued throughout the body.

If the Greek gods were, in a sense, made in the image and likeness of humans, they also had many foibles. The Greek gods and goddesses were jealous, vicious, malicious and vindictive.. They were vengeful to each other and to human beings. They were just like humans at their worst. They manifested all the perfections of a human being and all their weaknesses as well. And they were at times feared by the Greeks.

It is a little later that we have the nude female figure and the Venus d'Milo is, undoubtedly, the most famous of all. It was sculpted close to the time of Christ, possibly at about 10 B.C. We see all the same characteristics as we did in the male athletic figures and in the gods. We see the idealized perfection of the face and the idealized voluptuousness of the body, now all expressed in the nude female form.

This famous sculpture of the Laocoön is also in the Vatican collection.



Laocoön is in trouble; he and his sons are going to die from the attacking serpents. Laocoon is being punished by the gods for almost having thwarted their plan in the famous incident of the Trojan horse. In revenge they sent serpents to destroy him and his sons. This is what happens with the Greek gods. They are unforgiving and vengeful. But even in this scene of suffering and terror, the anatomy of the father and his sons is extraordinary. We see the same idealized perfection of the human form. Even this depiction of such suffering is rendered somewhat “beautiful” by the perfection of the anatomy and the graceful twisting and curving of the forms.

When we resume next week, we will resume with the Ancient Romans because they gave us the fundamental forms of Christian architecture. We will be able to draw back on some of these Ancient Greek concepts next week as we approach the early Christian experience and the Middle Ages, and we will see, as I have already said, how much the pagan Ancient Greeks prepared the way for a profound understanding of Christ’s Incarnation because they upheld and championed reason. One of their words for reason was *Logos*.