

“The Madonna”

Introduction

The topic for my final research project is “The Madonna” in Catholicism. I will analyze how “The Madonna” is used in the Catholic Christian Church. The Catholic Church is known globally for their faith and artwork, which can be inspiring to some and offensive to others. The curiosity of how the church uses artwork such as the “The Madonna” to express their beliefs can cause both positive and negative reactions because of all their lavish artwork. Some people find that artwork such as “The Madonna” as unnecessary in the modern world and Christian Churches.

Mary still makes an impact on the world and the way she is remembered through artwork. National Geographic has recently named Mary as the “world’s most powerful woman” (Orth 2015). Still two thousand years after Mary is said to have ascended into heaven and she is making an impact on the world. Orth stated, “her image and legacy are found and celebrated around the world” (2015). Mary, and the depiction of her through artwork is still relevant in modern day and “The Madonna” is not going anywhere, so we might as well embrace it and learn from it (Orth).

That is why I think that this topic can use more sociological analysis, to better understand how “The Madonna” is viewed in Catholicism. This study will explain: How the Roman Catholic Church depicts “The Madonna”.

Literature Review

The Catholic Church being one of the oldest Christian Churches has countless amount of research to how the church goes about their faith such as science, theology, politics, philosophy and so on. The research has a wide range of studies but one catches the eye of the public often both in negative and positive ways, which is its artwork. The church tells history through their artwork and the Virgin Mary is one aspect of their art that is highlighted. Studies of “The Madonna’s”, which are art pieces of the Virgin Mary, are relevant to the way the church perceive their faith, the emphasis of their mother figure the Virgin Mary, and how together the two make up an important part of their church. The following sections will elaborate on key ideas in the current research that discusses, how the depictions of the Madonna’s are in the Catholic Church.

Research of artwork in the Catholic Church can be overwhelming but to some it can be relaxing and reinsurance of faith. The Church is for the most part known globally, and since they have different types of cultures attending their church, artwork helps people better understand context of the Christian faith. Artwork is used in a way of connecting with different cultures and allows someone that does not speak the language the church is speaking and still be able to understand what the Church believes by the story the artwork tells (Mantovani 2014). (Mantovani 2014) even suggest that artwork can create emotions and make people feel humble. The church and artist get saints like the Virgin Mary and depict their view of them. This allows each culture to represent someone like Mary as they wish to view her so she is more relatable to that specific culture. Kane (2014) states, “In these artistic representations, Mary appears

related to the local area,” meaning that artwork such as “The Madonna” may look like the people of the culture that is creating the art. This means that Mary’s features vary from culture to culture.

Further studies explain how the Church sheds light on the Virgin Mary. Artwork of the mother figure the Virgin Mary states that it is a reminder to all Christians of the difference between the secular world and the world that Mary’s son Jesus came to preach about which would be heaven (Garneet and Rosser 2012). Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary through the Immaculate Conception meaning she was a virgin when she became pregnant with Jesus and was purified with the Holy Spirit (Balthazal 2007). Catholics and many other Christian Churches believe Mary is the new Eve (Baker and Mervyn 2014). Balthazal (2007) also explains how Mary was with her son Jesus through the worst situation, which was when he was crucified. She is seen as someone who will stay with people through their roughest scenarios. She is a mother and plays a mother role to the Catholic Church (Balthazal 2007).

The depiction of “The Madonna” can also be strong and powerful, “The Madonna” is a representative as a feminist for the church (Massam 1998). She teaches women to be a strong leader of the Catholic Church, even when culture around them is changing. Massam purpose for the article was to explain that Mary was not a thing in the pass, nor will she ever will be. Through “The Madonna” the Catholic Church is strengthen and it is strengthen by these traditional images (Massam 1998). “The Madonna” also is a symbol and example for nuns to remain in their vows of “poverty, chastity and obedience”

(Massam). Over all, “The Madonna” is a role model to continue to make disciples like Christ had wanted, according to the Catholic Church.

Finally together through the depiction of Mary through artwork is what helps people understand the faith of the Catholic Church. Mary is often seen as someone whose human beauty should be grasped and her holiness should exploded with the details of color with a painting (Baker, Mervyn 2014). The church uses artwork to express their gratitude of Mary just like the crucifix that helps people understand the suffering of Jesus. A statue of the Virgin Mary gives people hope and they are reminded they are not alone. The pictures and statues is a symbol of hope and comfort for Catholic Christians (Kane 2014). Kane (2014) gives the example of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the popularity of this sighting of Mary. He explains that Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared as artwork and thus most of Mexico converted to Catholicism, this is an example according to Catholics that God uses different ways to reach his people which can be through “The Madonna’s” (Kane 2014).

Overall, I have not found enough information of reactions of everyday people, and their views on the Church’s artwork of Mary. This would help researchers understand why “the Madonna’s” are important to the Church. Also I would like to understand deeper the reasons of the different depictions in various cultures. What makes this topic exempt from that logic? But so far through these studies of how the church depicts “The Madonna’s” gives an explanation on how artworks is relevant to the way the church perceive their faith, their mother figure the Virgin Mary, and how together the two make up an important part of their church. The reason why this topic needs more sociological

studied is so people can be culturally versed of the Catholic Church's depiction of "The Madonna".

DATA AND METHODS

To do my research for this project I will analyze how the Roman Catholic Church depicts "The Madonna's". To do this I will use unobtrusive method and content analysis research. I have taken an art history course, where I gained knowledge of varieties types of artwork, I am not an expert at "The Madonna's" but I have enough pervious knowledge in order for me to do this project. I have access to multiple libraries to check out art books and such for this project so collecting samples is possible. I also will use online serves, and art books if they are useful for this project to collect "The Madonna's" artwork.

For this project I will use information from the library database online as well. I will also use the library at the Catholic Church Our Lady of Wisdom Parish in San Marcos to gain more materials on the use of artwork in the church. For my sample size I will analysis sixty paintings, sculpture, and other forms of "The Madonna". I will be open to learning about the use of all artwork such as paintings, sculptures, statues, etc. After I gather all of my data I will conduct open coding research to observe the way the church uses the artwork.

Once I found sixty painting, statutes, sculptures of "The Madonna" I was able to find codes that developed in the findings. I broke down my codes by analyzing and the data I collected which made my themes. I then broke down the coding into examples under each theme. Keeping in mind I had to use what was available to me and pulled Madonna's from websites such as Nationalgeographic.com, Restoretradition.com,

Catholicanswer.com, totallyhistory.com, and fineartamerica.com that provided me with data for my project.

DATA ANALYSIS

This study explains how the Roman Catholic Church depicts “The Madonna”. I examined sixty Madonna’s that are used in the Catholic Church. This analysis of the artwork and the findings answered my research question. Once I collected all my data and analyzed them, three themes formed. The Catholic Church depicted “The Madonna” as (1) humble; (2) with powerful and authority; (3) cultural. More elaboration will be done on these three themes in the following sections.

Theme 1:Humble

One of the reoccurring themes found in the data is that Mary seemed humble. Out of the sixty “Madonna” artworks that I pulled data from twenty-two of them made up this category.

The softness of “The Madonna’s” face is inviting and fresh. Meaning that she is not frowning or in pain, but she is in a form of modesty with her facial expression, as seen in index A. She is also seen with her eyes closed and praying. By her facial expression she looks relaxed and delighted. She is being the example for the church and a model of how a woman should be in the church; what men should respect and seek whole heartily; and what children should duplicate.

“The Madonna” is also depicted with warm colors. She is usually wearing the colors off white and blue, or red. Her face as well is usually a rosy pink on the checks, even with “The Madonna’s” from different cultures, which I will go in more depth later.

She is usually wearing a veil, which is a tradition that has been passed from the Jewish faith to the Christian faith.

“The Madonna” is also seen as a motherly woman. She is often carrying her son Jesus, and at times even has other children in the picture as well. There are painting of “The Madonna” breastfeeding her son as well as showing intimacy with her child. This makes her seem like an average mother who only wants to take care of her son and also wants to care for others. Catholics believe that Mary is their own Mother as well, and this connects to the people in the parish.

Theme 2: authority and powerful imagery

“The Madonna” can be with other people but can also stand alone and she is clearly powerful and has authority. Nineteen of the sixty “Madonna’s” made this theme.

The positions of “The Madonna” in the artwork create a sense of authority. “The Madonna” is either the center of attention, meaning she is the only one in the picture, or she is placed in the center of the artwork with people around her. Even in times when people surround her she is the base for everyone else. In one picture everyone is looking at Jesus, and Jesus is looking back at “The Madonna” and no one else in the picture, see index C. In some statues she is being welcoming by having her palms open and looking down as if she is going to give blessings. The body language of “The Madonna” gives women in the church respect; because she is the mother of Jesus, which gives her strength and is encouragement for others.

The background of “The Madonna’s” is also powerful as well. In sixteen of the photos of “The Madonna” that was found, she has a white or gold halo around her head

showing that she is a holy person along with her son whom also had haloes around him as well, showing she has authority. “The Madonna’s” that were statues showed Mary with a gold crown. One in particular called Our Lady Of Guadalupe, Mary is standing in front of the sun which shows she has authority over the sun, as seen in index D. In six of the nineteen data that made this theme, “The Madonna” is sitting on a throne or placed on an altar to show that she has a sense of importance and respect for her in the Church.

The last example of how “The Madonna” is depicted to have authority and powerful imagery are the background colors of “The Madonna’s”. The colors in the artwork are bold and soothing just like “The Madonna” is depicted. The colors of the background help “The Madonna” pop and draw attention to her. For example one painting of “The Madonna” has the whole background blacked out and Mary is in blood color red garments with a gold glow around her. The deep colors allows “The Madonna” to show how powerful an image is of the mother of Jesus.

Theme 3: Culture

The last theme that was found in the depiction of “The Madonna” is culture. This theme had nineteen out of the sixty “Madonna’s” that developed this theme. Culture tells society what is expectable and what is not, from things such as hairstyle to what color skin in the prettiest. Different cultures depict “The Madonna” to their standard of beauty.

Every culture makes “The Madonna” their own so they can perceive her on a more personal level. One example would be the actual face of “The Madonna”. The face shape changes from a round fuller face from Asian countries and then there’s the “Madonna’s” that has a thin white faces from the European decent. The shapes of the

eyes are different as well depending in the culture. In Asian countries “the Madonna” has small eyes and in Hispanic cultures “the Madonna” has big eyes.

Another trait people can tell right away that is different from “The Madonna’s” is skin color. There are White, Asian, Hispanic, and Black Madonna’s. This one is the most noticeable for people. These cultures also have different types of hair and that is reflected in “The Madonna’s”. For example in the Asian culture “The Madonna’s” have their heavy white powder on their face they have slick back black hair in a bun. Then Hispanic “Madonna’s” would have long brownish blackish hair.

The last example for my theme is the way “The Madonna’s” dressed in the garments that their surrounded culture depicted them in. As stated before the Catholic Church is universal so all cultures from all over the world can join them to celebrate Christ together. In doing so a churches culture could have influences on their depiction of “The Madonna”. In my findings, there were some “Madonna’s” that had fashion senses such as earrings, and African dresses on. Some even had Indian head jewelry. This demonstrates how diverse the church is.

CONCLUSION/ DISCUSSION

This study was done to have a better understanding of “how the Roman Catholic Church depicted ‘The Madonna’. The first theme found about the depiction of “The Madonna’s” was that Mary is humble in the painting and sculptures. The second theme was that “The Madonna” is powerful and has authority. The third theme is culture because without being diverse the “Madonna” would not be relatable to the people in the parishes.

This study adds to previous research because the depiction of “The Madonna” is not going to stop changing because the depiction of women will not stop changing. “The Madonna” is still relevant in today’s society, since Mary was named one of the most power women in the world even after two thousand years after her presumed assumption. Just as long as the Catholic Church is around or as long as people continue to make “Madonna’s”, this subject will not go dry so the study needs to continue.

Some of the strengths of this study are that the artwork of “The Madonna’s” is available on line and I got to do a content analysis study, which worked well with the time I had. I also see that as a bad thing because if people want to really know more about artwork I think that seeing it and having someone who knows a great deal of art explain it to me would have been better. Also this is my first qualitative study but over time I’m sure it becomes easier to process, than just having to understand it in a couple of months.

For further research different types of Madonna’s need to be put into the study, or maybe break it up even more. Artwork of “The Madonna’s” in the Catholic Church is a lot of information to take in and at times it was overwhelming. I would want to further explore how this teaching of the Catholic Church can be seen by other denominations of Christianity and how it’s artwork of the Virgin Mary can relate to people even if they are not affiliated with the Catholic Church. Further research should go into something along the lines of the second theme, which was, power and authority and how that correlates with the Catholics Church’s teaching of Mary, and their depiction of “The Madonna’s”.

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Appendix

Index A



From: <http://restoredtraditions.com/>

Index B



From: <http://totallyhistory.com/madonna-of-the-rose/>

Index C



From: <http://restoredtraditions.com/>