

Liberty vs. Licentiousness: A Profane Image of the Virgin Mary

A Published Letter to *Calendar Letters*, in the *Los Angeles Times*

September 13, 1997

Admittedly, not the world's best Catholic, I was still very much offended by the large color photo of the statue of the Virgin Mary pierced by a large bronze culvert ("Articles of Faith for This World", Sept. 9), an "inescapable image of phallic penetration," in the review of Robert Gober's "highly theatrical grotto of sacred and profane love."

To the millions of us who worship [See Follow-Up Letter, below] Mary as the Mother of God, this image was even more obscene than would have been the image of one's natural mother being so unnaturally violated.

Nazi propaganda films may have been very effective in portraying Jews as animals and Salman Rushdie may have been not only within his rights but also very poetic in portraying Muhammad's wife as a whore, but just because art is well done doesn't make it good.

As a citizen, writer, and painter, I value the 1st Amendment; and because of this fact—not in spite of it—I had best heed the words from the Father of Our Country: "Arbitrary power is most easily established on the ruins of liberty abused to licentiousness."

A Follow-Up Letter, From Another Reader

September 20, 1997

While I totally agree with Douglas Drenkow's assessment that Robert Gober's depiction of the Blessed Virgin is an offensive abomination (*Calendar Letters*, Sept. 13), I must point out one error in his letter:

Catholics do not "worship" the Mother of God—we revere her as the holiest of created beings. Worship is reserved for the Lord. Nevertheless, Mary represents the highest goal that a created human being may attain. She acts as a mediatrix—an intercessor on our part with God. People like Gober bastardize their artistic freedom to licentiousness and sacrilege.

Note: I stand corrected.