

AN IMAGE OF HOLINESS

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[Assignment: Based on your direct observation, write a description of some part of the Chapel or the Union which conveys a recognizable feeling (delight, awe, disappointment, amusement, etc.) more through the use of specific details than by statement of attitude.]

(1) I am downstairs in the chapel, in the circular area that contains the baptismal fountain. When I look straight up I can see the mobile that decorates the three level area between the ceiling and the floor. Before I leave this area, I will see in the mobile an image of holiness I never noticed before.

(2) This mobile is composed of approximately thirty-five pieces of twisted metal varying from about one to two feet in length. Some of these pieces are simply flat coppery metal strips that look similar to slightly twisted crepe paper. The other strips of metal have been contorted into elongated V's like the stick birds children draw. Depending on the length of the piece, they twist one, two, or three times. I move closer to the mobile, and lean on the baptismal fountain to get a closer look.

(3) Each strip has a rough bumpy side and a relatively smooth reverse side. The scraggly face looks unfinished, as if bits of gravel are caught under the copper surface. The even counter-faces lose the coarseness, but still give the impression that if touched they will leave that thin residue of unpolished metal dust on your fingers. Unfortunately, noticeable threads of cobwebs are present between the pieces, and gray powdery dust has settled in the crevices on the copper.

(4) I drag a near-by chair over the cobblestone floor, invading the usual peacefulness of the chapel, so I can reach the bottom of the mobile. The slices of copper feel cool and I begin a chain reaction of movement when I tug on the bottom piece. My fingernail accidentally scratches the smooth face, and I get the same uneasy feeling as when fingernails scrape against a chalkboard. From directly underneath, the angle the baby during baptism must see, the curved pieces look like misshapen arms outstretched towards me. These arms seem eerie in the dimmed candle-like light and make me want to go up higher where the light is better.

(5) While climbing the spiral staircase that encloses the mobile, I notice that the spinning of the pieces makes one's eye naturally follow the echoing curve of the stairs. The two seem to work in unison, each one complementing the other. The pieces in the center, at the main floor level, are more clustered together than the bottom ones. They seem almost to merge together,

like a long twisting snake. The added light gives the copper a luminescent center that turns to gray at the edges.

(6) I go up to the very top of the stairs and lean over the small balcony directly under the skylight. The curved slices of metal now look like a flock of birds over a bird bath. Considering the location, they become doves and remind me of Piero della Francesca's painting of Jesus standing by the Jordan River with a dove over his head and gold lines to represent the Holy Spirit. The pieces are fluttering a bit with the breeze let in by someone opening the door, and this movement emphasizes the bird-like quality. From here the supporting strings are clearly visible, and the pieces seem like puppets waiting for someone to pull the strings and bring them to life.

(7) As I descend the stairs to leave, I wonder what feelings the artist intended his creation to inspire. The longer I look at the mobile, the more the twisting V's become doves and the regular curls seem to represent the presence of the Holy Spirit. This image seems so clear to me that I am curious as to how I ever overlooked it before. As I leave, I pass an elderly couple on their way to look at the mobile, and I wonder if the curving copper slices will inspire the same clear feeling of spiritual presence to them.