

A RENAISSANCE ARTIST WITH HUMILITY

SACRED PASSION: The Art of William Schickel, by Gregory Wolfe, with 175 full-color photographs. University of Notre Dame Press. 174 pp. \$95, hardcover, limited edition; \$48, paperback.

Reviewed by MURRAY BODO, O.F.M., writer-in-residence at Thomas More College in Crestview Hills, Kentucky, and author of numerous books, most recently, *Tales of an Endishodi: Father Berard Haile and The Navajos, 1900-1961* (University of New Mexico Press).

THOUGH I HAVE PRAYED in the choir stalls of the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky, whose chapel and cloister he renovated, and though I've visited him in his studio in Loveland, Ohio, and meditated in the Grailville Oratory he designed, and though I've dipped my hands into the water of the black Vermont granite baptistry of the Roofless Church at New Harmony, Indiana, I did not realize just how

deep and broad is the work of William Schickel—until I read and encountered the stunning photographs of Gregory Wolfe's *Sacred Passion: The Art of William Schickel*.

Schickel's work runs the gamut from stained-glass window design and painting and renovation (both ecclesiastical and secular), to architectural and furniture and interior design, to sculpture and tapestry, to murals and serigraphs. Schickel's body of work, spanning some 50 years, secures his place as one of the most versatile and prolific of American artists and designers.

Like the artists of the Renaissance, Schickel works mainly by commission. His vision and aesthetic were shaped by

great modernists like Georges Rouault, Marc Chagall, Igor Stravinsky and Eric Gill.

As a student at Notre Dame, Schickel came under the influence of Frank O'Malley, a dynamic English professor who taught a course on modern Catholic writers. One of the books O'Malley taught was Jacques Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism*, which had a profound influence on the young Schickel. Maritain and his fellow philosopher, Etienne Gilson, were proponents of a neo-Thomism which, in the words of Gregory Wolfe, "was a powerful vision of Christian humanism.... Thomists like Maritain and Gilson sought to restore a balance between nature and grace, faith and reason, sacred and profane."

Having myself been influenced by Frank O'Malley through my college English professor, Franciscan Father Leander Blumlein, a student of O'Malley's, I can understand how the young Bill Schickel would be caught up in what was called at that time "the Catholic

Renaissance."

In 1947, newly married Schickel and his wife moved to Loveland, Ohio, a small rural community about 25 miles from Cincinnati that was the location of The Grail, a lay Catholic organization.

I applaud Schickel's and his wife Mary's Franciscan decision to live poorly, surviving "through subsistence farming, raising their own food, including cows, chickens, pigs and honeybees. They heated their small home with a wood stove, used water from a pump and had an outhouse for a toilet."

The Schickels raised their 11 children with "the idea of Lady Poverty as something beautiful." The photographs

of their early family in *Sacred Passion* bespeak that love of Lady Poverty and the profound faith that inspired their life and Schickel's work, beginning with the renovation of The Grail's barn into an oratory of grace and beauty. Schickel himself wrote, "The barn is a blend of frugality, simplicity and poverty seen as a positive force.... I believe that this blend of frugality and splendor has no equal in the whole human building experience. There is a wonderful deep-rooted consciousness that our Savior came to dwell among us in a building that was constructed for the shelter and care of animals. We too are animals. The barn at its best is an integration of splendor and humility that is...expressive of the most fundamental Christian outlook."

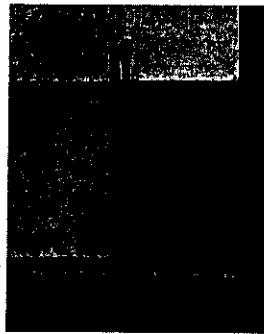
Frugality and splendor, splendor and humility: To me, that sums up all of Schickel's work as I turn the pages of this beautifully designed, gracefully written and personally inspiring book.

If you see any of Schickel's works, you will understand what comes of a man who "believes that an artist is first and foremost a creative individual who has developed the *habitus*, or craft, of making beautiful things."

THE CHRISTMAS TREE: Its Spiritual Meaning, written by Barry Brunzman, illustrations by Ardis J. Bow. St. Francis Special Ministries (P.O. Box 340026, Sacramento, CA 95834, phone 1-800-293-5400, fax 916-927-3535). 30 pp. \$8.95, and \$1.50 for shipping and handling.

THE LEGEND OF THE CANDY CANE, by Lori Walburg. Illustrated by James Bernardin. Zondervan Publishing House. 29 pp. \$14.99, U.S.; \$20.99, Canada.

LIVING THE DAYS OF ADVENT AND THE CHRISTMAS SEASON 1998, by



Frugality and splendor