



Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization

The Whole Church taking the Whole Gospel to the Whole World

REDEEMING THE ARTS

The Restoration of the Arts to God's Creational Intention

Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 46

**Produced by the Issue Group on this topic at the
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In Pattaya, Thailand, September 29 to October 5, 2004

"A New Vision, a New Heart and a Renewed Call"

In encouraging the publication and study of the Occasional Papers, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization does not necessarily endorse every viewpoint expressed in these papers.

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The context for the production of the Lausanne Occasional Papers

The Lausanne Movement is an international movement committed to energising
“the whole Church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.”

With roots going back to the historical conferences in Edinburgh (1910) and Berlin (1966), the Lausanne Movement was born out of the First International Congress on World Evangelization called by evangelist Billy Graham held in Lausanne, Switzerland, in July 1974. The landmark outcome of this Congress was the **Lausanne Covenant** supported by the 2,430 participants from 150 nations. The covenant proclaims the substance of the Christian faith as historically declared in the creeds and adds a clear missional dimension to our faith. Many activities have emerged from the Lausanne Congress and from the second congress held in Manila in 1989. The Covenant (in a number of languages), and details about the many regional events and specialised conferences which have been undertaken in the name of Lausanne, may be examined online at www.lausanne.org.

The Lausanne International Committee believed it was led by the Holy Spirit to hold another conference which would bring together Christian leaders from around the world. This time the Committee planned to have younger emerging leaders involved and sought funds to enable it to bring a significant contingent from those parts of the world where the church is rapidly growing today. It decided to call the conference a **Forum**. As a Forum its structure would allow people to come and participate if they had something to contribute to one of 31 issues (around which were formed Issue Groups). These issues were chosen through a global research programme seeking to identify the most significant issues in the world today which are of concern in our task to take the *good news* to the world.

This Lausanne Occasional Paper (LOP) is the report that has emerged from one of these Issue Groups. LOPs have been produced for each of the Issue Groups and information on these and other publications may be obtained online at www.lausanne.org.

The theme of the Forum for World Evangelization held in 2004 was **“A new vision, a new heart, a renewed call.”** This Forum was held in Pattaya, Thailand from September 29 to October 5, 2004. 1,530 participants came from 130 countries to work in one of the 31 Issue Groups.

The Affirmations at the conclusion of the Forum stated:

“There has been a spirit of working together in serious dialogue and prayerful reflection. Representatives from a wide spectrum of cultures and virtually all parts of the world have come together to learn from one another and to seek new direction from the Holy Spirit for world evangelization. They committed themselves to joint action under divine guidance.

The dramatic change in the political and economic landscape in recent years has raised new challenges in evangelization for the church. The polarization between east and west makes it imperative that the church seek God’s direction for the appropriate responses to the present challenges.

In the 31 Issue Groups these new realities were taken into consideration, including the HIV pandemic, terrorism, globalization, the global role of media, poverty, persecution of Christians, fragmented families, political and religious nationalism, post-modern mind set, oppression of children, urbanization, neglect of the disabled and others.

Great progress was made in these groups as they grappled for solutions to the key challenges of world evangelization. As these groups focused on making specific recommendations, larger strategic themes came to the forefront.

There was affirmation that major efforts of the church must be directed toward those who have no access to the gospel. The commitment to help establish self sustaining churches within 6,000 remaining unreached people groups remains a central priority.

Secondly, the words of our Lord call us to love our neighbour as ourselves. In this we have failed greatly. We renew our commitment to reach out in love and compassion to those who are

marginalised because of disabilities or who have different lifestyles and spiritual perspectives. We commit to reach out to children and young people who constitute a majority of the world's population, many of whom are being abused, forced into slavery, armies and child labour.

A third stream of a strategic nature acknowledges that the growth of the church is now accelerating outside of the western world. Through the participants from Africa, Asia and Latin America, we recognise the dynamic nature and rapid growth of the church in the *South*. Church leaders from the *South* are increasingly providing exemplary leadership in world evangelization.

Fourthly, we acknowledge the reality that much of the world is made up of oral learners who understand best when information comes to them by means of stories. A large proportion of the world's populations are either unable to or unwilling to absorb information through written communications. Therefore, a need exists to share the "Good News" and to disciple new Christians in story form and parables.

Fifthly, we call on the church to use media to effectively engage the culture in ways that draw non-believers toward spiritual truth and to proclaim Jesus Christ in culturally relevant ways.

Finally, we affirm the priesthood of all believers and call on the church to equip, encourage and empower women, men and youth to fulfil their calling as witnesses and co-labourers in the world wide task of evangelization.

Transformation was a theme which emerged from the working groups. We acknowledge our own need to be continually transformed, to continue to open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to the challenges of God's word and to grow in Christ together with fellow Christians in ways that result in social and economic transformation. We acknowledge that the scope of the gospel and building the Kingdom of God involves, body, mind, soul and spirit. Therefore we call for increasing integration of service to society and proclamation of the gospel.

We pray for those around the world who are being persecuted for their faith and for those who live in constant fear of their lives. We uphold our brothers and sisters who are suffering. We recognize that the reality of the persecuted church needs to be increasingly on the agenda of the whole Body of Christ. At the same time, we also acknowledge the importance of loving and doing good to our enemies while we fight for the right of freedom of conscience everywhere.

We are deeply moved by the onslaught of the HIV/AIDS pandemic – the greatest human emergency in history. The Lausanne movement calls all churches everywhere to prayer and holistic response to this plague.

"9/11," the war in Iraq, the war on terror and its reprisals compel us to state that we must not allow the gospel or the Christian faith to be captive to any one geo-political entity. We affirm that the Christian faith is above all political entities.

We are concerned and mourn the death and destruction caused by all conflicts, terrorism and war. We call for Christians to pray for peace, to be proactively involved in reconciliation and avoid all attempts to turn any conflict into a religious war. Christian mission in this context lies in becoming peacemakers.

We pray for peace and reconciliation and God's guidance in how to bring about peace through our work of evangelization. We pray for God to work in the affairs of nations to open doors of opportunity for the gospel. We call on the church to mobilize every believer to focus specific consistent prayer for the evangelization of their communities and the world.

In this Forum we have experienced the partnership of men and women working together. We call on the church around the world to work towards full partnership of men and women in the work of world evangelism by maximising the gifts of all.

We also recognize the need for greater intentionality in developing future leaders. We call on the church to find creative ways to release emerging leaders to serve effectively."

Numerous practical recommendations for local churches to consider were offered. These will be available on the Lausanne website and in the Lausanne Occasional Papers. It is our prayer that these many case studies and action plans will be used of God to mobilise the church to share a clear and relevant message using a variety of methods to reach the most neglected or resistant groups so

that everyone will have the opportunity to hear the gospel message and be able to respond to this good news in faith.

We express our gratitude to the Thai Church which has hosted us and to their welcoming presentation to the Forum. We are profoundly grateful to God for the privilege of being able to gather here from the four corners of the earth. We have developed new partnerships, made new friends and encouraged one another in our various ministries. Notwithstanding the resistance to the gospel in many places and the richness of an inherited religious and cultural tradition we here at the Forum have accepted afresh the renewed call to be obedient to the mandate of Christ. We commit ourselves to making His saving love known so that the whole world may have opportunity to accept God's gift of salvation through Christ."

These affirmations indicate the response of the participants to the Forum outcomes and their longing that the whole church may be motivated by the outcomes of the Forum to strengthen its determination to be obedient to God's calling.

May the case studies and the practical suggestions in this and the other LOPs be of great help to you and your church as you seek to find new ways and a renewed call to proclaim the saving love of Jesus Christ

David Claydon

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PROLOGUE

For an established and respected mission organization to recognize the arts as strategic to the life and mission of the church, and to commission a paper about the arts in the context of faith and redemption, is both visionary and long overdue. Apart from a small number of important voices, the church as a whole has been virtually silent on the topic for generations. There is an evident need to find ways to speak of the intrinsic value of the arts, what they are able to contribute to our faith communities and the cultures in which we live, and the unique ways in which they are able to move our spirit and shape our thinking.

Evangelical communities have been inclined to neglect the arts. There are of course many reasons for this tendency; it will be suggested that those reasons include common theological understandings and ways of thinking about spiritual life. However, in recent years a growing number of these same communities have begun to manifest a new interest in the arts and have made significant moves forward in engaging the arts in the life of the church. To be sure, it has not been a total transformation, but the signs are clear that a renaissance in the arts is taking place among churches in the west. Though non-western cultures integrate the arts more effectively, many of their faith communities have been westernized, and so follow similar patterns regarding the arts.

The task of global evangelism is a task of communication. It is evident that art, too, is about communication. The way in which art communicates is of course unique to the medium, but the power of the arts to move us, engage us, and help us to see with fresh eyes is indisputable. But we will want to suggest that art is not simply a tool or a piece of technology to be used for a predetermined purpose. The integrity of both art and the artist require something more.

Education

The task undertaken in Act I is to provide perspective on the biblical and theological foundations for understanding the creative gift as manifest in human artistry. Imagination has been neglected as a resource for helping us to think more clearly about the world. As a result, we have impoverished Christian thinking and understanding. The time has come for Christians to recover the imagination and to discern its value for faith and life. The arts are one of the key areas where the imagination does its work, and as we will point out later, faith is another area where imagination plays a significant role. As we explore the arts, looking particularly at the need for education, we will consider biblical foundations and strategies for developing our understanding of these gifts.

There is a need for a paradigm shift in how we view the arts—a fresh vision to help us understand how the recovery of the imagination and the affirmation of the gift of artistic creativity can be both celebrative and significant for the church. The biblical narrative serves as the context for the shaping of our theological understanding, and the resulting theology will have implications for all aspects of human life, including the arts.

In setting out biblical and theological foundations, we are concerned to do so in a way that provides not only fresh thinking, but also new practice. What we seek here is not simply a set of ideas, but a living word with the power to change and transform. We will explore how our understanding of scripture and of theology profoundly influences how we engage in the practice of our faith. Our concern will be about our practice as it relates to the arts.

Discipleship

In Act II we look at the artist in spiritual community. Our focus will be the discipleship of the artist shaped by a kingdom view. It will encompass the calling, mentoring, training, empowerment, and support of artists as uniquely gifted and vital parts of the Body of Christ—who like us all are called to work under the lordship of Christ, the creative Head of the Body which is the church.

To understand discipleship for artists as participants in the church's mission in the world, we need to understand with more empathy and perspective some of the key issues that affect their involvement. Among the issues to be considered are:

- Attitudes of the church toward the arts and of artists toward the church
- The struggles of the artist with authority, freedom, and accountability
- The nature of artistic language (the way art “speaks”)
- The inspiration or empowerment of artists by the Holy Spirit
- How we understand the nature of the creative process itself
- The impact of “non-contextual” attempts at mission on indigenous art.

The church today faces a different kind of world—one that has undergone profound changes in the past fifty years and continues to change at a rapid pace. Few people anywhere can avoid the realities of the information and artistic media that shape our everyday environment. At a time when communication has abandoned the age of the orator, we now find ourselves, culturally speaking, in the age of the artist.

Transformation

With spiritual and cultural transformation as desired outcomes, Act III will examine the place of the arts within culture, the importance of indigenous and contextualized artistic expression, the role of the arts in evangelism and missions, the need for Christians to practice their art in the marketplace, and the significant contribution the arts can make to the process of personal healing and social change. We must state here that art, in and of itself, cannot transform; only Christ can transform the human condition. With that clarification as context, we can show that the arts allow for diversity as they “witness” in verbal and nonverbal ways to the truth about the human condition and incarnationally “show” God’s redemptive purposes. They can also draw people to Christ when linked to acts of compassion and service. The arts enable cross-cultural and cross-generational communication and contextualization. Social and economic barriers can be overcome through collaborative art making, and arts used in therapies can invigorate health and healing.

Jesus consistently invited people to use their imaginations, to allow the images He presented to come alive, and to find meaning within those imaginings. He recognized that words or commands were insufficient. In order for people to make changes, they must first be able to imagine what is possible. Human transformative activity depends upon a transformed imagination. We will illustrate that this is especially true in at-risk and impoverished communities or groups of displaced and broken people, where the arts can reinvigorate a sense of personal and social responsibility. Healing can come through safe, accepted, and celebrated personal and communal expression.

Before Act I begins, a few clarifications are necessary:

Creativity—Not only the Arts

We will refer to creativity and imagination throughout this document. We want to make clear at the outset that human creativity and the power to imagine are gifts that show up in various ways in all walks of life. We readily affirm that the creative gift is manifest in areas of life that are far removed from what we call the “arts.” In fact, it is difficult to think of any aspect of life where creativity and imagination are absent. It is an essential capacity for ordinary living and in one way or another touches all that we do. Having said that, we clearly acknowledge that there are those who are endowed by the Creator in a special and sometimes extraordinary way and are called to serve Him in the obedient exercise of their artistic abilities. It is this group of gifted believers that will be our primary focus.

How We Define “Art”

We want to set out in simple terms what we mean by art. At the very least we want to say that the making of art is a creative activity that calls for skill and imagination. Art at its best always invites us to see things in fresh ways and is able to move us to the truth about things. It can also have great value in bringing order to the chaos of life and helping us understand our own humanity and the world around us. We want to affirm that art making is a gift which reflects in humanity something of the image of God, and, when done well, has a humanizing influence in the places in which it is practiced. The terms “art” or “the arts” as we use them encompass the literary arts, visual arts, drama, dance, and music. The creative engagement of the media arts (including film and video) can also be included here, although they will not be directly referenced in this paper.

“Christian Art”? “Christian Artists”?

The commonly used phrase “Christian art” is plagued with a host of meanings that can either help or hinder our understanding. To avoid confusion, we will prefer to talk about art that contains a Christian worldview, and we suggest that such art will in some way resonate with the narrative of scripture. It will speak the truth about the world and the human condition—with or without content that is recognizably or overtly Christian in nature—and it will be done with integrity and imagination.

While some artistically gifted believers like to be called “Christian artists” (mostly in the contemporary Christian music arena), other Christians, particularly artists who work in the marketplace, consider it an unhelpful and inaccurate designation that implies that their creative work will contain only Christian symbolism and subject matter. Such phrases can

unintentionally reinforce the notion that a work of art is only valuable in relation to its usefulness, particularly in the cause of gospel proclamation—an idea we do not want to endorse.

A Trinitarian Foundation

It should be noted that in shaping this paper, the doctrine of the Trinity provided a guiding framework. In our modern setting, we have tended to think of God as a powerful individual who creates, rather than as a loving community of three creating in relationship. We see parallels between the arts-related matters we address and the activities of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity engages the world in a significant and unique way.

Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Revelation	Incarnation	Reconciliation
Rational	Sensual	Relational
Education	Discipleship	Transformation

1. *Revelation/Rational/Education:*

God the Father has spoken to us through theological reflection on the biblical narrative, and it is that reflective understanding of His revelation that calls us to the challenge of education—so that we might deepen our understanding of God, the world, and ourselves.

2. *Incarnation/Sensual/Discipleship:*

In the coming of Jesus the Son we have the embodied presence of God in the world, which in turn affirms the sensual nature of our humanity. At the same time, we as followers of Jesus are called to be His embodied presence in the world through our faithful, obedient discipleship.

3. *Reconciliation/Relational/Transformation:*

Guided by divine revelation, motivated and shaped by the incarnate life of Jesus, we are to collaborate with the Holy Spirit to bear the fruit of personal and cultural transformation, so that in the end all things will be reconciled to God.

The rational, sensual, and relational aspect of God’s self-revelation in the work of the Trinity sets a pattern for our understanding of the world and needs to impact how we view the kingdom of God. Creativity that is shaped by Christian faith and imagination will, with maturity, integrate layers of these three elements into its human art making, as we will explain further in Act II.

Finally, like the filmmaker who must discard powerful and expensively produced scenes in order to create a cohesive and meaningful movie, we too have had to limit our scope and edit the length of this paper. We view our contribution as exploratory, not definitive. Our hope is that the work done here will assist the global church in the hard but vital task of “renewing the mind” on matters related to the arts and imagination, and provide a call to action that will be a transforming influence.

We are now ready to take our seats and allow our imagination to do its work. The house lights have slowly dimmed and the curtain is opening for the beginning of Act I.

ACT 1: EDUCATION

The Arts and a Renewed Theological Vision

Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And every one who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall. (Matthew 7:24-27)

As He concludes His great Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells this story about two builders. One builds on a secure foundation while the other sets his house upon a foundation that is weak and vulnerable. This story clarifies a twofold requirement for all who wish to follow Jesus: first, we are to hear and understand His teaching, and second, we are to let that teaching move us to action. As we take up the subject of a renewed theological vision, it is not merely an intellectual exercise. What we come to understand makes a difference in how we live. Transformational action is the result of transformed thinking.

In the story of the builders, Jesus tells us that this combination of hearing the teaching and living it out is like building on a rock. No matter what culture we live in, Christians will face the temptation to think and to act in ways that take us in directions quite different from what Jesus taught and the life to which He calls us. The temptation is to hear and not act, or sometime to act and fail to hear. But it is the one who hears and acts who is like the wise man in the story. This document is an invitation to hear and act, and to do so for the sake of the kingdom and for the glory of God.

Education

The theme of education that is under discussion here has two distinct aspects to it. The first is concerned with the content of the education. We will seek to articulate a basic understanding of the arts that rests upon sound biblical and theological themes. Those involved in cross-cultural mission, perhaps more than most, are aware of the way in which our cultural assumptions can colour our thinking and often distort the truth of things. We want to make it clear that not only cultural assumptions, but also theological assumptions can at times give us a way of understanding things that fails to get to the heart of the matter.

The second component of the education section is the challenge of finding ways to bring our faith communities to new understanding about the arts and their biblical and theological foundation. How can we foster careful, biblically informed thinking about the arts in our local churches, as well as in seminaries and colleges where upcoming Christian leaders are educated?

ACT I, SCENE I

Art, the Church, and the Imagination

A Long and Complex History

While we recognize the presence of a number of art forms in the worship and mission life of the historical church, we have chosen to provide a brief sketch of the visual arts. This is because first of all, when we look back to see how faith communities have dealt with the arts, we find that history speaks extensively of responses to the visual arts, and second, the history of the visual arts most clearly illustrates the nature of the relationship of the church to the arts in general.

The early church followed the biblical injunction against idolatry that was commonly associated with images found in pagan religions. However, the church has sometimes taken the Second Commandment to forbid art making as a whole. This interpretation of scripture cannot be justified because God Himself commissions representational art for the Tabernacle. Solomon's Temple was also replete with the beauty of various art forms and symbols. A careful examination of the life of the Hebrews will reveal that it is the *worship* not the *making* of art that is idolatrous and therefore to be prohibited.

Furthermore, the Greek philosopher Plato—whose ideas carried considerable weight with the early church fathers—disparaged art as mere imitation. For Plato, sensuous experience was thought of in negative terms and art was considered incapable of taking us beyond mere sensuality.

Augustine readily affirmed the attractiveness of the created order, but warned of the danger of it distracting the soul

from its search for God. Augustinian spirituality taught that the way to God was through the interior life of the soul and not through any knowledge of the material world, including that manifest through the arts. The legacy of this notion of spirituality is still very much with us today.

At various times throughout the Middle Ages (c. 500-1500 AD), voices were heard criticizing the use of expensive, elaborate, and even fantastical art in the monastic context. However, there was almost universal agreement that visual imagery was a valuable and even indispensable resource for teaching, particularly for the illiterate. In this respect, the use of visual art in the west differed somewhat from its use in the Byzantine (Eastern Orthodox) church, where icons were viewed not primarily as didactic tools, but as actual manifestations of or links to the holy person represented in them.

In the west, visual art played a central role in the liturgy and devotional life of the church. Cathedrals, abbeys, and parish churches were adorned inside and out with frescoes, sculptures, and stained glass, while the utmost craftsmanship and valuable materials were lavished upon liturgical implements. Manuscripts of the Bible, the writings of the church fathers, and other liturgical and theological writings were illuminated with elaborate images, sometimes solemn and awe-inspiring, sometimes highly narrative and even whimsical.

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century ushered in a new era. Theologians such as John Calvin contended that any use of images in worship would lead to idolatry—though the gift of artistry in other contexts was still viewed as God-given and so to be accepted and appreciated. The Protestant Reformation thus turned to emphasizing the word as central for the worshipping community, all but eliminating the visual arts. The Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a significant force in Catholic Europe. Hundreds of magnificent works of religious art were commissioned, most of them marked by theatricality and emotional fervour intended to inspire piety, devotion, and loyalty to the Catholic Church and its doctrines.

The best art of the early eighteenth century was religious art. But in the latter part of that century, a time when the institutional church was subject to harsh criticism, art tended to record details of daily life with little attention to religion. Art focused on earthly, not heavenly reality. In the nineteenth century art became almost a substitute for religion, and it was believed that through the aesthetic sense one could come to knowledge of the divine. But along with the elevation of the artist as a special figure able to live outside the religious and moral norms of society came prophetic voices warning against the moral bankruptcy of the artist and the loss of spiritual reality in an increasingly secularized society.

As artistic expression moved further from religious sensibilities, Christians in the early twentieth century increasingly removed themselves from the world of the arts. With absence came the loss of influence. The social and spiritual revolution of the 1960's, however, while challenging the existing social order even further, contained within itself the seeds of a new openness to creativity. During this period, a number of creative young people became Christians and sought to express their newfound faith through their artistic gifts. Although the initial movement was mainly towards contemporary music, it also began to spark renewed interest in theatre, dance, and the visual arts. At the same time, men like Hans Rookmaaker and Francis Schaeffer—who believed in the lordship of Christ over every area of life—began to disciple some among this new generation of believers to understand the place of the arts within a biblical worldview.

Nonetheless, the majority within faith communities simply neglected the arts, having no understanding and receiving no teaching about the place of the arts in the life of faith. It is also true that many held to a spirituality that remained suspicious of the arts and their material, embodied nature. There have been numerous signs of change in the church in the past two decades, as a significant number of local churches have demonstrated a new openness to the arts and to artists. The arts are playing a greater role in worship, and some churches have set aside gallery and performance spaces for visual art, drama, and music. In addition, numerous organizations devoted to the arts have been formed by Christians and now carry considerable influence in promoting the arts and networking artists.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism has become a major theme in academic and other circles, as we try to discern the meaning of changing social and intellectual patterns. Postmodernism is very much a western phenomenon, but with western culture being exported around the world, other cultural settings already have been or will be touched by its influence. It offers a perspective that challenges views on truth, rationality, and meaning that have dominated the west for the past three or four centuries. The emphasis on “abstract” reason is being overtaken by an emphasis on “concrete” embodiment. The neat, clean logic of propositions is being replaced by a more open-ended emphasis on narrative. The visual has eroded the primacy of the word, and any claim of ultimate truth is no longer acceptable in a pluralistic world of competing stories and relative “truths.” Grand (or “meta”) narratives such as Christianity have been rejected as inadequate containers for the perception and engagement of reality. And, as we all need life-directing stories, people are now constructing their

own narratives and consequently their own “truths.”

Despite the more negative aspects of postmodernism, it does allow for a new openness to “spirituality” and more attention to the aesthetic side of life. In leaving the rigor of western reason behind, postmodernism readily embraces the arts, whether music, dance, film, visual art, or theatre. Or to put it another way, symbol, narrative, and the poetic have become common and accepted ways to communicate. The power of the arts to move both heart and mind is unquestionable and their presence is everywhere. We are in a transitional moment in history and these important changes must be considered as the faith community seeks to give shape to its global mission.

Imagination

Earlier we made it clear that the gifts of creativity and imagination are woven into all aspects of human life and do not belong to the arts alone. Imagination is the ability to look beyond what is immediately present to what might be. We could say that imagination helps us to order our worlds and make sense of our experiences. It puts us in touch with a larger narrative—God’s story—and helps us to see things differently.

To clarify, the role of the imagination is not to take us away from reality, but to expose us to new ways of seeing things. That is why the parables of Jesus are so powerful—they invite us to imagine things we have not thought before. We often have our thinking, acting, and values shaped by the prevailing ideas of our various cultural settings. The gospel comes to us as a living word and draws us to think imaginatively of how things could be different. Imagination is capable of moving us closer to the truth about the world as we look through the lens of scripture. As an imaginative activity, art too can open our eyes to see old things in new ways. This important role for imagination suggests that our faith communities need to do their part in cultivating an imagination well rooted in the biblical narrative and the images of scripture.

ACT I, SCENE II

Key Biblical and Theological Foundations

There is much in scripture that we can draw upon as we seek a basis for understanding and affirming the arts. The Bible itself comes to us in an artistic form and consists mainly of story and poetry. There is also the rich imagery of the biblical text in both Old and New Testaments. Metaphors abound as the writers attempt to help us grasp what God is like or make plain how we are to live. The use of story allows us to enter into the life and times of biblical characters, and in the process we are moved and instructed in ways that are not easily forgotten.

Biblical References to the Arts

When the biblical narrative first introduces us to God, it is as creator and maker, the author and imaginer of all creation. The “cultural mandate” (Gen. 1: 28) calls us to responsible practice in the shaping of culture and care for the created order and involves all human “making,” including the arts. God demonstrated His original intention to create a world that was both functional and aesthetic when He placed trees in the garden that were good for food and beautiful to look at (Gen. 2:9). This would have been of little consequence had He not created humankind in His image (Gen. 1:26) with the ability to appreciate beauty. Bezalel and Oholiab were called and equipped to lead the faith community in artistry for the tabernacle (Ex. 31–39). In the wilderness journey we observe God commissioning and using a visual artefact (a sculpture of a serpent) to bring healing, forgiveness, and restoration to His rebellious people (Num. 21:1-9).

We discover David the musician, dancer, and poet and Nathan the prophet and storyteller; the imaginative visioning of Elijah and Elisha, of Jeremiah and Ezekiel—imagination not limited by circumstances, but able to see beyond the difficulties of the present to what has been promised; the memorable poetic images of Joel, Amos, and Habakkuk and the attention-getting street theatre of the prophets. Biblical accounts of festival and ceremony (which included music, dance, and poetry) speak of the need for creative celebration with rituals and symbols that bond the people of God to their story.

There are also examples of distortion, as the people of God used dance, music, and visual art in idolatrous celebration (Ex. 32), while seven hundred years after God commissioned and powerfully used the sculpture of the serpent in the desert, it had to be destroyed because the people were worshipping the created thing rather than the creator (2 Ki. 18:4). Idolatry, pride, and impurity are ever-present temptations, and art can be a ready servant employed to support sinful practice. It is just such distortions that underline the need for the church to re-educate the imagination through engagement of the biblical story. We shall see, however, that human distortion is not a reason for abandoning God’s good gifts.

Jesus told parables. These short stories were rich in meaning and still speak to us in the twenty-first century. Images for Jesus in the gospels—the lamb, the vine, the door, and the shepherd—all serve to inform our sense of His identity and work.

Baptism and the bread and wine speak to us of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Songs, hymns, and spiritual songs were a part of the life of the early church. The book of Revelation is full of imagery that calls out to the human imagination and invites us into the grand story of what God has done and will do for us in Christ.

Biblical Terminology for Art and Artist

Scripture makes very respectful references to artistry. The terms in the Bible referring to what we call “art” include artistic design, workmanship, and celebration in song, dance, and music. In the Bible, creative specialists like Bezalel (Ex. 31, 35), Hiram (1 Ki. 7), and those skilled in music (1 Chron. 25) are referred to as “skilled craftsmen,” “designers,” and “skilled persons.” The idea behind these various Hebrew words suggests a very high level of skill, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom in dealing with these creative activities.

Theological Themes

1. God

The Christian faith affirms belief in God as triune—Father, Son, and Spirit. God creates the world, sustains it, and providentially cares for it. There is a unique, divine breaking into time and history in the coming of the Son. The Son comes to do the work of redeeming all of creation from the effects of humanity’s wilful separation from God and restoring it to God’s original intention for all that has been created. The Spirit remains in the world for purposes of transforming fallen creation, the restraining of evil, and the enabling and enlivening guidance of the people of God. As triune, the nature of God is inherently relational, while the holy, creative, imaginative, loving, and providential nature of God shapes divine action in the world.

2. Creation

The Christian faith has consistently affirmed a clear distinction between Creator and creation, affirming that all that exists has come into being by a divine act (*ex nihilo*, out of nothing). All too often we find the doctrine of creation reduced to a discussion about the truth or falsehood of evolution. Such a reduction misses the importance of understanding the beginning of our story—without which nothing in scripture has any context or ultimate meaning.

The creation story introduces us to what has been called the cultural mandate—to be fruitful, multiply, care for, and steward the earth. This has profound implications for how we respond to what is given to us in our various cultural settings. Those who stand in covenant relationship with God are called to approach nature and culture in a way that complies with what God requires of us. The created order offers us a glimpse into who God is and tells us of his power and glory (Ps. 19:1, Rom. 1:20).

God approved His handiwork as “good.” It follows, then, that creation is best understood as a gift that God has given us to enjoy and upon which we are to exercise faithful stewardship. Humanity is called to exercise its own resourcefulness in maintaining order that is God-honouring and allows for human flourishing. This call to order the world is an implicit affirmation of the goodness of creation, and a call not out of the world but into the world. It is a call not to escape but to engage, and to be at work in the business of formation and transformation.

3. Fall

There is, however, a complicating factor. The biblical narrative also tells of human failure to follow God’s instruction. Humanity exercised its freedom to win for itself autonomy—to operate independently of God. Humanity’s move to autonomy was one that affected not only its relationship with God, but also carried profound consequences for all of creation. Now, neither humanity nor creation is in the state that was originally intended. Both have fallen short of God’s intention and are now in need of redemption. It is here that we can see the very close relationship between creation and redemption, something we will attend to shortly.

4. Incarnation

At the heart of the Christian story is a claim that God does not remain hidden but is revealed to us. God breaks into history and takes on the form of a man (Phil. 2:5-9). Incarnation is central to the gospel and poses a clear challenge to all negative claims about the created order. Orthodox theology has at times given so much emphasis to the divinity of Jesus that the truth of his humanity has been obscured. Incarnation says that in obedience to the Father and through the work of the Spirit, the Son comes into a world which was made through Him and which He continues to uphold (Col. 1:15-20). God ventures forth in Christ to reverse the fortunes of fallen creation and fallen humanity. Incarnation affirms our humanity and

the order of the material world. Faith that seeks to be negative about the physical world in favour of an “other-worldly” spirituality ignores the powerful message of the incarnation. Scripture makes clear that the church is the body of Christ present in the world—bearing witness to the divine story of cosmic redemption.

5. Redemption

Redemption has a much wider scope than personal salvation, or as we say, the “saving of souls.” It speaks to the need of humanity and all of creation to be reconciled to God. A narrow understanding of redemption fails to capture the breadth of the story of God’s breaking into history. What we think about salvation will have considerable bearing on what we value. We will affirm what can be saved, and ignore or neglect what we believe to be outside of God’s redemptive purposes. The environment and the culture are casualties of this kind of limited thinking.

6. Mission

When thinking about mission, it will be important for our purposes to reflect upon it in context of this broad spectrum of theological themes. Central to our understanding is the nature and outworking of the kingdom of God. His kingdom—His rule and reign—is both a present reality and a future hope. Second Corinthians 5 makes it clear that mission is God’s “ministry” (God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself) and He invites and commissions us to participate with Him in it (He has given to us the ministry of reconciliation). Unless a kingdom perspective of the lordship of Christ over every area of life permeates our understanding of mission, we will continue to express a reduced story that communicates a reduced vision of the overarching work of God to restore all of creation (the cosmos) back to His original intention.

In the coming of Christ through incarnation and in His life, death, and resurrection the future has invaded the present. The renewal of the human community begins in the church but does not end there. While the community of faith lives in anticipation of what is to come, it embodies that hope in all that it does. These facets of the gospel narrative open for us a holistic perspective on the nature of mission and provide the context for faithful living, including the work of artists.

ACT I, SCENE III

Implications and Alternatives for the Arts

This brief sketch of biblical and theological foundations is in need of application. What bearing does all this have on the arts? It is common knowledge that art and artists are often marginalized in faith communities. We hope to be able to show just how important our theological thinking is as we now pick up on some of these themes in relation to the arts.

Art and Redemption

We begin with the doctrine of redemption, as it is there that we find the key to how many have responded to art, particularly in the latter part of the twentieth century. More than anything else, so it has been argued, being a Christian is about being saved and doing what one can to see that others may be saved as well. Our vocations are often judged by whether they serve the cause of redemption or not. We speak of “full-time service” as the highest calling, missing the point that we are all in full-time service wherever God has placed us. The belief that the biblical call to salvation is essentially addressed to the need to have the soul reconciled to God has led to a neglect of both the bodily side of life and human responsibility toward the natural order and the culture that we have created. This in turn has brought about a spiritual practice that diminishes the value of many aspects of ordinary life, including the arts, and for all intents and purposes sees both nature and culture as irredeemable.

Setting up redemption in this sense as the measuring stick by which we judge the value of things has led many to think of the arts exclusively in terms of their usefulness to the work of evangelism and worship. To put the matter succinctly, the salvation of souls has become the end and all else the means. We want to suggest that this way of thinking about redemption and salvation is too narrow and has served to distort our understanding of Christian responsibility in the world.

Two correctives are in order. First we must bring the understanding of redemption into balance and harmony with other significant doctrines of the Christian faith. Redemption has dominated Christian thinking in some theological circles, and has resulted in the neglect and devaluing of other doctrines such as creation, Trinity, and incarnation. We need to recover a full-orbed theological understanding. The second corrective is to see that redemption is about more than the salvation of individual souls. Scripture makes it clear that the redemptive work of Christ is a work of cosmic proportions. The whole creation is in need of redemption and we wait for the day when “all things will be made new.” Once we see redemption in this broader context, we can understand how the arts can be pursued in a way that resonates with the activity of God in the world.

The title of our group at the Lausanne Forum was Redeeming the Arts. There was significant discussion about whether this title conveyed what we wanted to affirm. Two views emerged. First, the call to redeem the arts may suggest that art itself falls short and is in need of redemption. Yet if creativity is a gift from God, it is not art that needs redeeming but the people who do art. No one wished to support the idea that there is something wrong with art. A second perspective was proposed. While art in its original state needs no redemption—the distortion, misuse, and abuse to which art has been subjected does need redemption.

In this case the redemptive process should include filtration, so that meanings and ideas that are contrary to biblical teaching can be set aside and new meanings can be shaped for the art form. Various cultures around the world have engaged music, dance, drama, and the visual arts for cultural and religious purposes that are in some cases incompatible with Christian faith. This situation does not call for an abandoning of the art forms and instruments, but calls for a redeeming of those forms and instruments into the Christian story. Christians in each culture will need to discern how this can best be accomplished.

Art and Creation

The narrow perspective on redemption that we have described has resulted in the neglect of the arts, for art is seen as a merely human endeavour tied to this world alone. However, when we see clearly that the work of redemption is for the whole of creation, we are then able to ask the question about redemptive artistry.

The biblical narrative recorded in the early part of Genesis calls us to nurture and develop the creation that God has affirmed as good. If we are to be consistent with the cultural mandate, this will include both the natural order around us and the cultural order that we create. Cultivation of that cultural order involves creativity, imagination, and most certainly the arts. Affirming creation opens the way for embracing all that God has made as “good,” including human creativity. And we are to take seriously not only what God has made, but also human making. The creative arts are but one expression of the divine image within us as well as one component of the social and cultural life of the human community. Art is able to reflect and allude (suggest, point) to something of the order and meaning that God has given to the world—which speaks to us of design and a master designer.

We might also consider the sustaining work of Christ in “holding all things together” (Col. 1:17). This speaks of God’s ongoing engagement with the created order. Typically we think of the act of creating the world as a gesture of divine power. However, another model has been suggested¹ in which the creation of the world is understood as an exercise of divine artistry. God lovingly brought into being a vast cosmic order that continues to enjoy the sustaining care of the Creator. Those who bear the image of God are also “makers,” able to engage imagination in order to be agents of newness. Metaphor and imagination, so common in the biblical text, are each valuable in the work of enabling us to see and hear anew. Art is deeply dependent on human imagination—something that needs to be recovered in our Christian understanding. And as we mentioned earlier, imagination includes the capacity to see what is possible. The narrative of scripture that shapes our faith invites us to see fresh possibilities both within and beyond our world of time and space.

If we take the doctrine of creation in its fullness as laid out in scripture, we will accept that work with human hands is sacred work, that holy places are not limited to those places devoted to worship, that sacred and profane may be a false division, and that the ordinary things of life are gifts of common grace from the One who made all things and who saw that it was good. Doing the work of an artist should be seen as a sacred calling. Like all other work, it is to be shaped by the great narrative of scripture and through the One into whose image we are to be conformed (Rom. 8:29).

Art and Incarnation

At the heart of Christian faith is the majestic declaration that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us—and we beheld His glory... full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). The divine becomes human and enters into the darkness and pain of ordinary life, experiencing its joys and sorrows. With incarnation so central to the Christian story, it is surprising that so many within the Christian community have given so little attention to the body. Embodiment involves the senses. We have resisted the sensual side of life, often equating it with a distorted sexuality. Resistance to the physical/sensual side of life has had a profoundly negative impact on the arts. We need a fresh reminder that God has taken on flesh and with it all that is entailed in being human. The incarnation—God taking on human flesh—makes it clear that there is no room for negative talk about the physical side of life in the Christian story.

That the invisible God becomes visible in Christ is a movement whose structure is paralleled in creative activity. Art is sometimes said to be about making the invisible visible—the fleshing out of concepts and ideas. The incarnation also informs our art making in that it is the embodiment of both judgment and hope. It manifests judgment in revealing our lust for autonomy instead of a relationship with the Creator, and hope in its affirmation of the possibility of re-creation.

However, when theologian Trevor Hart refers to “the poetry of the incarnation,” he is suggesting that we cannot fully grasp who Jesus is through His humanity alone. In the same way, poetry communicates well beyond the words on the page, visual art beyond the paint on the canvas, and dance and drama beyond the words and movements of the performers. Hart goes on to say, “He takes our flesh with all of its limiting factors and inherent flaws, and through a work of supremely inspired (Spirit-filled) artistry, transfigures it, before handing it back to us in the glorious state which its original maker always intended it to bear. At this level creation, redemption and re-creation are shown to be interwoven as activities of the same divine Poet.”²

ACT I, SCENE IV ***The Task of Global Education***

We have looked at some of the ways in which our thinking needs to be reshaped when considering the links between faith and art. Laying out a fresh understanding is only the beginning. The second facet of this educational component is to consider how faith communities might strengthen their understanding and heighten their awareness of the arts as well as welcome them into the mix for faithful living. Here we are concerned to create opportunities for learning about both the biblical view of the arts and about art itself. The education we wish to encourage includes education about the arts, in the arts, and through the arts.

The time is ripe for Christian faith communities around the world to be intentional in their commitment to engage the arts as an important component in the life of the church and as a strategic resource for bridging to the various cultures in which our faith communities are found. Our neglect of the arts impoverishes our communal life as God’s people and diminishes our resourcefulness as witnesses of the kingdom and the good news of the gospel.

Because of this neglect, little is being done to cultivate a Christian imagination. Meanwhile, the imaginations of a whole generation are being shaped by cultural trends that are devoid of any Christian content. The great task of reclaiming the imagination is one that will require our commitment to develop effective education programs for believers in our faith communities and educational institutions. This is no small task, and will require vision and leadership as well as the engagement of dancers, poets, visual artists, and performance artists in our communities.

Obstacles

The call to a renewed theological vision as set out in this document is a call for a shift in our thinking. We are all inclined to maintain our comfort level, and new thinking can make us uncomfortable. Change is often a slow process and we are aware that there are obstacles that may make the shift we are recommending difficult. Here as elsewhere, we will want to confront obstacles with strategies for consideration, discussion, further development, and possible implementation. These tasks will include:

- Overcoming neglect of the arts by the church
- Overcoming resistance to change
- Communicating with those who can make a difference
- Reducing discomfort with the ambiguity found in the arts
- Finding church communities that are hospitable to the arts
- Funding curriculum development in colleges and seminaries
- Overcoming resistance to art within a church context
- Shaping sustainable structures that will support the arts and artists
- Connecting Christians involved in the arts
- Finding qualified people to develop curriculum in the arts

Strategies

The “renewed mind” needs the vehicle of strategic action that will employ the personal, educational, and technological resources available for the work of educating in the arts. This education in the arts must permeate our homes, our churches, our schools, and our institutions of higher learning. Our hope is that this document will be a catalyst for mobilizing Christian communities around the world to give new attention to the arts and so be beneficiaries of all that they have to offer. To accomplish this requires creative strategies for moving from good ideas to a place of dynamic change. Among the strategies we wish to affirm are:

1. Creating an ethos in the home and home school environment in which each child is encouraged to explore, discover, and develop their God-given creative ability to its fullest potential—a place where the arts are an integral part of the learning process itself.

2. Developing educational resources for churches to provide an informed biblical and theological understanding of the arts. These may take the form of church or small-group curriculum.

Mike and Zipporah, musicians and messianic Jewish believers, have launched an arts academy with a Christian worldview. They are attempting to fill a huge void in support for young artists who are just beginning to develop. They write about the development of artists and cover the disciplines of music, theatre, dance, writing, and visual art in their academy. However, it comes as no surprise that their greatest challenge is getting adequate funding for staff, facilities, and equipment.

3. Funding qualified teachers to create courses in the arts for Christian higher education. One of the greatest challenges facing artists and art organizations today is the issue of funding. Patronage is still necessary if artists are to pursue what God has gifted and called them to do. Sadly, with notable exceptions, most evangelical grant-giving foundations have little or no understanding of, or interest in, the arts. Ironically, secular foundations and arts-funding organizations are much more responsive to Christians when they see quality work in the arts and perceive that the community will benefit in some way. Artists and their supporters also need to think more in terms of business models in their work and projects. It is of particular importance when making funding proposals to businesses and corporations to present them in language they will understand and respond to. Mutually beneficial and helpful relationships must be established with the business community.

4. Establishing biblically based course and degree offerings in the arts at Christian colleges, seminaries, and universities. It is in these places that both the leadership and the rank and file of the church can discover the value of the arts in the scheme of the divine order of creation and the mission responsibility of the church.

The “Dreaming Of Lions Project” by a Canadian artist uses an unusual visual narrative exhibition along with PowerPoint lectures to teach visual language, visual metaphor, and ways in which God uses this language to communicate with His people in the scriptures, in every culture and in daily life. This display and lecture series has travelled internationally and is also available as an interactive college and seminary-level credit course.

5. Planning for seminars and conferences that will foster new awareness of the arts and encourage Christian leaders and teachers to promote the arts in churches, mission organizations, and educational settings.

A church in Paris, France, organized a four-day art event with expositions, concerts, dance and film offerings, and a forum. All events were free and open to the public. The response from the community was overwhelming. The exposition focused on the work of invited professional painters, but also featured the work of amateurs and church members selected by jury. In the context of this weekend art show, a four-day forum was organized inviting artists, pastors, and others from around Europe to discuss the relationship of art to the mission of the church in the urban context. A dozen countries were represented.

6. Developing and supporting networks of Christ-centred arts organizations. This relational synergy will help to increase the momentum and understanding of arts-related concerns within faith communities, while encouraging individual artists.

ACT II: DISCIPLESHIP

Character, Artistic and Relational Development of the Artist

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:45-46)

Jesus Chooses a New Metaphor for Beauty

One picture of Christ's kingdom describes the discovery of a precious pearl by a keen-eyed merchant who knew something very special when he saw it. Jesus is very careful in His choice of images, and grounds His use of metaphor in the physical aesthetics of the object or place that He isolates for our instruction. While most commentators focus on the pearl as a symbol for spiritual virtues, there is also the need to see the kingdom of God as having a richly material dimension in Christ's reconciliation of all things.

Why is Jesus using this parable? The beauty of the kingdom of God is a different kind of beauty, one that is often overlooked and even reviled in this world. It is subtle, even invisible or only "spiritually discerned," yet worth sacrificing for, though it can be uncomfortably disturbing as well as life-giving. Jesus has chosen a metaphor that affirms the natural beauty of the pearl and likens it to the value of the kingdom of heaven.

At the heart of kingdom living is a spirit that is willing to follow Jesus. Christian morality includes a shaping of inner character as well as outward behaviour. A pearl has a unique balance of internal and external beauty that can seem less obvious than other brighter and more colourful gemstones. Such beauty does not come easily. The development process of pearls is very slow. It is one of irritation and discomfort for the oyster who continually coats a nagging, embedded grain of sand within its own body with precious mother of pearl, until it is discovered and brought out into the light of day. This is not unlike the character development process in the artist. In this section of our study we will examine the nature of the calling to be an artist, and what is involved in discipling artists to fulfil that calling—to realize the beauty of the pearl.

Discipleship for Artists is Complicated by their History

Believers are called to pursue a growing, intimate relationship with God out of which flows a responsibility to steward the gifts we have and employ them for God's glory. This pattern holds for artists as well. The artist who is a Christian can take the artistic gift and offer it as a way to glorify God. Unfortunately, many who have been raised in Christian communities have found neither resources for thinking about their calling nor encouragement to pursue it. Because of the tendency of the church to marginalize artists, the following consequences have arisen:

- Many Christians involved in the arts are discipled by the culture, not the church
- Secular artists, not Christians, are "discipling" the nations through the arts
- Communication by the church has departed from the biblical pattern, as we note below.

These realities have often left Christians involved in the arts with no sense of place in the church or in the work of the kingdom. It has also resulted in fewer opportunities for artists to be nurtured in their spiritual journey. This may explain why so many faith-based arts organizations have developed in the last few decades. These organizations fill a gap for artists who feel marginalized by the church because of their art and marginalized by the culture because of their faith. Faith communities that affirm their artists and the arts may draw on their gifts to pass on the transforming story of the gospel through the arts, and address the whole person through the engagement of the imagination.

As the biblical narrative unfolds, it does so in stories and poetry. In fact, approximately 75 percent of scripture consists of story, 15 percent is expressed in poetic forms, and only 10 percent is propositional and overtly instructional. In our retelling of the same story, we have reversed this biblical pattern. Today an estimated 10 percent of our communication is designed to capture the imagination of the listener, while 90 percent is purely instructive.

Many Christians are beginning to realize that we cannot know God or walk the journey of faith as God has designed it without engaging the imagination. We are at a time when the church is being called to look afresh at the role of the artist. It may well be that the arts are one of the most untapped resources for the kingdom work of the church today. Whether we consider the church's biblical assignments when gathered for worship, healing, and equipping; or as "salt and light" reaching out to and influencing the community around it; or for world evangelization—in any of these contexts, artists have the potential to make a valuable contribution.

ACT II, SCENE I
Character Development of the Artist

If we think in terms of the “kingdom” of God, we are implying that we are under the rule of a “king.” When Paul speaks of himself as a “bond-servant” to Christ, he is accepting the position of a willing servant to his new master. This idea of a “kingdom” and of working under authority is no longer a common model in many parts of the world. For those who are practicing artists, discipleship raises an interesting tension between authority and freedom. Life experiences can make “authority” a very threatening matter. Many artists have come to treasure their “freedom” of expression, their mobility, and their romantic (even mysterious) notoriety as a breed apart, setting the ideas of authority and freedom in opposition to one another.

Discipleship, from a biblical point of view, is a “relational” process that should be nurturing and serve to bring healing. Liberated from sin and guilt, we can know in a special way the joy of being reconciled to God and adopted into His family. Our Christian walk invites us to companionship with Christ through the Spirit. However, it also involves the challenges of humility, study, correction, emotional vulnerability, passion, and even conflict. Learning about Jesus takes place in large part through our relationships with others within the context of Christian community.

Autonomy

Life in community plays a significant role in the non-western world, while western individualism can serve as an obstacle to community. The artistic temperament, wherever it is found, leans toward thinking and acting independently. Artists, especially in the west, have often come to treasure their autonomy in one or more of the following ways:

1. *Conceptual autonomy*

To a large extent, the arts have taken the path of philosophical divorce from the authority of biblical revelation, following the movement toward secularization and individualism. This development places humanity at the centre of all thinking and action and moves God to the margins. Visual art, music, dance, theatre, and literature have all sought greater fulfilment in reason, human emotion, and personal expression. The slide away from acknowledging God as the source of all things, including creativity and imagination, has been relentless. The biblical model is found in the invitation to bring every thought captive to Christ.

2. *Aesthetic autonomy*

In recent times, in nearly every artistic discipline, the language of art has moved into increasingly more subjective forms of expression, making communication and accessibility to community life more and more difficult. Once again the centre is humanity apart from God. The aesthetic side of life needs to be shaped by the biblical story and knowledge of the One who has made all things. The search for the self fails if it comes only to a reference point no bigger than the limits of human perception. Human flourishing and obedient aesthetic life require a relationship with the triune God of scripture.

3. *Relational autonomy*

Artists have often wrongly interpreted creativity as the by-product of a splendidly sheltered, solitary life somehow removed from the social, interpersonal realities of communication, cooperation, and especially conflict—all unavoidable parts of community life. Increasingly, subjective artistic language has encouraged the distancing of artists from communal, religious, and social accountability. Creativity winds up becoming idealized as a relationally separate thing, done in isolated and protected environments. Although isolation manifests itself differently in the world of dance, theatre, and music ensembles, which are by nature more communal, even these communities can tend to separate themselves from members of the society at large.

If not autonomy, then what? The redemptive process requires the belief that God is interested in all aspects of social, economic, and vocational life, and that work is an integral part of involvement in the kingdom. The opposite of autonomy is not silent submission and compliance. It is conceptual, aesthetic, and relational interdependence in community and healthy relationships, in which a social conscience is almost unavoidable. However, we must first consider what needs to occur in the heart of the artist for his or her artistry to be faithful.

Character

Artistry moves closer to seeing in a more fully Christian way as the artist lives in the story of scripture and shapes a worldview consistent with that story. There is a sense in which knowing the Father gives us access to envision the great

sweep of creation, in which earthly temporal reality will be seen as a part of a much larger picture and understood accordingly. In Jesus we have access to the master of picture language—an empathetic communicator reaching out to us, taking on our humanity, and addressing us in our own languages. In the Spirit we have comfort, empowerment, gifts, wisdom, insight, and intercession on our behalf. Ours will be a spirituality and an artistry that engages the realities of life, not one that seeks to escape them. In light of this, the inner landscape of the heart and our day-to-day walk are to be crafted to Christlikeness. This cannot happen in a spiritual vacuum. Character must be forged with the support, discipleship and accountability of Christian community.

The Empowerment of the Spirit

Maturity comes not only through the seasoning of experience in living, but also through the “renewal of our minds” by the power of the Holy Spirit—the One who is able to guide us into all truth about sin, righteousness, and judgment. Any insistence on autonomy in order to find either personal or artistic illumination is naïve and foolish. God’s grace comes to us as a gift and invites us to let go of our desire for autonomy in favour of relationship with Him. Three biblical principles make it clear that to “do it our way” without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit dooms us to failure.

1. To overcome spiritual opposition

Scripture reveals that there is an undercurrent of spiritual warfare in our world that removes any possibility of neutrality and ridicules human pride in its own self-determination. It clearly suggests that unless we stay close to the Vine and put on the full armour of God, we are highly vulnerable to a ruthless predator in Satan and to the forces of evil, both subtle and blatant, that show up in our various cultural settings.

2. To mature as disciples

Jesus continually suggests that allegiance to Him means doing things that run counter to the comfortable compromises to which our culture is inclined. We are called to enter a “narrow gate,” to “bear a cross,” to share in Christ’s “baptism of suffering,” to take on a “yoke” as we journey with Him. Emotional and spiritual health depends on the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus makes it clear that independence is at best an illusion, for “without Me you can do nothing!”

Discipleship for an artist, as for any believer, implies the necessity of spiritual commitment, apprenticeship, and humility. It involves the cultivation of wisdom for discerning truth and making wise choices—between addictive and true pleasures, between a life of caring and one of abuse, between idolatry in any form and Christ-centeredness. The options set out here are really choices for purity, humility, and obedience rather than idolatry, pride, impurity, and independence. Isaiah’s lips had to be cleansed before he could bear God’s word to the “people of unclean lips.” If the creativity of the believer is to be faithful and God-glorifying, attention to these moral and spiritual matters is essential. When we choose to enter the world of the arts, we must exercise great care lest we become participants in the practice of distorting God’s good gifts.

3. To be commissioned for service

The examples from biblical history of great artistic endeavor are all closely linked with the specific calling of the Spirit in someone’s life. In fact, the first recorded example of indwelling with a commissioning of God’s work was the great designer and craftsman Bezalel. Similarly, the governor Zerubbabel and his partner the high priest were publicly honoured and vindicated as partners with God’s Spirit through the prophet Zechariah as they struggled to rebuild the post-exilic temple for Ezra. David the artist, warrior, king, and architect clearly evidenced the presence of God’s Spirit in his life, in poetry, music, dance, planning, and architecture. And it is significant that God’s act of creation began when “the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.”

Faithfulness in the Artistic Calling

Artists should not take their gifting lightly. For some “a calling” may include a strong sense of God’s leading, while for others it consists in a deep commitment to offer their talents for the glory of God. Artists, like other believers, should prayerfully and soberly seek God’s direction with thankful hearts. Most biblical characters who were called by God were ordinary men and women who were usually terrified. Most responded out of a deep sense of their own inadequacy. These men and women were made aware of the power of God—the real reason for their success. The best way to thank God for our gifts is to develop and express them for His glory.

Artists need to take responsibility for the attitudes of the heart, emotions, behaviours, and relationships that shape their artistic perceptions, imagination, and use of language. Considering how common it is to hear of the woundedness of

artists, discipleship needs to incorporate a clear understanding of the need for healing within this group of gifted believers. The issue of how suffering can either build character and creative responses or break people down into sinful or emotionally self-destructive life patterns is a familiar one among artists.

Finally, there is a need to risk being part of a community where all can learn, sitting under spiritual leadership. Artists need to put themselves in a position where their artistic concepts, language, and technique will be influenced by a biblical worldview, practical wisdom, and the spiritual intercession of our brothers and sisters in faith.

Obstacles

The need and desire for discipleship and accountability in the life of the artist can be seriously compromised by:

- Emotional injury that can lie buried or be an open wound, causing the artist to be bitter and distrustful, to sow seeds of discord, or to seek false sources of comfort.
- Love and passion for art that supercedes commitment to Christ. Whether defined as loving art too much or loving God too little, this is an issue the artist may have to face.
- Character and sin issues that negatively affect the life, discipline, and Christian walk of the artist, creating spiritual and moral vulnerability to the distortions of the art world.
- Distrust of spiritual community and discomfort with authority that cuts artists off from help and prevents them from maturing as servant leaders for Christ.

Strategies

We recommend that arts leaders work with existing church, parachurch, and mission leaders to consider:

1. An artist's covenant (a written statement) with an artistic counterpart (performance, exhibition, reading, etc.) in the context of a local body of believers—a community ritual, formalized in a public way.
2. An artist's study guide on discipleship, written by and for artists, leading them through the process of evaluating and integrating art and faith, while deepening their commitment to Christ.
3. An initiative, led by local, national, and international arts groups, in which Christians in the arts are identified, contacted, prayed for, connected together, and linked to a local church community if they do not already attend.
4. Local, regional, or national conferences with an emphasis on spirituality and character development that also provide individual counsel and prayer for artists.
5. An arts council that is made up of practicing artists, pastors or spiritual leaders, business people, and other gifted members of the Christian community for advice, prayer, support, accountability, and project development.

A BIBLICAL CASE STUDY

Character Development in the Pilgrimage of David as an Artist

David was a man of deep passions who sought after God's own heart. At the same time he was gifted by God in music and the creative arts. He pursued and developed his talent as a young boy and was anointed by God through Samuel to be a strong leader. However, before David could realize the fullness of his anointing, God had to refine and build his character through great spiritual battles (1 Sam. 16).

David was placed somewhat prematurely into leadership by King Saul, which fostered a personal perception of his being valued for his abilities. Saul was unaware of David's true gifts and abilities and tried unsuccessfully to fit him into his own armour. David initially stood in who he knew he was, using his own innate creative giftings rather than the prescribed methodology (1 Sam. 17:34-37). Unfortunately, he later gave over those honourable passions and desires and used them manipulatively, leading to death and blood on his own hands (2 Sam. 11-12).

Throughout David's life, his desire was to please God. However, at times he made conscious decisions not to be accountable to others and allowed his passions and emotions to go unchecked. David further manipulated circumstances to protect a reputation that was placed upon him. After being confronted about his sin, he repented and turned back to God in brokenness for restoration and revival.

Throughout his journey, David composed psalms that reflect his true creative heart. He wanted to be transparent and real. These psalms are a mirror that can help artists to understand the need to be truthful in our creative expression.

ACT II, SCENE II

Artistic Development of the Artist

Eyes To See

If the church and its artists are to speak truthfully to a kingdom view, then we must live with our eyes open. As we contemplate God's creative and sustaining work, we see the rational, the sensual, and the relational attributes (see chart on page 7) mirrored in the way the artist sees.

Rational, Sensual, and Relational Forms

In the vast expanse of the universe, we can only begin to grasp the span of God's sustaining power. An incomprehensibly rational mind is administering and keeping all levels of creation operating in an orderly manner. The diverse beauty of the plant and animal kingdoms also presents us with innumerable examples of God's love of sensual, visual pleasure for its own sake. The most sophisticated creation of all is the interdependent world of people and relational activity. It is the ability to bring together unique but related aspects, creating a unity rather than uniformity, that so reflects and honours the Creator.

How Artists See

Artists see what is real and imagine what is possible. Creative artistic expression and imagination therefore depend on our perception of what is real, true, and of value. Our way of seeing things will include the world of ideas (the rational), the world of things (the sensual), and the world of persons (the relational). The artist sees reality—the beauty and the ugliness, the comfortable and the pained, the refined and the corrupted. Some art forms present ideology, theology, and simple observation in rational ways. Other forms explore emotion, passion, colour, and texture for their own sake. Still others explore relationship. In these ways the arts fully engage our human capabilities and invite us to look afresh in the hope that we might come to see more clearly.

A major preoccupation for some artists is a search for beauty and an idealization of form, colour, light, texture, space, race, or gender. A smaller number of artists seem to be less interested in searching for perfection or beauty than in responding to what is flawed and in need of protest. In general we could say the former is art for contemplation and the latter is art concerned with action. Calvin Seerveld has observed that "... the Lord wants double edged artistry, praising God's name and setting things straight."³

How Artists Design

Artists not only see the world in unique ways, they also use their design sense in any art form to interpret and arrange their responses to the world. Devices such as composition, story line, choreography, screenplay, and many subsets of those skills shape the finished product for the audience, so that our experience of it is largely controlled by the artist. The artist is able to have enormous influence over the audience's perception of the truth presented. Here is an opportunity for the work of the artist to carry an understanding of things born out of a biblical worldview.

The Use of Metaphor

Artistic expression can be so orderly and sterile that it fails to engage or move us in material, emotional, or spiritual terms. It can be so sensually driven in pursuit of beauty and accessibility that it can lead people into idolatry. It can be so focused on love and relational theology that it lacks a broader awareness of sin or a theological/historical overview.

The metaphors used by Jesus, on the other hand, usually have immediate cultural context (mirroring), historical connection (visioning), and relational power (transformation). For example, the picture of bread and the leavening of the dough is immediately connected with an aromatic staple of the Jewish diet and the domestic process of making bread rise. It is connected backwards to the traditional meanings of manna and the Passover ceremony and their associations with atonement. It is further retooled by Jesus to suggest a present and future association with Himself—the Bread that sustains, that is broken sacrificially—reactivating memory and bonding through the communal ritual of the Lord's Supper.

The beauty of many biblical metaphors is that they are able to resonate with daily life, connect a people with their history, and stimulate their imagination to see beyond their simple time-bound circumstances. They offer a glimpse into the future, into the spiritual realm, and into arenas of life not previously considered. Story, metaphor, and ritual go around our intellectual defenses and reach to our inner world of feeling and the deep sensibilities that accompany our relationships.

Expression, Communication, and Propaganda

The discussion of art as spontaneous expression has, unfortunately, been set in opposition to art that is thoughtful, premeditated communication, as if something about the latter is less faithful or authentically artistic. It goes back to the question of whether art should be didactic or simply “art for art’s sake.” It should be recognized that art communicates at many levels and in a variety of contexts, from highway signs to gallery contemplation and countless ways in between. The arts can inform, illustrate, edify, motivate, entertain, educate, or decorate. They can reinforce or challenge community norms and values or illuminate the human condition. We therefore affirm creative diversity and strongly support a return to art that intersects meaningfully with daily life.

However, art that relates meaningfully to life must include art in relation to the faith of the artist. The issue that arises here is the possibility of art being propaganda. When we think of propaganda we consider how its style can at times be insistent and rigid, or it may be manipulative and coercive, or deceptive and misleading. When art is used in these ways it is not just expressing a point of view, it is seeking to force others to accept that point of view. In this context we see propaganda in negative terms, but essentially to propagate is to “make public.” Some would dismiss art that has religious content or a Christian worldview as propagandistic, but that is not sufficient reason in itself to be negative about such a work. Biblical stories and spiritual themes have provided the inspiration for many great works of art.

Dualism and Syncretism

What we refer to here as dualism is the view that separates the sacred/spiritual from the profane/material. It is a false dichotomy that results in contempt for the physicality of our working worlds, our homes, our geographies, and our interior emotional lives. It dematerializes the kingdom of God and undermines the divine respect for the cultures we live in. On the other hand, syncretism tries to bring into harmony things that often cannot be reconciled. It is the tendency to unite rather than separate. It moves us to identify with everything and everyone around us, so that we blend together and minimize our differences.

These issues bear on the arts. Dualism diminishes the value of our embodied life and the materiality of so much of art, while syncretism advocates a blended spirituality that undermines the biblical norm of Christ-centeredness. Both of these tendencies show up in our cultures and in our faith communities. We need to be vigilant in resisting their influence, whether on our lives or on our art.

Artistic Mastery

Artistic mastery, in any culture, is confirmed by that culture’s artistic values and is always the result of extensive study and apprenticeship, often over many years. Mastery is more than skill, knowledge, and understanding. It involves the wisdom to apply those qualities in the creative process of what is being formed. In the hands of a master craftsman, artistic expression can be a powerful vehicle for the perception and reframing of “truth telling” that allows the arts to act as:

- Gateways to God’s creational, incarnational, and redemptive truths
- Mirrors to the collective/historical memory of cultural and spiritual communities
- Thorns for provoking repentance or change in spiritual and cultural communities.

Artistic expression is meaningful work in the kingdom of God in any culture and is worthy of study, apprenticeship, and the cultivation of mastery. There are no short cuts to excellence. However, when excellence is pursued for its own sake, it can lead to pride and a driven and destructive perfectionism. Mastery that has a divine reference point will always reflect and honour the Master Artist—the One who is so supremely excellent.

Obstacles

The potential for artistry in the hands of Christians can be seriously harmed by:

- Lack of training in the arts and of education in art and cultural history
- Too many compliments, allowing acceptance of mediocrity with indiscriminate affirmation
- Too many rejections, leading to discouragement
- Laziness and a weak work ethic
- Spiritual attack in various forms
- Censorship in certain forms
- Lack of appropriate facilities for training in the arts
- Lack of funding

Strategies

The church should consider how it might take up the role of patron to the arts by:

1. Developing a theology of creativity and beauty
2. Commissioning and funding arts projects within the church and cultural community
3. Identifying and mentoring creative people within the church
4. Presenting and installing quality works of art in church sanctuaries
5. Devising short-term “artist in residence” projects
6. Creating a study guide (and workshops) to develop creative-process skills in the church
7. Building or adapting church and community facilities for arts education and expression
8. Offering arts courses in partnership with local Christian artists and/or schools of art
9. Developing an articulate artistic “voice” through critical insight into its own creativity

A BIBLICAL CASE STUDY

Joseph the Visual Thinker

In the Joseph story (Gen. 37-50) we can study the idea of communal skill development. Joseph has the God-given insight to interpret dreams, the gift of understanding visual code and metaphor, and an ability to communicate the meaning of images to others. In his family culture these gifts are not recognized and he is ridiculed. Eventually his brothers sell him into slavery in order to remove this troublemaker from the family.

As a slave in Egypt and in isolation from his own culture, Joseph continues with his strong faith in the God of Abraham and Isaac. He becomes a cultural learner and through his obvious gifting in administration is constantly given leadership roles. In prison his gifting in visual interpretation comes into play again as he correctly explains the dreams of two of Pharaoh’s servants. Eventually he is called before Pharaoh to interpret two disturbing dreams that none of the court diviners can understand. With God’s help he correctly foresees seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine, but he does not stop with merely giving the interpretation of the dreams. He uses his gift of administration to outline a solution to the problem. Pharaoh recognizes his skills and gives him the authority to carry out his plan. Finally, he is reunited with his family as they come to Egypt to seek help during the famine.

In the end, Joseph recognizes that God used him in a special way. As a visual thinker empowered by God, he was able to save two entire cultures from extinction through creative thinking, creative problem-solving, and successful communication to authority.

ACT II, SCENE III

Relational Development of the Artist

The artist’s best chance for fulfillment in discipleship to Christ lies in faithful participation within an adopted spiritual community. For some, their art will be practiced and well received in that community, while others may practice their art in other settings such as the local art community of their city or culture. Scripture describes and implies that artists and their art may play an important role in various aspects of the life of the believing community—these may include celebrating, worshiping, teaching, instructing, caring, proclaiming, praying, or participating in the general course of community life.

Regrettably, in every corner of the globe we have discovered that the relationship between the artist and the church looks more like a divorce than a marriage. Though artists might hope to lay claim to personal and spiritual support in the church, there is often a painfully tragic distrust in both directions.

Discomfort with the Arts

The church often expresses an uncertainty about artists and their work. It might be a concern about the emotional and material immersion of artists in the world, an incomprehensible artistic technique, perhaps the refusal to be accountable, or concern about past connection to false religions and the occult. In parts of India, for example, many Christian communities will not accept the recovery of indigenous art forms, fearing them to be inseparable from Hinduism or Buddhism. In South and Central America, Christians who have left Catholicism have great difficulty accepting the world of “images,” fearing the power of idolatry. It is as if we are witnessing the “meat offered to idols” issue played out again today (1 Cor. 8, Rom. 14).

Artists can fear structured authority, abuse of their gifts, or simply live with a certain indifference toward the church

as an institution they perceive to be deeply entrenched and unmovable. Many artists simply cannot embrace the struggle for acceptance they sense lies ahead of them, and so just stay away. While at times the church may do too little, it may be that at times the artist can expect too much. What is needed is constructive dialogue that will restore trust and explore how art can help to enrich the life of the faith community and serve to cultivate a new openness to artistic expression.

Awakening

However, this is not the whole story, as currently we are witnessing a worldwide awakening of artists in the Body of Christ. As recounted by members of our group, God's Spirit has ignited fires of hunger, passion, and artistic brilliance in isolated signal posts in every part of the world: in India, Australia, Colombia, North and South Africa; on Mohawk and Sioux aboriginal tribal councils of the United States and Canada; in the theatres and sound stages of London's West End; in the emergence of Japanese "Gospel" choirs; in the opera houses and dance theatres of Latvia; in New York's Metropolitan Opera and in Times Square; in the congregations of the Philippines; in the film studios of Hollywood; and in the street gutters of Toronto. It is happening in universities, prisons, churches, nightclubs, galleries, and pubs.

God is not waiting for the church as an institution to reclaim its historic heritage or to affirm the artistic gift. He is raising up highly gifted people of vision all over the world who are both artists and Christians, to honour the God who speaks in pictures, who invented all music, who wrote the great story full of pictures of the past and images for the future, who smiled as David danced, and who is designing a new world to come. The same Spirit who filled Bezalel, Zerubbabel, David, Joseph, and Daniel with wisdom and indefatigable, tenacious, workmanlike faith, is still at work to herald His glory, to witness to His coming, and to reaffirm life made by Him in the whole creation.

The Arts and Worship

In recent times we have also seen much evidence of renewal in worship. It will be obvious to all who have been touched by that renewal that the arts are playing a significant role. We have commonly understood that our faith journey is shaped by what we understand with our intellects, but that is only part of the story. The renewal of worship in our day is at its heart a case of the awakening of aesthetic sensibilities that have lain dormant in so many congregations for too long.

If we accept that worship has a significant aesthetic character, it will be clear that the arts fit well into our worship contexts. The arts can contribute to the renewal of worship as worship can contribute to a renewal of the arts. The arts are able to open windows for us to the transcendent. When placed in the context of biblically rooted worship, the arts are powerful in their ability to open our eyes to see more clearly.

When a community gathers for worship, one of the purposes of that gathering is to remind them of their story. We should seek to involve all of the senses in this process. This is of particular importance in the context of an experiential and visually-oriented postmodern generation. Memory is also essential as we recall the biblical narrative and the grace of God in our lives. To engage the memory is a work of the imagination. Art can capture things for us where words alone fail. Art can both remind us of what we have forgotten and help us to see what we have never understood. It is time for the church to employ all of the arts in worship so that they might do their work and give glimpses of truth, beauty, and glory. When we have rehearsed our story, we are renewed and empowered to live out that story in conformity with the beauty of the image of Christ.

Singers, musicians, dancers, actors, visual artists, and television production crews make up the worship and creative arts team at Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia. The creative design team makes artworks for display on stage during sermons, at conferences, or in the church offices and foyers. A number of dance teams work individually on different projects or can unite together for church services, special events, conferences, festivals, community events, and album recordings for DVD and television production when required. The drama team is likewise involved in television projects, church services, and the youth or children's church and runs weekly theatre-related in-house courses. Apart from providing the music for the regular services and events, Hillsong musicians, singers, and songwriters serve an increasing number of people throughout the world with new praise and worship songs via their recordings.

Art that Serves

We believe that the biblical teaching on gifts in the Body can be also said to apply to artistic gifts. We offer a few suggestions here that demonstrate how the arts can be a significant resource for the church and how the church can support the artist and the arts.

1. *Mainstreaming*

All believers are valued members of the body of Christ. There is no place for one part of the body to say to another “we have no need of you.” The term “mainstreaming” refers to efforts to integrate the giftings of all members of the body—including artists—into the mainstream of church life and mission. In several locations around the globe, a new wave of creative arts pastors/facilitators has taken huge steps forward in addressing the challenge of integrating traditional gifts with artistic ones. We find this combination of visionary, facilitator, and bridge-builder to be encouraging and farsighted. The observations below are from a leader/artist already working in such a role:

The first priority for creative arts pastors is to serve through their local church with the creative gifts they have. They should manage the creative resources placed in their care so that the arts, and individual artists, can be released to achieve their maximum impact and excellence. Pastoral care and leadership of the creative artists in the church is also their responsibility, whether the artists serve within the church or out in the marketplace. The creative arts pastor, with an understanding of the vision and mandate of their local church, can inspire the artists of that church to invest their gifts into its vision and ministry, while leading them in the way that will most effectively make this vision and mandate a reality. These arts pastors/facilitators are also well positioned to take the creative ideas presented to them and respectfully communicate these to their leadership, to demonstrate how the arts can work in tandem with other areas of the church to achieve all that God is calling them to.

2. *Assisting in biblical interpretation*

One of the places where the artist may be of help is in discussions about biblical interpretation. Scripture is full of poetry, metaphor, story, and examples of ritual and festival. Artists are used to working in an environment where they seek to get at the truth of things indirectly and not just directly. There are many literary conventions in scripture that use this more indirect approach, so artists would be valuable discussion partners in these matters. For example, they understand how metaphor is always grounded in the physical and artful properties of the real, tangible world around us, and yet infer layers of reality that include the transcendent. Eyes and ears for only the rational or the “spiritual” have missed much along the way.

3. *Cross-cultural communication*

The arts can be of immense value for cross-cultural communication. It is surprising just how reluctant most mission organizations have been to take up the arts and put them to work in the task of mission. The value of the arts is evident not only in cases of cross-cultural mission but also in urban mission. The good work that has been done in contextualizing the gospel in traditional and indigenous communities must be transferred and applied in the urban setting. The artist can be an invaluable resource here.

4. *Leadership*

Many gifted artists also possess leadership ability. Our hope is that artists will find their way into positions of leadership within the church and within the culture. In this way they can have more significant opportunities to serve with their gifts and provide direction on matters related to the arts and faith.

5. *Fellowship*

Artists, like other professionals, are part of a special interest group with its own industry needs, benefits, and dysfunctional systems of behaviour and organization. The church can be a place where artists meet together on a regular basis for discussion, study, encouragement, prayer support, and a biblical perspective on specific issues related to the integration of their work and their faith. At present, organizations established to promote the arts and the Christian discipleship of the artist carry most of that responsibility.

Obstacles

The relationship of artists to the church and the integration of their gifts into the life and mission of the church are hindered by the following issues:

- Marginalization and wounding of artists by the church
- Artists who feel the church has abused their gifts
- Artists who have abandoned the church
- Artists who prefer isolation to community
- Lack of understanding of how artists can contribute to the life and mission of the church
- Few artists, or those who understand art, in spiritual leadership in the church

- Weak character and selfishness in the artist
- Artists who lack humility and a servant heart
- Lack of discipleship for professionals in the church
- Few “art friendly” church environments that nurture the arts and the artist
- Cultural circumstances unique to each nation that interfere with reconciliation
- Fear the church will limit or censor artistic expression
- Fear the church doesn’t understand or value the arts

Strategies

Reintegration of artists into the life and mission of the church can be helped through:

1. A well-developed reconciliation process for reconnecting arts, church, and mission leaders that facilitates mutual openness, understanding, and healing.
2. A biblically-based curriculum for artists on spiritual walk, leadership training, teamwork, administrative process, and the role of the artist in church and community.
3. An organized, cohesive, church-supported engagement of community and professional artists in ways that are conducive to the building of genuine relationship and dialogue.
4. Cultivation of financially viable commissions that respect the need of the artist to make a living and that pay for the amount of materials and time required for excellence in any art form.
5. Cultivation of far greater access to foundation resources (private and institutional) to support art projects, artist development initiatives, and especially arts leadership training in each country. Investment in leaders is perhaps the wisest investment of all.
6. Formation of a creative arts pastor/facilitator leadership training program in which spiritually mature artists are employed to nurture the artists in their church, integrate the arts into the life of the congregation, identify and train upcoming arts leaders, and make fellow leaders more aware of the place and role of the arts in the life of God’s people.
7. Development of a national and international network of arts leadership to collaborate on strategy, funding sources, prayer, conferences, communication, etc.
8. Funding and support for training in arts management, because arts programs and initiatives need people with business and arts understanding to make them happen.
9. Development of virtual interactive forums on topics related to the arts and faith and the design of web galleries where artworks can be shared, discussed, and evaluated.

A BIBLICAL CASE STUDY

The Work and Walk of Bezalel the Artist

Perhaps the greatest biblical example of the installation of an artist’s work in the service of God, and certainly the first, is the commissioning of Bezalel by the Lord and His servant Moses to complete all the artistry of the Jewish tabernacle. It speaks to important aspects of the artist as a disciple and illustrates a godly leadership model.

In an extraordinary work of movable architecture, Bezalel was the first person in scripture to be publicly associated with the empowering of the Holy Spirit. He was the first man to be charged with encoding the revelation of God and a theocratic worldview into visual form. His art director was Jehovah himself. Now there’s a sobering thought!

Bezalel, whose name means “in the shadow of God” (under His protection), was the craftsman/artist who worked principally in metal, wood, and stone (Ex. 31:1-11), while Oholiab, who was associated with him and subordinate to him, had charge of the textile works (Ex. 36:1,2, 38:22). Bezalel didn’t apply for the job; he was called and appointed in a very special way.

a) *The artist was called*

The Lord called Bezalel by name for a specific creative task, demonstrating that artists can be called by God and that the pursuit of art can therefore be a spiritual calling (Ex. 31:2).

b) *The artist was filled with the Spirit*

Bezalel’s art in the service and praise of God required the empowerment and guidance of the Holy Spirit (Ex. 31:3). For the glory of the Lord to be revealed in the tabernacle (Ex. 40: 34-35) through the indwelling of the Spirit required a Spirit-filled artist. The Old Testament pattern of the Spirit being given only on specific occasions to specific individuals in order to accomplish specific tasks shows the importance of the quality of Bezalel’s work to God.

c) ***The artist had godly character***

Bezalel was filled with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (Ex. 31:3), all of which are aspects of a person's character—the fruit of a process requiring time and disciplined learning. Bezalel was a learner, an apprentice, nurturing his art through the acquiring of godly wisdom, godly understanding, and godly knowledge. He desired to have his own life crafted into something beautiful for the praise of the Lord.

d) ***The artist was skilled in craft and collaboration***

Bezalel had the ability to take raw material and craft it into something beautiful (Ex. 31:3). But he went further than his mere creative abilities; he also had the skill of collaboration, recognizing his need to be complemented by other skilled persons. By defining his specific role and the role of others in the artistic process, he obtained the highest level of workmanship.

e) ***The artist taught***

Bezalel wasn't blessed with knowledge, wisdom, and skill to keep it to himself. The Lord put in his heart the desire and ability to teach others (Ex. 35:34). The natural effect in the discipleship process of Bezalel was to reproduce his knowledge in other gifted people, thus multiplying what the Lord had given him. In teaching others, Bezalel reached mastery as an artist and craftsman.

f) ***The artist submitted to godly leadership***

Bezalel put the work of his hands into the service of the Lord and his appointed leader, Moses. In holding himself accountable by bringing the finished work to Moses so it could be inspected for obedience to God's word (Ex. 39:33), he laid the foundation for his own blessing (Ex. 39:43). In submitting to godly leadership, Bezalel received affirmation of his calling, spiritual gifts, artistic gifts, and the resources he needed through manpower and funding to complete the work.

ACT III: TRANSFORMATION

The Arts, Mission, and the Marketplace

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." (Matthew 13:33)

Storyteller, performance artist, and poet, Jesus is relentless in seeking to draw us to the truth about the world. He has a unique way of bringing life through word and action. He engages heart and mind and consistently calls upon our ability to imagine. In this parable Jesus is engaging His listeners by speaking of a common daily practice—a woman working with her hands to mix yeast into flour in order to make bread.

This parable alone demonstrates that the truth of Christ must be worked all through culture and all through the world. God's act of breaking into history in Jesus is brilliantly creative. As yeast is vital for bread, so the kingdom is vital for human life to flourish and be all it is meant to be. Our various cultures have drifted far from what they were intended to be and are in need of the healing and redeeming presence of Christ. One of the ways that the yeast of kingdom presence can be at work in the world is through the arts. Art that is born out of an understanding of the biblical narrative can speak eloquently to a world that has forgotten the story that offers the hope of a new reality. The arts engage our imaginations. They move rather than instruct. They cause us to think rather than tell us what to think. So, like yeast, they are able to generate newness that will serve to nurture us in heart and mind.

We now turn our attention to how the artist can intentionally connect with the kingdom purposes of God as the "yeast" in cultural and spiritual transformation. When we talk here about the marketplace, we are referring to the everyday world of work and life outside of the church—in our local communities and the culture at large. Central here is the biblical injunction to be culture formers, and so we return again to the cultural mandate.

ACT III, SCENE I

Culture and the Cultural Mandate

Lovingly God brought all things into being in moments of hovering, holy imagination. Man and woman were formed as those who would bear the image and the imagination of their Creator. Conscious of our relationship with God, bonded in mutual love, and maintaining respect for the natural order, we have been invited to cultivate the earth—and cultivate our own living practices accordingly. We are stewards of creation and of all the practices involved in caring for that creation and making it grow. The end result of cultivation is the development of culture. We are by our very nature created to be cultural beings that are actively involved in the constant re-creation of our world.

For the purpose of our paper, we will define culture as "the sum total of human activity that is superimposed on God's creation." Culture includes our geographical location, race, gender, sexuality, language, ideas, beliefs, values, customs, rituals, ceremonies, and social behaviour. How we treat each other and what we expect from one another is informed by the culture we create together. Culture is also expressed in the way we work, play, dress, and relate to one another, and through various art forms such as story-telling, dance, music, drama, visual art, and literature.

A Cry for Healing and Renewal

Unfortunately, our world is so much about the exchange of goods and services that what we understand about one another's cultural integrity has often been compromised or reduced to mere economics. We are increasingly saturated with goods and the drive to possess more, while poverty looms large and the resulting illness and devastation has meant the loss of countless lives. Children all over the world are living in garbage dumps, sewage systems, subway tunnels, and under highway overpasses. The whole world and all its members are groaning and travailing as we search for meaning and purpose.

Personal and social conflict often follows between those who wish to preserve their traditional practices and those who adopt contemporary cultural trends. In our urban centres we are bombarded with images and sounds and eventually become overloaded in a way that desensitizes us to one another and to the values that can best contribute to human community. The outcome is often a spirit of indifference and a sense of powerlessness. It is a social catastrophe. With passion deadened, dreams are cast aside or simply disappear, and imagination fails to do its good work. A sense of hopelessness makes change difficult to imagine. The loss of imagination is a crisis that has reached global proportions. Our current cultural malaise cries out for healing and renewal.

Engagement or Withdrawal

In the face of such great need we cannot justify remaining aloof from those whose beliefs differ from our own. It is no small matter to be invited to participate in the redemptive work of care and compassion. Withdrawal is contrary not only to the cultural mandate, but also to the gospel invitation to be salt and light in the world. If we view cultural engagement as off-limits for the Christian, we support the sub-biblical idea that God is interested only in the church and is not at work in our world. The call for the church to take up engagement with the culture in which it is located is a call to be the embodied, active healing and redemptive presence of Christ in the world. Withdrawal has also led to our neglect of the arts. In so doing, we have muted a voice that can speak to issues of oppression and dehumanization as a prophetic critique and a resource for healing.

The Church and Culture

The church is called to live out a story that can make a difference. It is a story that can ignite the imagination and bring the joy of hope and promise out of the dust of social and personal despair. Once again the arts are an efficient helper to assist in reshaping the imagination and opening a window onto the grand vista of God's redemptive purposes in Christ.

However, the presence of the church in the world is often defined solely by its effort to do evangelism. This has sometimes resulted in a lack of genuine involvement in individual, social, communal, and global issues. We must reclaim the cultural mandate as an inherent part of our responsibility as those who seek to live out of the biblical story. Our cultural work will include the cultivation of the arts, which in turn will be indispensable in bridging our differences and offering us a language that penetrates deeply into the heart and soul.

The twentieth-century theologian Karl Barth spoke of the task of culture as "the realization of our humanity." Surely we can say that the gospel and the incarnation in particular have this same purpose. It is evident that our culture and the Christian faith will propose quite different answers to the question of what it is to be human. The culture may say that wealth and pleasure are central, or education and power. Christianity sets forth its answer in the person of Christ who is the model of humanity.

To be fully human requires that we be in relationship with God. It should be clear to all how important it is for the faith community to have its voice present in the culture of which it is a part. The gospel comes as an alternative to the agenda of the society; it offers a different understanding of what it means to be human. Art is able to express this in subtle and meaningful ways and to do so in a "language" those outside the church will understand. In this way the art of the Christian can be what one author has called "redemptive art":

By 'redemptive artistry' I mean something much closer to what the dove did for Noah in the ark. Noah was wondering whether the punishing flood had receded and the earth was now habitable again. The dove came back bearing fresh olive leaves (Gen. 8:11), a token that the faithful Lord was giving new life on earth after the awful judgment on world sin. Maybe we could consider artistry by the redeemed for their neighbour as simply giving a metaphoric promise of life and hope at the gracious Rule of Jesus Christ on earth... Redemptive artistry will be bearing fresh olive leaves.⁴

ACT III, SCENE II

The Arts, Evangelism, and Contextualization in Mission

The Great Commission

Before Christ ascended into heaven, He commanded His disciples, "go therefore and make disciples of all nations (ethnos), baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..." (Matt. 28:19-20). The Great Commission, as it is known, has been at the core of Christian mission since its inception. By integrating the use of story (teaching), symbol and ritual (baptism), and cross-cultural communication (all nations), it draws our attention to the strategic role that the visual and the symbolic must play in the evangelism and discipleship process.

Understanding the nature and purpose of the arts is vital for evangelism and missions because of the strategic role they play in every culture. Every people group reinforces and passes on its story through the arts. Generation after generation, people find themselves through the artistic legacy of story. Art has its own unique way of "speaking" and "meaning." It does not function well when we try to make it into something it is not. To put it directly, art is not a good

preacher—it is by nature allusive, indirect. The arts should therefore not attempt to evangelize per se, but they can “bear witness” to truth. For example stories, contemporary parables, and allegories are very creative, art-friendly, and meaningful ways to engage the imagination, highlight the human condition, and allow the Holy Spirit to “point” people toward transcendent realities.

Toymaker & Son is an allegory of the gospel set within a world of toys (the Toymaker sends his son as a toy into Toyland to fix the broken toys and restore them to how he had originally created them). Using a nonverbal fusion of drama, dance, mime, colourful costumes, and original music, this theatrical production has been able to cross national and cultural barriers around the globe for over twenty-five years.

Multiple millions of people in over sixty nations and on every continent have seen Toymaker & Son. It has been part of the official cultural programs at World Cup Soccer, Olympic, and Commonwealth Game events. From street performances in inner-city ghettos to world-class theatres and national television broadcasts around the world, this allegory has struck a chord with young and old. The Holy Spirit has used it to touch lives and point many people to Christ.

When considering mission and culture, it is important to note that change can happen in two ways. The gospel can change a culture, and the culture can change the gospel. No culture remains entirely static. To be an agent of cultural change need not be the same as cultural domination. What is interesting about Christianity in this regard is that as a faith, it is not tied to any culture. It has gone beyond both the religion and the language of its founder, affirming that the eternal truths of God may be conveyed in everyday speech no matter what the cultural context. When it comes to culture changing the gospel, we encounter again the problem of syncretism where the essence of the gospel is changed by a culture and so takes on different meaning. The important question to discern is whether the gospel of Christ has been compromised in its adaptation to culture.

Heart Language

Indigenous arts are expressive, intrinsic communication forms that are integrated within and across the structures of society where they define and sustain cultural norms and values. We must come to see that becoming acquainted with the artistic expressions of diverse cultures is as important as attending language school in preparation for mission work. The arts provide a window to the language of the heart. Such a language is able to bypass obstacles that keep us from relating to one another. It takes time to do the research that will unravel the meanings of indigenous art, and weave well the threads and patterns of indigenous Christianity, so that the gospel can be poured into indigenous forms.

There are some Christ-followers in various parts of India who have been judiciously taking cultural forms from the Indian religious context and explicitly “pouring” new meaning (biblical truth) into those symbolic elements. The purpose is to gain a more widespread hearing among Hindus and to achieve greater understanding of the gospel message. This is done in the context of the Hindu satsang form (from the Hindi “sang,” meaning fellowship, and “sat,” meaning truth—a fellowship cantered on the truth). During the satsang, the acharya (teacher) leads the group that is gathered.

The home of a professional Hindu artist (also a seeker), the roof of another Hindu family’s house, and the home of an expat university professor were the settings for three such satsangs that took place in Delhi. The following are some of the common elements of these gatherings: the singing of bhajans (devotional songs involving leading and mimicking as well as unison singing); the giving of a pravachan (message) which often focuses on the words in the bhajans; prayer for specific needs; the presence/explanation of symbolic objects and personal counselling for those who request it. The Christian acharya will sometimes end this time of worship by breaking a coconut, explaining how it symbolizes the “pouring out” of Christ’s blood and the “breaking” of his body for the forgiveness of our sins.

Contextualization

Missionaries need to champion the value of arts done by the local people in their own style, rhythm, and language, allowing them to express their praise to God. Art and music shaped by western society is present everywhere in the world. Instead of allowing this to erode interest and respect for the traditional indigenous culture, a strong church will accept the healthy challenge to worship freely with both western and indigenous music styles. Though the approach is

changing, there are still groups of missionaries insisting on western art forms for indigenous churches. Based on the teaching they have received, many non-western churches have adopted this practice. It is a challenging task for local leadership to reclaim their traditional cultural practices. A college dance professor in Ghana observes:

In Africa the performing arts are not just for the stage. They are part of the life of the people—a language that is seen in everyday activity. It is therefore sad that Christianity has not explored using much of the arts as they already exist in Africa. Songs that came with the faith are foreign. Our many traditional musical instruments were all rejected. So even though our people embraced the Christian faith, it is still seen today as a European religion. This is why it is necessary to initiate moves that will lead to the Christians in Africa incorporating their dances, drumming, and singing into the expression of their faith for upcoming generations to see Christianity as their own.

Every people group has its own unique cultural traditions, artistic expressions, and festivals that are woven into their daily life. The redemptive process must involve indigenous Christian leaders of the culture in the restoration and sanctification of these symbols, ceremonies, and art forms where possible—redirecting them towards Christ. The fear of syncretism, justified as it is, should not immobilize the redemptive process from moving forward, depriving people of the opportunity to worship and celebrate in their own heart language. Only then will they see the gospel as their own, as this Zambian artist indicates:

Many of the illustrated Sunday School materials, children's Bibles, and images that we have grown up with are of a foreign nature. In 2003 a group of five artists in our congregation began a banner-making group. The initial projects were planned around the liturgical calendar: Christmas and Easter. We designed the banners of the wise men, Jesus, and the multitudes at the crucifixion scene with chocolate complexion. The response when each was unveiled was one of identifying with and seeing ourselves in Christ's story. There is a resurgence of traditional song and dance in Zambia both in the church and in society as a whole. Church choirs in city churches that have traditionally used non-indigenous instruments have now begun to use those that are part of our own culture. Many did not sing in the Zambian language, now they do. Some churches have harnessed this resurgence to incorporate many traditional forms of music in the church.

An exciting development is happening in the Philippines. The two waves of evangelization in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries not only Christianized but also westernized more than 90% of the people. In fact, successful Christianization was almost equated with the destruction of indigenous heritage as zealous missionaries demonized native arts, especially music and dance. However, in the last decade, an artistic group known as Kaloob has embarked on a mission to “decolonize” Christianity in the areas of theology, liturgy, music, dance, and other formal expressions. They propagate the use of indigenous music and musical instruments, dances, rituals, and costume tradition in worship and celebration.

Our method includes painstaking research on existing indigenous folk dance and musical traditions. Researched materials are analyzed and filtered through scripture to decide which art forms, or parts of such art forms, may or may not be used in Christian worship and practice. Forms or symbols whose meanings do not offend biblical principles are considered “redeemable.” These art forms are then formally offered to the Lord by way of a performance we call a “prayformance.” Instruction and propagation follows, in which we teach these renewed music and dance forms that are then interpreted by leaders for use in local church worship and other events.

In the past ten years, more than 100 distinct dances and rituals and their accompanying music have been “redeemed” and are now used by believers. Kaloob has also steadily risen to become one of the country's top five folk dance companies, and in the last few years we have been featured by the Cultural Centre of the Philippines in its annual Festival of the Arts. More notable is the change that has taken place in the Philippine Christian church. For example, our home church, which features a rich tapestry of indigenous music and dances, has grown from a congregation of 200 in 1994 to more than 7,000 today. Many Filipino Christians no longer demonize their cultural and artistic heritage, but aspire to share that same, albeit redeemed artistic heritage to the world and for the further enrichment of the Body of Christ.

The Power of Analogy

Indigenous Christian leaders, along with others in the faith community, need to consider not just which art forms are appropriate for the church, but also what ceremonies, symbols, and rituals are to be retained in daily family, village, and city life so that they will keep hold of their root culture. With this focus, Christians remain accessible to their non-Christian neighbours and the Christian faith will be winsome and reach deeply into the culture. One key is to look for an analogy to Christ in the stories or songs of the culture that show how God was already at work before the missionaries came, showing that Christianity is not “white man’s religion.”

An analogy to Christ can be found in the ancient story of an “eagle-man.” He gave up his wings and his high loft in the cliff and became an Eskimo, so he could teach a lost family how to survive on the cold tundra. He saves their lives in order to “begin a new kind of people” on the earth. One cold winter, missionary couple Gene and Marylou wrote a script and several songs that retold this story and related it to what Christ did for mankind. They worked with seven Eskimo (Inuit) Christian young people who then performed the story in four or five surrounding villages. Many tears were shed to see an all-Eskimo “gospel team.” Late nights were spent listening to how God had touched these indigenous people through one of their own stories and its analogy to Christ.

Cultural Exchange

The arts can break through language and cultural barriers and are able to speak deeply to those who experience them. We must be careful to equip artists and directors who are sensitive and interested in building relationships with other cultures. We should create work that raises questions, incarnates aspects of a biblical worldview, and has a quality of craftsmanship to it that compels those witnessing it. A “cultural exchange” model is often more appropriate in this context than an “outreach” model.

International Festival of the Arts has held arts festivals in Russia, Bulgaria, and China. Hundreds of Christians from around the world involved in different aspects of the arts participated in these large-scale cultural exchanges. As each nation offered its best gifts through performance, exhibition, and teaching, the cultural and political barriers melted away and friendship and trust was built. As a result, long-term relationships and opportunities for the kingdom were established.

During the cultural exchange with Russia in 1991, a military leader offered a radio transmitter that had been used to send propaganda into Czechoslovakia. Now that the communists were gone it was no longer needed. The equipment was purchased. Local believers were trained. The appropriate licenses were granted, and Radio “Teos” was launched. A decade later, the station was honoured with the Golden Microphone Award—Russia’s premiere recognition for excellence in radio broadcasting. A transmitter once used to spread communist propaganda was now spreading the gospel with excellence.

The historic performance of Handel’s Messiah by a Chinese orchestra that had never played it to an audience who had never heard it was one of the highlights of the arts festival held in Yunnan Province, People’s Republic of China. The words of the Messiah, sung by visiting believers, were translated into Chinese and “scrolled” for the audience to read on two electronic screens during the performance. Next day, the provincial newspaper wrote an article headlined “Messiah Touches Hearts” and asked those who had been moved by the performance to write about their experience. Many did and their responses were published. What could not be “spoken” was enthusiastically received through an artistic performance.

Obstacles

Cultural and cross-cultural engagement, evangelism, discipleship, and transformation through the ministry of the church is limited by:

- Lack of culture-sensitive ways for the church to engage the marketplace
- Ethnocentric, monocultural perspectives that do not value other cultural frameworks

- Inadequate theologies that limit the scope of redemption
- A dematerialized view of spirituality that does not value earthly reality
- A “ghetto” or “siege” mentality that sees the church as a survivor, not a transformer
- A belief that cultural involvement and the kingdom of God are mutually exclusive
- A misunderstanding of the biblical mandate to be a culture former, not a culture escaper

Strategies

The following strategies will further enable what God is already doing in the cultural arena and through the indigenous peoples of the world to reflect His creational intention:

1. Repent and ask forgiveness for a monocultural perspective on missions that has denied indigenous people the right to celebrate faith in Christ with their own creative forms and within their own cultural framework.
2. Encourage the renewal and redirection of cultural practices towards Christ that are free from western Christian forms that hinder the celebration of indigenous creativity.
3. Study the artistic expressions of diverse people groups during mission and evangelistic training to better understand their issues, heart language, and worldview.
4. Research indigenous cultural forms and practices to see if they can be used as a “container” for the expression of biblical truth in evangelistic or mission settings.
5. Teach, train, and disciple believers to have a clear biblical understanding of the cultural mandate and its implications for cultural engagement and cultural transformation.
6. Use a variety of creative forms to express analogies, parables, and allegories that resonate with specific people groups and open them up to perceive spiritual truth.
7. Hold cultural exchange “festivals” with local and international ethnic groups to facilitate relationship building, dialogue, understanding, and mutual artistic expression.

ACT III, SCENE III

The Arts, Social Issues, and Societal Transformation

The Power of Story

The Body of Christ is also called to stand with those who have suffered. The arts are able to communicate in empathetic ways. Compassion is the capacity to identify with the suffering of others, and a refusal to be compassionate keeps people powerless and fails to give value or meaning to their experience. We must not sell short the value of the arts to reach into the heart and soul of any who experience the struggles of life.

While we again remind ourselves that art itself cannot transform—transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit—the arts, the imagination, and the creative process can facilitate and promote personal well being, emotional and mental health, and other therapeutic modalities. This is clearly demonstrated in the ability of David’s music to calm the troubled spirit of King Saul. We suggest that this inherent ability found within the arts is a part of God’s original intention for creative expression.

Metaphor can be a significant resource in the process of healing. Symbols and gestures help us to tell our stories and enable greater cross-cultural and multi-generational understanding than words alone. A poem, a dance, a dramatic piece, a musical composition, or an improvisation is often capable of communicating more deeply than ordinary speech.

A missionary to Latvia for eleven years wrote and choreographed a modern ballet called Voices from the Ground, dedicated to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in WWII Europe. She took the words and poems of victims and survivors and told their stories. The universal themes of love and family were woven into the production using symbols such as the Tallit, Shofar, hair being shaved in the gas chamber, a wedding, a marketplace, and a train platform. The modern ballet was abstract, but the symbols spoke very clearly, especially to the Jews. Following one of the dress rehearsals, theatre manager Israel Zach, an older Jewish man, came up to the missionary weeping. Kissing her hand, he thanked her over and over. He began to tell the emotional story of his escape from Latvia at age four, and how his entire family was murdered in the Holocaust.

Alternative Reality

In the wedding feast of Cana, Jesus turned the water into wine. He used a cultural practice of the people—water from the ceremonial jars for cleansing—and He transformed that water into wine for the enjoyment of the wedding guests. The wine points to the wine of the new covenant in Christ's blood. He takes the existing practice and turns it on its head without explanation. The water can no longer cleanse as before, but the wine, his blood, cleanses from deep within. The imaginative work of the arts can facilitate a fresh awareness of the possibility of a new reality centered on Jesus.

“Jay” had been coming to the drop-in centre for years. He wore his navy jacket even on hot summer days, along with heavy boots and a hat that covered his eyes. He walked hunched over and his sadness followed him like a cloud. One day we brought art materials and invited several youth to create pieces that reflected their ideas of health. Jay surprised us by joining in. Watching him choose materials was like watching a composer listen to some strange inner voice, about to put his thoughts on paper. He chose a canvas board and mostly blue paints. He'd never painted before. He stared at the empty canvas a long time and swirled the paint with his brush on the palette for an hour. In the next weeks we witnessed a transformation. He worked with commitment and vigour on his picture of a landscape of mountains, space, water, and birds on a background of beautiful blue sky. Throughout his painting, people who had never felt comfortable with Jay approached him, asked him about his ideas, and shared memories that his piece evoked. Gradually as he worked, we watched as his shoelaces were untied, as he took off his jacket revealing his well-worn undershirt, and as his hat came off unleashing mounds of beautiful black matted hair and brown eyes.

Participation in the arts allows the people involved to set their own agenda and pace for healing. They make the decisions about the tools to use, the medium to work in, the colours, music, words, or movements. They determine the outcome and its presentation. These decisions are important for those who have felt powerless to change their circumstances or who have felt their self-worth diminished by violence, hunger, loss, or shame.

Healing Emotional Wounds

The arts are able to make links between the inner life of the imagination and our day-to-day living. They give forms that allow us to integrate the head, heart, and hands. They nurture self-understanding and in that way they are therapeutic. For people who have experienced loss or brokenness from abuse, war, or illness, the arts are a non-threatening way to bring recovery that may have seemed impossible.

Raised in a dysfunctional and abusive home in North Africa, Yousef learned how to sharpen a pencil and make basic drawings from a stranger passing through his city. He had the desire to continue drawing and painting, and did so as he lived and worked in different parts of his country. After becoming a Christian in 2002, he had contact with an artist who taught him more of the basics of drawing and painting and helped him discover his gifts. He realized that through his art he could share things that were hidden in his heart and freely express his emotions.

A Transformed Imagination

We have often emphasized concrete, literal expressions to the neglect of the intuitive, nonverbal, and poetic. This is an imbalance that needs to be corrected. There is a need to recover our appreciation for beauty so that it can include the beauty we find in brokenness. The arts allow us to look into human brokenness in a way that is manageable rather than overwhelming and can challenge us to bring change. An invigorated imagination sees new possibilities and potential. Problems become opportunities when hope is reborn and energy is renewed. A renewed mind is necessary for a renewed walk.

As a young girl in a communist country, “Mia” loved music and dance. When she was old enough, she auditioned and was accepted into a state school to receive training in the arts. However, when the authorities found out her family were Christians, the offer of a place was withdrawn. As the little girl grew up she would make up dances and dance on her own whenever she could. Many years later she was arrested and put into prison for her faith. The guards would often make her change position and threaten her with beatings if she moved in any way. During this prolonged period of detention and cruelty, Mia survived by choreographing dances in her mind and then dancing them out in her imagination. While the guards observed her motionless body, inside she was leaping, whirling, and jumping as her whole body

praised God.

Obstacles

The involvement of the church in social issues can be hindered by:

- Failure to recognize ministry to the poor and needy as service to Christ
- Resistance to a “social gospel” as over against the pure gospel (evangelism)
- A limited view of the scope of the gospel
- A sacred-secular division of reality that relegates social issues to secondary importance
- Lack of imagination to envision change
- Overwhelming need
- Lack of training in arts therapy and allied fields
- Limited resources

Strategies

The following arts-related strategies can move people toward healing and wholeness:

1. Embrace an approach to evangelism and mission that speaks to the whole person
2. Collaborate with community leaders to creatively solve individual and social issues
3. Give people a creative way to tell their stories
4. Offer people new ways of seeing themselves and their situations through the arts
5. Train artists in art therapy and allied fields
6. Work to aid the healing and restoration process through a variety of art therapies
7. Bring beauty and humanity through the arts in refugee camps, orphanages, etc.

ACT III, SCENE IV

The Artist in the Marketplace

In the majority world, the marketplace is an actual location where traditional festivals, daily communal activities, and the selling of local goods and crafts take place. In the west, we find a fluid marketplace of ideas, commerce, and politics, with its incomprehensible number of locations, specializations, information and entertainment technologies. In both marketplaces, Christians are often denied participation in the festival of the market.

The Festival of the Market

The arts can address and bring attention to the social and political issues of the marketplace and move people to change their thinking and their attitudes. It is of the utmost importance that artists who seek to follow Jesus enter the marketplace and do so with the full support of their local church body. The church, however, has traditionally been suspicious or fearful of releasing its artists into the “secular” realm, believing that they have sold out and are compromising their faith. Faulty theology often immobilizes those artists who are called to celebrate their creative gifts in the centre of the culture.

A stream of Christians involved in the performing and fine arts are surfacing in the tapestry of European cultures. This new breed of artists—many working in the marketplace—are finding the inspiration for their art and life through their ongoing relationship with the God of the Bible. They prefer to be known simply as artists rather than as “Christian” artists. Their art, work ethic, dignity, passion, and compassion reveal their identity as Christians. Although their works do not often contain biblical references, they convey perspectives, values, and truths that are consistent with scripture. Recognizing that the arts are the rhetoric of European society, they traverse the highways and byways of culture. They understand that art ultimately reveals something of the worldview of the art-maker and that art bends and influences society. However, they are neither utilitarian nor pragmatic in the exercise of their craft, nor do they often use their art in the direct service of evangelism. Yet their aim is to love and serve their audience and to obey Christ’s mandate to be salt and light. They are piercing the darkness with light and depositing salt for healing into the wounds of a broken society.

Artists in the cultural marketplace need support, encouragement, and accountability. We must put aside our suspicions and recover the biblical teaching that Christ is Lord of all creation, including culture. The marketplace is in need of a Christian presence, not abandonment. The church should be intentional about sending artists as agents of

reconciliation into the world, into all aspects of the entertainment industry, or as a presence at local, national, and international arts events. Because the arts shape culture, we need a new generation of artists who will enter the marketplaces of our various cultures to be the yeast that will leaven the bread with the energizing presence of the Spirit.

Janeric was the first Swedish artist to be officially invited to mount an exhibition in Riga, Latvia. Realizing his lack of knowledge about that country, he visited it in order to understand the people, pray, and sense God's heart for this Soviet-occupied nation. Following several months of intense artistic creation, the exhibition of his work began.

One of the exhibited pieces, entitled 70x7, was based on Jesus' reply to Peter in response to the question of how many times we are to forgive. Jesus had replied not seven (the perfect number) but seventy times seven (without limit). One year after the exhibition, Latvia gained its freedom. Several articles appeared asking what should be done to those who had been responsible for the injustices they had all suffered. Several solutions were discussed. In one newspaper article, Janeric's painting 70X7 was shown with the caption, "Is there a limit to forgiveness?" The painting subsequently appeared at an exhibition in former East Germany, where it became part of the lengthy process of re-examining the role of the hated secret police, the Stasi.

The Christian working in the marketplace as an artist needs to have a lifeline to the church. As with all its missionaries, the church needs to care for its artists on the frontline of secular culture by providing adequate spiritual foundations and accountability to enable their calling and ongoing discipleship. Artists need space—space to create, space to experiment, space to take risks and even make mistakes. As much as their art, artists themselves are works in progress, and much patience is required to allow the Master Artist to work in and through them. We encourage church leaders to initiate dialogue with its artists in order to foster the mutual respect that will facilitate a healthy relationship and promote that much-needed accountability.

Principles for the Marketplace

What principles should guide artists in the “grey areas” of the marketplace? First, it is important to ask why something is considered to be a “grey” area and find out who says so. Are they culturally grey, uncertain, socially taboo, or is it something to be avoided because scripture makes clear the practice is unacceptable for a follower of Jesus?

What might be considered grey? In the arts there is plenty to challenge the biblical standards. Performance art, theatre, and dance may have a questionable moral and ethical base. In fine arts, creative writing, painting, sculpture, and photography we could ask how artists might edit their work—what they leave in and what they leave out of the frame.

We should be guided by the scriptural charge that whatever we do, we are to do it all to the glory of God. We are further exhorted: “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things” (Phil. 4:8). The teaching of scripture in context is our signpost. Do the cultural signposts point us towards or away from God? All choices have consequences. What voices are we listening to?

Obstacles

Artists are prevented from effectively following Christ's example to enter the cultural marketplace when they or the church culture exhibit any of the following:

- Fear of sell-out and compromise
- A view of culture as outside of God's concern
- An escapist attitude toward culture
- Use of language, symbols, and metaphors that do not resonate with the culture
- Lack of spiritual accountability on the part of artists
- Few non-Christian relationships
- A view of work in the marketplace as unspiritual
- Absence of a kingdom perspective

Strategies

The church and its artists will more effectively engage and influence the marketplace through the following strategies:

1. Commission and pray for marketplace artists called as cultural “missionaries”
2. Encourage artists to enter the marketplace to be salt and light
3. Create works of spiritual and artistic excellence that permeate the culture

4. Network believing artists working in the marketplace, for support and encouragement
5. Establish Bible study and prayer groups in the different entertainment industry sectors
6. Establish art galleries, participate in art exhibitions, and fund touring gallery shows
7. Partner with community architects to transform community aesthetics
8. Negotiate public space for innovative art installations
9. Validate the arts as a career option for Christians called to engage the culture

EPILOGUE

“How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade.”
(Mark 4:30, 31)

As we indicated in the Prologue, the area of faith is one of the places in which the imagination does its work. As we engage the arts from a kingdom perspective, the picture of the mustard seed encourages us to envision what is possible. In a similar way, the biblical narrative of the bronze serpent gives insight into the redemptive process.

Redemption

The Restoration of God’s Original Intention

The Israelites had fallen back into the predictable pattern of grumbling against Moses and described the food God provided for them as “loathsome.”

Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us” (Num. 21: 6-7).

So Moses prayed for the people and a long-suffering God responded:

The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived (Num. 21: 8-9).

God’s Original Intention

God told Moses to make a symbol, a likeness of the deadly serpents, and put it on a pole. Everyone who looked at this symbol was healed, forgiven, and restored. This was God’s original intention when He commissioned Moses to make the bronze serpent. However, the symbol became the focus of attention instead of the One that it pointed to. To find out what happened, we must fast-forward 700 years to the time of King Hezekiah.

He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it
(2 Ki. 18:4).

God’s Original Intention Distorted

This bronze serpent had become an idol. God’s original intention for it had become distorted. In repentance, Hezekiah smashed it to pieces. This symbol of God’s healing, forgiveness, and restoration now lay shattered on the ground. Hezekiah’s action was the fruit of repentance. He dealt with the distortion. When distortions are dealt with, restoration is a divine-human possibility. It would be another 700 years before the bronze serpent was to appear again in the narrative of the Jewish people.

God’s Original Intention Restored

A Jewish ruling council member readied himself and set out under cover of darkness to find answers to troubling issues (Jn. 3:14, 15). In His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus likened His upcoming death on the cross to the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness. Those who looked to Him would also be healed, forgiven, and restored. The journey of the bronze serpent had come full circle. It had found its deepest fulfillment in the crucified Christ, who had come to

restore God's original intention for His creation.

In contemplating the story of the bronze serpent, one might wonder why Jesus would identify with a metaphor (a symbol, a sculpture, a work of art) that had become an idol and had to be destroyed. Surely there was a more appropriate story He could have drawn upon. The answer speaks to the heart of personal and cultural restoration and the implications are profound. "When the sin issues are dealt with in any area of life, that area of life can begin to reflect God's original intention for it."⁵ This is the heart of the gospel narrative. The restoration of God's intention in every area of life, including the arts, is a possibility when the distortions are dealt with. Jesus did not identify with the bronze serpent in its distorted state. The distortion had been dealt with through Hezekiah's repentance. Jesus now identifies Himself with the original intention of the symbol—healing, forgiveness, and restoration.

Renewed, Restored, and Refocused

God could have asked Moses to take a dead snake and put it on a pole. But the sculpture allowed them to "see" beyond their own immediate suffering to God's attitude toward their sin. This symbol was more eloquent than words in evoking a deep emotional response. The arts have the ability to heighten or alter our perception of reality by making the familiar appear unfamiliar, so that we engage it with new eyes and receive new understanding and revelation.

Although there are often complex factors involved, it is our firm conviction, based on the biblical narrative, that when distortion is dealt with, symbols, rituals, dances, and musical instruments can be renewed, restored, and refocused to the glory of God. In the story of the bronze serpent, we find the gospel narrative in microcosm, with its inherent structure of original intention, original intention distorted, and original intention restored. History is moving toward the day when all of creation will be restored back to God's original intention. The biblical narrative boldly proclaims that the process has already begun.

Developing an Artistic Voice

How an artist sees the world can be a valuable asset for the church as it engages its mission. Artists need to be about the serious business of creating work that is innovative in its concept, strong in its artistry, and marked by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. When human artistry connects with the purposes of God, extraordinary things can happen (Ex. 40:35).

The arts have exercised a powerful prophetic role in the past. Will we encourage art making that is simply an echo of the culture? Or will Christians be a fresh voice bringing unique and innovative creative expressions and a biblical worldview to bear on the serious issues facing our world? As we have noted, interest in the arts has been growing among Christians in recent years. There has been a real surge in the training and preparing of dancers, actors, musicians, writers, and visual artists. While we commend these initiatives, we must ask: where are the choreographers, directors, producers, and composers? These are the influencers, the change-agents who have the ability to make their vision a reality, and who control content, form, and production values.

With this in mind, we recommend a strategic investment in those who have developed their spiritual and artistic voice, who take creative risks, and who create thought-provoking work that offers a new reality in Christ. If as artists we remain just an echo of our culture, isolated from the community of faith, we will ultimately find ourselves in a cultural wasteland with other self-absorbed and bitter artists who have lost their way in the noise and confusion of the marketplace.

Soli Deo Gloria

Artists are called to be salt, light, and yeast in every sphere of artistic endeavour. Salt includes compassion and humility. Light encompasses discernment and freedom. Yeast permeates and transforms. We are to manifest these attributes so that an unbelieving world might see our good "artworks" and glorify God.

As the curtain closes and the house lights come up, we are left to contemplate what we have "seen" and "heard." As we make our way out into the streets of everyday life, we can remain satisfied with things as they are, or we can envision things as they could be.

ENVISION A FUTURE

Envision a future in which the church worldwide will integrate into its theological foundations a response to God's gifts of beauty and creativity that will value and empower Christian engagement in and enjoyment of the arts.

Envision a future in which the community of faith is at the forefront of artistic innovation that will be celebrated in the corporate life of the church and its individual members, in the local cultural marketplace, and in the global entertainment industry.

Envision a future in which all children are able to explore, discover, and develop their creative abilities, and where those with special gifts are given the encouragement and opportunity to study and develop their God-given creativity to its fullest potential.

Envision a future in which education in the Christian school, home school, Sunday school, and vacation Bible school integrates the arts not only into the curriculum, but also as a major part of the learning process itself.

Envision a future in which students in seminaries, Bible colleges, and missionary training schools are required to study and experience the arts for their own development, understanding, and preparation for pastoral and mission leadership and service.

Envision a future in which it will be common practice for Christian universities and colleges to offer a variety of degrees in the arts and allied fields of study, and to invest in the specialized facilities necessary for quality training, performance, and exhibition.

Envision a future in which business and arts leaders work together in partnership to ensure that kingdom resources are gifted or invested into strategic arts initiatives, and that business training and practice is on the cutting edge of creativity and innovation.

Envision a future in which art patronage is once again seen as a responsibility of the church, enabling great works of art to be produced that will affirm our story, celebrate our common humanity, challenge our thinking, enrich our world, and bring glory to God.

Envision a future in which the arts are a partner in local and global community development projects that bring healing and hope to the poor and needy, the abused and marginalized, and children at risk, moving all people toward God's intention for them.

Envision a future in which the church in all people groups will reinforce the biblical narrative, pass it on to the next generation, and celebrate the goodness of God within their own cultural framework and with their own indigenous instruments and art forms.

Envision a future in which mission organizations will value the partnership of artists and the arts in fulfilling the Great Commission, as consultants in indigenous hymnody and contextualization, and in the task of church planting and cultural restoration.

Envision a future in which information will be available to promote the active global networking of Christians in the arts in order to encourage, discuss, strategize, identify and share resources, and facilitate diverse creative partnerships.

Envision a future in which artists will desire to be excellent in their craft, spiritually mature in their walk, humble in their attitude, servant-hearted in motivation, moral in lifestyle, and uncompromising in their obedience to Christ.

Envision a future in which Christians in every diverse cultural context of our world are continually involved in a lifestyle of intentional, premeditated acts of creativity and beauty, pointing to the day in which the Original Artist will "make all things new."

ENDNOTES

1 Sayers, Dorothy L., *The Mind of the Maker*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1941, 1967, 1987).

2 Hart, Trevor, "Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing and Touching the Truth," in *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), pp. 1-26.

3 Seerveld, Calvin, *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves* (Toronto, ON: Tuppence Press, 2000), p. 8.

4 Seerveld, Calvin, *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves* (Toronto, ON: Tuppence Press, 2000), p. 112.

5 Harbinson, Colin, *The Arts & Cultural Restoration*, (Jackson, MS: LAMP, 1998) p. 7.

SCRIPTURE SOURCES

PAGE 4

Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And every one who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall. (Matthew 7:24-27) NRSV

PAGE 9

At the heart of Christian faith is the majestic declaration that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us—and we beheld His glory... full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14). **ASV**

PAGE 12

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:45-46) NIV

PAGE 23

He told them still another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.” (Matthew 13:33) NIV

PAGE 24

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (ethnos), baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...” (Matt. 28:19-20). **NASB**

PAGE 32

“How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade.” (Mark 4:30, 31) NASB

PAGE 32

Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us” (Num. 21: 6-7). NIV

The LORD said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived (Num. 21: 8-9). NIV

He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it (2 Ki. 18:4). NIV

RESOURCES ON THE ARTS, CULTURE & FAITH

BOOKS

Bass, Alice. The Creative Life. Downers Grove, Ill: Cleveland OH: IVP, 2001.

Believing that God has called everyone to creative living in daily affairs, this book will help you explore God's design for your creative life.

Bausch, William. Storytelling: Imagination and Faith. Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984.

Bausch celebrates the power of stories for passing on truths and myths from one generation to the next within religious and secular traditions.

Begbie, Jeremy S. Voicing Creation's Praise. Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1991.

A timely discussion from the perspective of a well-read theologian that points out the desperate need to regain the lost Christian voice in our postmodern arts.

Begbie, Jeremy, ed. Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 2000.

A collection of essays looking at links between the doctrine of incarnation and various art forms including literature, poetry, dance and music.

Best, Harold M. Music Through the Eyes of Faith. San Francisco: Harper, 1993.

This thought-provoking work, one of a series co-sponsored by the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, examines the connections between music making and faith.

Blogg, Martin. Dance and the Christian Faith. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985.

Examines what the bible says about both dance and worship, and relates it to an understanding of what dance is and how it can be used in the church and education.

Bond, Fiona. The Arts in Your Church. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2001.

This work is a valuable resource for those thinking about how to engage the arts in a church setting. The author brings a wealth of experience to her writing.

Brand, Hilary and Adrienne Chaplin. Art and Soul: Signposts for Christians in the Arts. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2001.

This work focuses mainly on visual arts and offers valuable insights for shaping a biblical worldview on creativity.

Brown, Frank Burch. Good Taste, Bad Taste and Christian Taste: Aesthetics and Religious Life. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

A unique historical look at responses to the arts and beauty and issues related to taste, art and religious life.

Bustard, Ned, ed. It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God. Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2000.

A thoughtful and informative collection of articles, mainly by artists connected with CIVA, covering a wide range of topics related to faith and art.

Card, Michael. Scribbling in the Sand: Christ and Creativity. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2002.

This work explores the God-given gift of creativity. Biblical themes run throughout the book as he takes up questions around creativity.

Cunningham, David S. Reading is Believing: The Christian Faith through Literature and Film. Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2002.

The author looks to literature and film to illuminate current thinking on the basic beliefs of the church.

- de Gruichy, John W.** Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
A challenging, academic look at the links between art, justice and cultural transformation.
- Dyrness, William A.** The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture. New York: Orbis Books, 1997).
Explores key themes in a Christian approach to culture. An excellent, theologically informed resource for thinking about culture and the arts.
- _____. Visual Faith: Art Theology and Worship in Dialogue. Baker Books, 2001.
Grounded in historical and biblical research, the author offers an intriguing, substantive look into the relationship between the church and the world of art.
- Eusden, John Dykstra and John H. Westerhoff, III.** Sensing Beauty: Aesthetics, Human Spirit, and the Church. Cleveland OH: United Church Press, 1998.
Explores the relationship of aesthetics to beauty, truth and goodness.
- Elsheimer, Janice.** The Creative Call. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Waterbrook Press, 2001.
For artists or for those with artistic talent that has never been developed, this book will help you grow closer to becoming the person God has designed you to be.
- Forde, Nigel.** Theatre Craft. Bromley, UK: MARC Europe, 1986.
Although primarily concerned with stagecraft, this book has a good chapter on "The Christian Artist," plus other thought-provoking material scattered throughout.
- _____. The Lantern and the Looking-Glass: Literature and Christian Belief. London: SPCK, 1997.
Though devoted to reflection on the literary arts, this insightful book is a valuable resource for all of the arts.
- Gaebelein, Frank.** The Christian, the Arts, and Truth. Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1985.
Essays, editorials, and lectures by a renowned educator, writer and musician take a thoughtful and scholarly look at the relationship between art and truth.
- Guinness, Os.** Fit Bodies, Fat Minds. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995.
Traces the retreat of Christianity that has rendered us ineffectual against the influences of popular culture and calls for the reinvigoration of the Christian mind.
- Harbinson, C., S. Scott, R. Loydell, R. and B. Beerhorst.** Artrageous. Chicago, Ill: Cornerstone Press, 1992.
These lectures and essays by four Cornerstone Festival speakers deal with issues of artistic and spiritual importance to Christians involved in the arts.
- Harbinson, Colin.** The Arts & Cultural Restoration. Brandon, Mississippi: LAMP, 1998.
This compact, illustrated book examines God's plan to restore creation back to His original intention and shows the significant role of the arts in the redemptive task.
- Harries, Richard.** Art and the Beauty of God: A Christian Understanding. London: Mowbray, 1993.
The author shows how a biblical faith can give a key place to beauty and argues for a Christian approach to art that is sensitive to the spiritual dimension.
- Higgins, Gareth.** How Movies Helped Save my Soul: Finding Spiritual Fingerprints in Culturally Significant Film. Lake Mary Fl: Relevant Books, 2003.
Brings the Bible and film into conversation, demonstrating how life's big questions cannot be avoided.

- Jensen, Robin M.** The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith and the Christian Community. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.
Shows how the Church cannot ignore the arts and calls for renewed attention in contemporary faith communities.
- Johnston, Robert K.** Reel Spirituality: Theology and Film in Dialogue. Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2000.
A theological look at recent films, that helps provide helpful insights into "reading" film and discloses how it addresses moral and spiritual issues.
- _____. Useless Beauty: Ecclesiastes through the Lens of Contemporary Film. Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2004.
A creative conversation between book of Ecclesiastes and the voices heard in the postmodern world.
- Jones, Mary, et al.** God's People on the Move. Sydney, Australia: CDFA, 1988.
This is a practical manual that covers the "why" and "how" of using movement and dance in the Church. It includes a short biblical and historical background.
- L'Engle, Madeleine.** Walking on Water. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Waterbrook Press, 2001.
This is a classic work that calls readers to put their imagination to work. The book is full of insight and encouragement for the Christian artist.
- Newport, John P.** Christianity and Contemporary Art Forms. Waco, Texas: Word, Inc., 1971.
This book is a guide to understanding and interpreting developments in literature, drama and painting.
- Noland, Rory.** The Heart of the Artist. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999.
Written for artists by an artist, this book deals with issues that face everyone involved in an arts ministry.
- Noll, Mark A.** The Scandal of the Evangelic Mind. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994.
Noll takes evangelicals to task for largely abandoning the universities, the arts, and other realms of "high" culture.
- Ouspensky, Leonid and Lossky Vladimir.** The Meaning of Icons. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1982.
This fine and beautifully illustrated book offers history and context to the increasingly popular presence of icons.
- Potok, Chaim.** My Name is Asher Lev. New York: Ballantine Books, 1972.
This evocative novel and its sequel, The Gift of Asher Lev, traces the life of a gifted Hassidic artist and shows his struggle to come to terms with art and his Jewish faith.
- Romaine, James.** Objects of Grace: Conversations on Creativity and Faith. Square Halo Books, Baltimore, MD: 2002.
This is a collection of conversations with some of today's most intriguing artists, focusing on the intersection of Christianity and creativity.
- Rookmaker, Hans.** Art Needs no Justification. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1978.
This Reformed perspective views art as integral to the creation order and a gift from God, to be celebrated and enjoyed as part of our humanity.
- _____. The Complete Works of Hans Rookmaaker. Vols 1-6, edited by Marleen Hengelaar-Rookmaaker, Carlisle, UK: Piquant Books, 2002.
A rich and thoughtful resource, these six volumes take the reader through Rookmaaker's writings on the arts as critic and historian. There is a wealth of material on music and the visual arts.
- _____. The Creative Gift. Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone Books, 1981.

This well-known art historian argues that it is the Christian's responsibility not so much to change the world as to keep it from decay and corruption.

Ryken, Leland. The Liberated Imagination Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1989.

A manifesto for Christians in the arts that addresses the nature of art and what the bible says about creativity, beauty and the place of the imagination.

_____ . The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing. Waterbrook Press, 2002.

Brings together in a single source the best that has been written on the relationship between literature and the Christian faith.

Sayers, Dorothy L. The Mind of the Maker. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1941, 1967, 1987.

First published in 1942, this excellent work provides a careful introduction to the doctrine of creation and affirms the idea of God as artist.

Schaeffer, Francis A. Art and the Bible. Downer's Grove, Ill: IVP, [L'Abri1973].

This classic little book on the arts looks at various art forms of the Old Testament and suggests ways in which a Christian view of art can take shape.

Scott, Steve. Like a House on Fire: Renewal of the Arts in a Postmodern Culture. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002.

Draws from history, scripture and experience to explore the links between faith and the arts for the contemporary church.

Seerveld, Calvin. Rainbows for a Fallen World. Toronto, Canada: Tuppence Press, 1980.

Discusses aesthetics and the arts: "the biblical charter for artistic activity," "obedient aesthetic life," and "the fundamental importance of imaginativity in education."

_____ . A Christian Critique of Art and Literature. Toronto, Tuppence Press, 1995.

The book contains basic lectures explaining how a person can treat art and literature so as to be redeeming one's time.

_____ . Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves. Toronto, Canada: Tuppence Press, 2000.

Alternative steps in understanding art. A key thinker and teacher of philosophical aesthetics encourages mature, bold Christian engagement with the arts.

Schroeder, Celeste Snowber. Pray with Hearts and Hands. London: Harper Collins, 1995.

An insightful book on praying not only with thoughts and words, but with the body, showing how movement can facilitate worship, prayer, celebration and healing.

Silberling, Murray. Dancing for Joy, A Biblical Approach to Praise and Worship. Baltimore, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 1995.

Covers biblical foundations, dance styles and philosophy that will help in starting or developing a dance ministry.

Spencer, William David and Besancon Spenser Aida. God Through the Looking Glass: Glimpses from the Arts. Grand Rapids MI: Bridgepoint Books, Baker, 1998.

The authors define art and then build a biblical framework for evaluating it.

Thistlethwaite, David. The Art of God, and the Religions of Art. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998.

Traces the progressive loss in the west of contact with, or faith in, a real created order, and discusses the manifestations of this loss in fine art.

Turner, Steve. Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2001.

Here is a compelling invitation to everyone in the creative community to be salt and light in the world of the arts.

Veith, Gene Edward. State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Mappelthorp. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994.

This book establishes a strong Christian context for understanding expressions of human creativity and powerfully defends the arts as a gift from God.

Walsh B. and R. Middleton. The Transforming Vision. Downer's Grove, Ill: IVP, 1984.

A challenging book that gives a passionate call for Christianity to penetrate the structures of society to reform and remould our culture.

Wolterstorff, Nicholas. Art in Action. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980.

This introduction to the theory of art, while granting that galleries, theatres and concert halls serve a purpose, argues that art should also be a part of everyday life.

Yancey, Philip, ed. The Classics we've Read, the Difference they've Made. New York: McCracken Press, 1993.

This is a fascinating collection of essays by well-known authors that speak about the literature that has influenced them and why.

Zahniser, A. H. Mathias. Symbol and Ceremony. Monrovia, California: MARC, 1997.

The author shows how rites, symbols and ceremonies in many cultures can be transformed, infused with a new spirit, and given Christian meaning.

General works

Boorstin, Daniel, J. The Creators: A History of the Heroes of the Imagination. New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1992.

This work details events and individuals who have imaginatively contributed to the shaping of cultures around the world.

Bosch, David, J. Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission. New York: Maryknoll, 1991.

Thorough, theologically informed and academically inclined, this work highlights a wide spectrum of current issues in missions.

Brueggemann, Walter. The Prophetic Imagination. Philadelphia Penn: Fortress Press, 1990.

An insightful biblical scholar takes up the theme of the imagination, as it is manifest among the prophets of scripture.

Gardner, Howard. Frames of Mind, The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. New York: Basic Books, 1985.

Instead of affirming reason as the criterion for intelligence, Gardner points to such options as musical and emotional intelligence. This is a relatively new approach to human understanding with positive implications for the arts.

Kraft, Charles, H. Anthropology for Christian Witness. New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1999.

A thorough, basic introduction to the study of anthropology, designed specifically for those who plan careers in mission or cross-cultural ministry.

MacGregor, Neil with Erika Langmuir. Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art. New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

A handsomely produced look into the history of art, with text that is an excellent resource for understanding the work depicted.

Middleton, J. Richard and Brian J. Walsh. The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview. Downers Grove Ill: IVP, 1984.

These authors lead us through a careful account of how and why we are to shape a Christian worldview.

_____. Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age. Downers Grove Ill: IVP, 1999.

Gives valuable perspective on several of the challenges that postmodernism poses to Christian belief.

Ryken, L., James, C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III. Dictionary of Biblical Imagery. Downers Grove Ill: IVP, 1998.

This is a contemporary reference work that explores the images, symbols, motifs, metaphors and literary patterns found in the Bible.

Journals & magazines

The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies, New Brighton, MN: Union Theological Seminary.

Designed to explore issues related to theology and art. www.ARTSmag.org

Creative Spirit: A Journal of the Arts and Faith. Jackson, MS: Belhaven College.

In-depth articles and features on dance, theatre, visual arts, music, photography, poetry and mission informed by a biblical worldview.

www.belhaven.edu/arts/publications.htm

Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion. 3307 Third Ave. W. Seattle, WA 98119: Centre for Religious Humanism.

Quality articles and reviews particularly on literature and visual arts from a Christian perspective.

www.imagejournal.org

Inspire: A selection of dance writings. Journal of the International Christian Dance Fellowship, Sydney, Australia.

Articles cover different aspects and ministries of dance and movement in a Christian context.

www.icdf.com

Mars Hill Review. P.O. Box 10506 Bainbridge Island, WA 98110 – 0506

Essays on issues of theological importance, interviews with writers, teachers and artists, original fiction, nonfiction and poetry, and arts reviews.

www.marshallforum.org

Audio and video resources

Begbie, Jeremy. Theology through the Arts. Vancouver, Canada: Regent College, 1996.

These lectures given at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, explore the relationship between the arts and theology. His special interest is music.

_____. The Sound of Hope.

A two-video set including lectures and a performance by Jeremy Begbie, given in Ottawa, Canada, in March 2004. (18 Blackburn Ave. Ottawa, ON, Canada: Augustine College). www.augustinecollege.org

Harbinson, Colin. The Arts—A Biblical Framework. (Audio Series I).

Develops a biblical framework for understanding the place of the arts in God's world, and affirms human creativity as a dynamic expression of His image and His kingdom.

_____. The Artist — A Spiritual Foundation. (Audio Series II).

Illustrates the necessity of godly character in the life of the artist and principles that will motivate artists to build a strong spiritual foundation in their lives.

_____. The Arts & Cultural Restoration. (Audio Series III).

Shapes a vision of God's intention for all people to worship Him within their own cultural framework, and shows the role the arts in the ongoing task of cultural restoration

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Organisations

Art and Christian Enquiry (ACE), 107 Crundale Avenue, London NW9 9PS, UK.

Studies and promotes the engagement of the visual art with church and theology.

www.acetrust.org

Artists in Christian Testimony (A.C.T.), 116 Wilson Pike Circle, Brentwood, TN 37024.

A missionary and ministry-sending agency for artistic missionaries.

ACTNashville@ACTInternational.org

Arts Centre Group (AGC), The Courtyard, 59 Portobello Rd. London W11 3DB UK.

A national British association of Christians professionally involved in the world of the arts, media and entertainment. Bi-monthly magazine.

www.artscentregroup.org.uk

Belhaven College, 1500 Peachtree Street, Jackson, Mississippi 39202.

A four-year Christian liberal arts college offering degrees in dance (ballet and modern), theatre, music, visual arts and creative writing. New professional facilities. www.belhaven.edu

The Brehm Center for Worship, Theology, and the Arts, Fuller Theological Seminary, 135 North Oakland Avenue, Pasadena, California 91182.

Educates artists in theology and theologians in the arts. www.brehmcenter.com

Christian Artists' Networking Association (CANA), 9933 Business Park Dr, Sacramento, CA 95827.

Publishes a regular newsletter and organises regional, national and international conferences in Asia and Eastern Europe. www.canagroup.org

Christian Artists Europe, P.O. Box 81065, 3009 GB, Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Responsible for an annual pan-European conference for Christians in the arts, celebrating its 25th year in 2005. www.continentalart.org

Creative Arts Europe, Rue Aux Loups 25, B-1380 Lasne, Belgium.

Network of artists & art lovers who aspire to train the church in a Christian worldview, and permeate European culture with art that offers hope and life.

www.CreativeArtsEurope.com

Christians in Theatre Arts (CITA), P.O. Box 26471, Greenville, SC 29616

Gives Christians a continent-wide support network of other believers who are working in all aspects of the theatre arts. www.actinternational.org

Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA), 255 Grapevine Road, Wenham, MA 01984.

Networking organisation for visual artists in North America, publishes a newsletter three times a year and holds a bi-annual conference. www.civa.org

Chrysalis Seed Trust, The Arts Centre, P.O. Box 629 Christchurch 8015, New Zealand.

Committed to support artists and their profession and to help resource the arts community from a Christian perspective. Quarterly newsletter. www.cst.org

Crescendo, Postfach 219, CH-4003 Basel, Switzerland.

An international network of classical musicians; encourages them in their professional life and faith.

www.crescendo.org

Ethnic Worship & Arts Focus,

Free monthly e-newsletter that focuses on multicultural artists and their indigenous styles.

To subscribe: GCWAC@DiscipleTheNations.org

Greenbelt, The Greenhouse, Hillmarton Road, London, N7 9JE, UK.

An annual UK Christian arts festival with seminars and music. Tape catalogue. www.greenbelt.org.uk

Imago, 133 Southvale Dr., Toronto, Ontario, M4G 1G6, Canada.

A national arts organisation supporting Christians in the arts. Newsletter. www.imago-arts.on.ca

International Christian Dance Fellowship (ICDF), PO Box 943 Lane Cove, NSW 1595 Australia.

Networks Christians in the Creative Movement Arts around the world to impact the church and the world. Conferences and journal. www.icdf.com

International Festival of the Arts (IFA), 263 Lighthouse Lane, Brandon, MS 39047.

Expresses a Christian worldview through large-scale cultural exchange festivals that have taken place in Russia, Bulgaria and China. www.colinharbinson.com

La Fonderie 97 rue Julien Lacroix, 75020 Paris.

A network and community of artists seeking to value, inspire, encourage and embolden Christians working in artistic and creative professions. www.lafonderie.org

Project Dance, 520 Eighth Ave, Suite 330, New York, NY 10018.

Dance Spirit Magazine named Project Dance Times Square as one of the top 10 dance events in New York City. Has also expanded nationally and internationally. www.projectdance.com

Regent University, School of Communication and the Arts. 1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach, VA, 23464.

The department of theatre arts offers graduate studies with a vision to transform the world of theatre. www.regent.edu

Wesley Institute, 5 Mary Street, Drummoyne, NSW 1470, Sydney, Australia.

Combines the teaching of arts and theology. Offers degrees and diplomas in dance, dance therapy, drama, graphic design and music.

www.wesleymission.org.au

PARTICIPANTS

Colin Harbinson	Convener United Kingdom, U.S.A.
Mary Jones	Co-Convener Australia
David Potvin	Facilitator Canada, U.S.A.
Janine June Arbolario	Philippines
Jim Beise	France
William Brown	U.S.A.
Peter Bruderer	Switzerland
Jose Raymund Conception	Philippines
Mrinalini R. David	India
Paula Dubill	U.S.A.
Natalie Emmanuel	Spain
John Franklin	Canada
Nigel Goodwin	United Kingdom
Jennifer Goss	South Africa
Melissa Thorson Hause	U.S.A.
Janeric Johansson	Sweden
Colin Kirton	Malaysia
Eduardo Lapiz	Philippines
Patricia Larson	U.S.A.
Christine Leaves	Australia
Karen Liew	Malaysia
Samson Manwatkar	India
Sharon Matthews	Wales
George McDow	U.S.A.
Kuzipa Nalwamba	Zambia
Seth Newman	Ghana
Phyllis Novak	Canada
Gordon Pennington, III	U.S.A.
Sharon Perry	U.S.A.
B.K. Petersen	India
Jamie Pryor	Australia
Michael Schalles	Germany
Steve Scott	U.S.A.
Raman Singh	India
Byron Spradlin	U.S.A.
Ken Taylor	Japan
Mary Lou Totten	U.S.A.
James Tughan	Canada
Mark Turner	U.S.A.
Takeshi & Sakivo Yamanaka	Japan