

WORLDVIEW AND ART: A CALL FOR BALLADEERS

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Introduction

Why is someone who works for a relief and development agency writing about art?

I am not an artist or gifted in the arts. Nor am I particularly knowledgeable in art history or art appreciation. I am a “popularizer,” someone who is able to relate worldview to issues of vocation, hunger, and poverty. Some have called me a “passionate paradigm shifter” because I have a heart for leading people to see things from the biblical worldview.

It is as a worldview popularizer and a paradigm shifter that I seek to address those who have an interest in or calling for the arts. I write as someone who appreciates artists: your calling, your giftings, and your ability to influence culture.

Even though I lack the talents of an artist, there are a number of things that motivate me for the arts. First, God is beautiful! He is also the First Artist, and He has made a beautiful universe for us to inhabit. Every time I see the beauty of an Arizona sunset or see the crashing turquoise surf at a Hawaiian beach, my heart is thankful for God and the beauty of His creation. Indeed, the Psalmist is right, “The heavens *declare the glory of God*” (Psalm 19:1).

Second, my heart has been broken for the poor. Many people who are poor are gifted artists and have had little encouragement to express themselves in their art. The world they inhabit, the world of slums and refugee camps, is filled with chaos, darkness and absence of beauty. When I first came to work at Food for the Hungry International (FHI) in the early 1980’s, our founder, Dr. Larry Ward, used to say that he would like to see FHI be known as the agency that planted flowers in refugee camps. Larry understood that the poor need to have hope, and that the glory of God is revealed in the beauty of flowers. Flowers might be the only sign of hope that the poor have.

William Carey, the father of modern missions, described what he saw when he first arrived in India. He wrote of the immense poverty he found in the lives of the masses of Hindu poor:

... [they] made stupid contentment the habit of their lives. *Their minds resembled their mud homesteads, devoid of pictures, ornaments and books* [italics mine]. Harmless, indifferent, vacant, they plod on in the path of their forefathers...¹

How can the poor come face to face with the Living God, the First Artist, so that their minds can be filled with the imagination of beauty and their lives and homes reflect the beauty they can see in the Creator and His creation?

¹ Quoted in Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), pp. 30-31.

It is told that when the Protestant Reformation came to Holland, people responded to their new faith by putting art on the walls of their homes and flowers in window boxes. Why did they do this? They were celebrating their lives before the face of the beautiful God.

My third motivation to address the issue of the arts is the faces of many friends who have been called into the arts and who have had little support and often discouragement from the Church, pastors, or Christian peers for their calling. The tears in their eyes have broken my heart. In our generation, the Church has often abandoned her rich calling to the arts for a weak super-spirituality. This narrative is a call for freedom, for release of those Christians who are gifted in the arts. It is a challenge for the Church to regain her heritage as the prime encourager for the artist and the arts.

The fourth, and perhaps the most compelling motive I have for writing this paper, is to see Christians released into the arts and for some Christians to be free to be called to be *balladeers*² for Christ and His kingdom. We live in a very broken world, a world that the God of the universe is touching. One of the vehicles of His touch is through the manifestation of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, through the arts. Cultures are waiting to be redeemed and nations disciplined. The artist has a very significant role in this process.

Questions

Where does the *impulse* for human creativity come from? What are the implications of this impulse for Christians who have a call to the arts, especially as it relates to the issue of culture and discipling a nation? Why is it that some people are born with music in their soul, dance in their legs, a poem on their lips, or hands longing for a canvas and brush or for the touch of clay? Where does human longing for Beauty, Goodness, and Truth come from? Does my worldview provide a basis for art and music?

These questions and others reverberate in the individual and around the world. They are good questions which demand answers. But unfortunately, not all answers are the same. Different worldviews answer these questions in very different ways, and they do not all answer them adequately. A worldview that excludes a Creator gives us a world that is not a *creation*; it gives us a world that is only illusion (Hinduism) or only nature (Secularism). You cannot have a creation without a Creator. You cannot have a Creator without a creation. But many philosophies and religions have no Creator and thus have “worlds without beginning.”

Worlds without Beginning

Daniel J. Boorstin, the author of *The Creators*, is a Pulitzer Prize winning historian and, for many years, was the Librarian of the United States Congress. His book *The Creators* explores the artistic impulse found in man. It asks the questions, “Where has this impulse come from? Whence man ‘the creator’?”

Most religious and philosophic movements are not troubled by the “mystery of creation.” They suppose worlds without beginning, worlds without a Creator. Boorstin examines Hinduism,

² The word balladeer was used during Medieval times to refer to people who sang ballads—stories put to song, in public places. I am using the word for those Christians who are artists (not just songwriters and singers) who are called to be a prophetic voice to their culture or the nations. Their call is to consciously bring Kingdom Culture: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty into the marketplace and public square.

Confucianism, Buddhism, Greek polytheism, and Islam. I will add Secularism and Evangelical Gnosticism to my discussion.

Hinduism

Hinduism is monistic; that is, it holds to the absolute oneness of all things. There is no Creator God in the Judeo-Christian sense. The universe is not a result of creation but of a *de*-creation, a breaking of the one absolute unity. Before the universe existed, everything was *one*. Then the absolute oneness was broken. Boorstin writes:

For the Hindu the creation was not a bringing into being the wonder of the world. Rather it was dismemberment, a disintegration of the original Oneness. For him the Creation seemed not the expression of a rational, benevolent Maker in wondrous new forms but a fragmenting of the unity of nature into countless limited forms. The Hindu saw the creation of our world as “the self-limitation of the transcendent.” For the Hindu our very notion of creation was reversed. Instead of transforming nothing into everything, the Hindu creation broke into countless imperfect fragments what was already there.³

In Hinduism, the material world is *maya*, an illusion. Not only is it unimportant, but it does not exist. Therefore, there is no reason to make anything of it. In Hinduism, man is a “spirit.” The goal of life is to “get off the wheel,” the endless cycles of reincarnation, to escape the brokenness, to be “uncreated,” to be reunited with the absolute One.

Confucianism

Similar to the naturalism of modern Secularism, Confucianism is more a practical philosophy of everyday life than a religion. It focuses primarily on how to live in the world. The followers of Confucius had little time to contemplate the mystery of beginnings. Boorstin writes:

Confucius himself, so far as we know, was not much interested in cosmogony [the origin or generation of the world and universe], metaphysics, or the origins of the universe. And his successors turned neither to creating gods nor to one Creator-God. Instead they described creation as a process of natural forces.⁴

Like modern day Secularism, Confucianism sees life coming about not through a Creator God, but through a slow evolutionary process.

Buddhism

Like Confucianism, Buddhism began as an “atheistic religion.” Its founder, Prince Siddhartha, later called Gautama Buddha, had reacted to what he considered the crass spirituality of Hinduism. Like Confucius, he had no desire to understand the world. However, unlike Confucius, he had no desire to improve the world, but only to escape it.

³ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Creators: A History of Heroes of the Imagination* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Buddhism held to Four Holy Truths: 1) All existence is suffering. 2) All suffering stems from man's selfishness. 3) Nirvana, the goal of Buddhism, is freedom from suffering. 4) Man's selfish cravings end when man follows the Holy Eightfold Path to enlightenment. This way of enlightenment leads to the *extinction of the self*. Buddhism is similar to Hinduism in its belief in the values of the disappearance of the individual.

On the issue of creation, Boorstin writes of Buddhism:

Is it any wonder that the Buddha dismissed those who asked when and how the world was created? That he aimed at them "the unbearable repartee" of silence? What soul en route to Buddhahood would waste energy on the mystery of creation? The Buddha aimed at Un-Creation. The Creator, if there was one, was plainly not beneficent.... If there was a Creator, it was he who had created the need for the extinction of the self, the need to escape rebirth, the need to struggle toward Nirvana. The Lord of the Buddhists was the Master of Extinction. And no model for man the creator.⁵

Greek Polytheism

Unlike the monism of Hinduism and Buddhism and the atheism of Confucianism and Secularism, the Greeks believed that there were gods and that they were "personal gods." But in contrast to the one infinite-personal God of the Theism of Islam, Judaism and Christianity, the Greeks believed in a myriad of finite personal gods. This belief, called polytheism, saw the gods more like glorified human beings than the transcendent Creator God of Theism.

Boorstin writes:

The Greeks every day saw men and women aided or frustrated by the whims or purposes of the gods. This they found more urgent and more interesting than speculation over how and why it all began.

So, too, by showing their gods and goddesses as immortal men and women with all the human passions, fears, and hopes, they made men and women the more godlike.... The Greeks shaped their gods in man's image. They made *man their point of departure*, [italics mine], and for them the problems of Creation were only afterthoughts.⁶

Instead of a creation story, where the infinite-personal God creates the universe, the Greeks witness the beginnings of the gods. Boorstin comments that the Greeks replaced cosmology with *genealogy* [italics mine];⁷ He writes of Hesiod's epic poem *Theogony*:

... going back to the very beginning provides a gory and sexually explicit chronicle of the birth of the gods. Every act of Creation was an episode of divine loves and hates.... Unlike what we read in Genesis, Hesiod shows us not the Act of Creation but *countless acts of procreation* [italics mine].⁸

⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

⁶ Ibid., p.33.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 34 -35.

Like the Hindus, the Greeks were suspicious of matter. Plato suggests that reality was spiritual and that this physical world was merely a “shadow.” The fact that this world lacks substance had an impact on the arts in Greek society. Professor Colin E. Gunton of King’s College London writes that: “[t]he doctrine that matter is dubiously real was one of the reasons for Plato’s well-known suspicion of art, well illustrated by the expulsion of the poets from his ideal state.”⁹

Islam

In contrast with the monism of Hinduism and Buddhism, the polytheism of Greek mythology, and the atheism of Confucianism and Secularism, stands the triad of Theistic religions coming from the loins of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In these three, God is Creator. But there is a distinction between Islam and Judeo-Christian Theism.

In Biblical Theism, God created the universe “in the beginning.” Today, He sustains the universe. At the time of creation, God placed His image bearers on the earth to function as vice regents or stewards of creation. Boorstin writes:

The uniqueness of the biblical Creator-God was in his powers of making; the uniqueness of man and woman too would be in their power to imitate their God and after their fashion to exercise the power of creation. After God created the species in the Beginning, he blessed them to be fruitful and multiply; He made them so that each procreated after its kind (Genesis 1:22). This spectacle of Creation shaped and limited Western man’s thinking.¹⁰

In contrast, Islam has a very different concept of creation. Boorstin writes:

The Muslim Creator-God is notable not only, nor even mainly, for His work in the Beginning, but as an orderer, a commander, of life and death in our present.... But the Muslim God awes us by the continuity, the omnipresence, the immediacy, and the inscrutable arbitrariness of his decrees.

In the Koran, God’s fiat recurs in the conception and gestation of every human being, in every repetitive phenomenon of nature. Again and again God gives his orders, “Be” and it is, for each stage in man’s growth. Every such decree of re-creation provides an additional “sign” of God’s power and authority.¹¹

This is “fatalism” in all its fullness. There is only one actor on the stage of history, and he is Allah. There is no place for man. There is no place for man to create something new, to make real history. Boorstin concludes: “What clearer warning against reaching for the new? For a believing Muslim, to create is a rash and dangerous act.”¹²

Secularism

Modern Western Secularism begins with the universe and not with God. Secularism, by its very nature, is atheistic. Without a Creator, there is no creation, only nature. It was Darwin’s mythology of

⁹ Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 50.

¹⁰ Boorstin, p. 68.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., p. 69.

evolution that made plausible life on earth without a Creator. However, in this model man does not transcend nature; he is part of it. He is, at best, an animal, at worst, a machine. There is no place for man the “creator.” There is no explanation for the impulse towards art that is found in mankind.

As there is no God or transcendence in Secularism, art has no transcendent purpose. The purpose is merely pragmatic. Art is used for utilitarian purposes. In consumer societies art is used for commercial purposes. In communistic or fascist societies, the arts are often used for purposes of propaganda.

Evangelical Gnosticism

Before we examine the Biblical Theistic alternative to all that we have seen above, we must make note of the compromised Evangelical Gnostic position. Many Christians, in response to Secularism’s inroads into the Church, abandoned the biblical worldview for the Greek Gnostic worldview.

The ancient Greeks divided the universe into the spiritual and the physical. The spiritual was high and holy. The physical was low and “dirty.” The spiritual was sacred, and the physical was secular. This sacred-secular dichotomy is also known as dualism.

Evangelical Gnosticism tends to begin with the Fall of Adam and Eve described in the third chapter of Genesis. God’s response to the Fall is the cross where Jesus dies to save man’s fallen soul for heaven and eternity. Beginning with the Fall, the profound importance of the creation (Genesis chapters one and two) and the Cultural Mandate given in Genesis 1:28 have been lost. What is important is the spiritual life and spiritual concerns. This world and matters of culture are of little importance. They are part of the “secular” realm.

In the Evangelical Gnostic paradigm, art is found in the lower or secular world. As Plato wanted to abolish art from the ideal Greek state, so Evangelical Gnostics abolish the arts from the Christian life. Music, film, art—these are worldly endeavors. Art has little intrinsic importance. Christian artists are relegated to being second class citizens in the life of the Church.

For art to have any value in most evangelical circles, it must deal with spiritual or religious themes. It may also be justified if it is employed in worship or evangelism. What is lost is art for the glory of God, art for art’s sake, or art as a vehicle for bringing beauty into life. There is no space for the Christian artist to be an artist. There is little concept of, and virtually no place for the *balladeer*—the prophetic artist—to speak into the world.

With the exception of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, the major world religions and religious philosophies posit a world without beginnings, a world without a Creator. But if creation does not exist, from where comes the creative impulse that we see in mankind around the world? Wherefore the dance, the music, the sculptor, the drama, the poetry, the painting? From what framework does this come? The opening line of the biblical narrative explodes into the longings of artists around the world:

“In the beginning ... GOD created ... the heavens and the earth.”

In the Beginning God

In contrast to a world without beginnings, we find these revolutionary words: “*In the beginning* God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).¹³ This answers the questions of women’s and men’s longings to draw, write, paint, sculpt, and make music and dance. This line, “In the beginning God ...” is the opening line of the biblical narrative and it establishes the “story line” for The Story. A meta-narrative that begins with these words creates a very different world and a very different context for our own lives and stories than do the other alternatives we have been examining.

The name of the first book of the Bible, *Genesis*, signifies beginnings. The Hebrew title of the first book of the Bible is *Bereshith*, literally “In the beginning!” This word stands as a fitting contrast to the worlds without beginning. The Greek counterpart for the Hebrew *Bereshith* means “origin,” “source,” or “beginning.” So while most of the other philosophies and religions have a world without beginnings, the Judeo-Christian faith shouts out, “There was a beginning!”

The significance of “In the beginning God”

First, let’s note that if there was a beginning, then there must also have been a “before the beginning.” Before the beginning, God existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Before the beginning, there was a Creator, there was *Imagination*.

The second thing to note is that in the beginning, God made the Primary Creation—Reality (with a capital “R”)—out of nothing—*ex-nihilo*. The creation was in harmony with God, with His intentions, and it was in harmony with itself. As we shall see later, God’s creation provided the context and the resources from which artists begin their creative activity.

We also see that God, the Creator-God, is the First Artist. He was the First Composer, creating the sound of the waves and the wind, the silences of the heavens, the music of the spheres, the choir of birds in the morning’s dawn. He was the First Painter, creating spectacular sunrises and sunsets, colorful gardens, birds and fish—living art. He was the First Sculptor, forming the Grand Canyon, the mighty Rocky Mountains, the Alps and Himalayas. He was the First Choreographer, creating the dances of the porpoise, the mating dance of the pigeon, the flight of the humming bird, the floating of the snowflake, and the falling of the leaves. He was the First Author, giving us the first words, writing HISStory, giving us the Bible, the hymns of the Psalms, and the *poema* of our own lives (Ephesians 2:10).

The Creator at work

After the opening lines, we find that God had made, as it were, the “unformed clay.” This is revealed in Genesis 1:2, “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Note the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, began to bring form to the unformed. He “*hovered*” gives us the sense of the Spirit’s care for creation, the archetype for the hen hovering over her brood of chicks.

The creation continues with the formation of the inanimate matter.

¹³ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. (Genesis 1:3-5)

Note the power of the spoken word. God spoke creation into existence. He used words to bring creation into existence. Psalm 33:6-9 captures the sense of this.

⁶ “By the *word* of the LORD were the heavens made,
their starry host by the breath of his mouth.

⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea into jars;
he puts the deep into storehouses.

⁸ Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the people of the world revere him.

⁹ *For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.*”

Note again, that God created by speaking words. The First Poet brings into Reality, His poem.

At each step of the creation we see the Artist’s evaluation of His work. We can almost picture the painter examining his canvas as he unfolds the images from his mind. The First Artist examines His work to make sure it was as He had imagined it. Six times in Genesis (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) we read, “It is good” (pleasant). Five times (1:7, 9, 11, 15, 24) we read, “It is so” (just so, “it is established”). Following the creation of man, God looks at what He has made and proclaims, “It is very good” (Genesis 1:31). His creation is the Divine Masterpiece.

As we move to the post-creation record, we find that God created “*all things*.” The prophet Isaiah notes (40:25-26):

“To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.
Lift your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one,
And calls them each by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.”

Note that the Lord asks through the prophet Isaiah, “Who created all these?”

Who created all these? God did. Nothing that He intended to create was missing when He was finished. Likewise, the Apostle Paul reveals the comprehensiveness of creation. In Colossians 1:16 Paul writes, “For by him *all things* were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; *all things* were created by him and for him” [italics mine]. God the First Creator, is the Creator of *all things*.

“*God’s art communicates!*”¹⁴

¹⁴ Edith Schaeffer, *Hidden Art* (Location: The Norfolk Press, 1971), p. 15.

As Christian writer and co-founder of L'Abri Fellowship Edith Schaeffer has noted, God's art communicates. God has communicated through His Word—the Bible, and works—the creation. His Word, what theologians call Special Revelation, tells us, among other things, about the Creator and the creation. His works, what theologians call General Revelation, reveal His existence and the results of His imagination to all mankind.

Special Revelation confirms the power of General Revelation to communicate about the Creator. The apostle Paul states that God's eternal power and divine nature are revealed to all people through creation in Romans 1:20. "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Similarly, the Psalmist David, in poetic terms, tells us that God's art communicates about the Creator. Psalm 19:1-4:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.
There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.
Their voice
goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

Again, in his book to the Romans, Paul talks about how creation communicates about the First Artist to the entire earth and all peoples. In Romans 10:18 he quotes from Psalm 19:4: "But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: 'Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.'"

What do the heavens declare? *The glory of God!* Edith Schaeffer conveys this powerfully:

*The heavens continued to communicate something to man, something of the glory and wonder of God. The heavens continue to declare to man something of the fact that He is there. They testify that He exists, that He is the Supreme Artist and the Perfect Scientist...*¹⁵

The astronomer Galileo understood that a scientist could explore the universe and learn about both God and His creation. The key to exploring the universe, he added, is to understand the language that God used to create. Galileo wrote:

Philosophy [Nature] is written in that great book which ever lies before our eyes. I mean the universe, but we cannot understand it if we do not first learn the language and grasp the symbols in which it is written. The book is written in the mathematical language...¹⁶

A world without beginnings leaves little or no room to explain and support man as an artist. A world with beginnings creates the framework for man's artistic expression and longing for the beautiful.

The Crown Jewel of God's Creation

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶ Quoted in Edward Rothstein, *Emblems of Mind: The Inner Life of Music and Mathematics* (New York: Times Books/Random House, 1995), p. 196.

The imago dei

As God comes to the close of His creative activity, He has yet to make the steward who cares for the Master's house, the vice regent who rules in God's stead. In Genesis 1:26-28 we find the remarkable words that reveal the impetus for human artistic expression:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

This text reveals to all who will see, the wonderful nature of the *imago dei*, the image of God. First note that the *imago dei* is male and female. There are two equal and different expressions of the image of God, female and male. Second, because God is a Creator, the *imago dei* is also creative. In fact, man is the Secondary Creator or Co-Creator with God, or what Edith Schaeffer calls the *creative creatures*.¹⁷

Resources for human creativity

Man is not autonomous. He must begin his creativity with what God has provided. Cultural commentator and Christian apologist, Os Guinness writes: "Human creativity is derivative and reflective, working within the bounds of what God has formed."¹⁸ What God has provided as assets for the creative process come from both inside and outside of man.

The assets from *outside* of man are found in the material world, including materials for making tools, colors, canvas, clay, paper, ink, etc. They would also include the elements of design¹⁹ and beauty (the laws of aesthetics). This would also include the framework of the creation order, including physical and meta-physical laws.

The assets found *inside* of man refer to the imagination of man's heart and mind and to the will, the internal mechanism for making free choices regarding which ideas should be developed and how to best develop those ideas. Fortunately man is a spirit-body being, so his hands and feet form the connectors between the inside and the outside resources.

The importance of the human imagination

Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary, the first American dictionary of the English language, defines imagination as: "n. [L. imaginatio.] The power or faculty of the mind by which it conceives and forms ideas of things communicated to it by the organs of sense.... Imagination is the power, which gives birth to the productions of the poet and the painter.... Conception; image in the mind; idea.... First motion or purpose of the mind. Gen.6."

¹⁷ Schaeffer, p. 28.

¹⁸ Quoted in Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999), p. 449.

¹⁹ Elements of design would include such things as color and value, space, shape, and line and texture.

Human imagination is the crowning purpose of the heart and mind of man. It is the power to make mental images of things seen and unseen. Edith Schaeffer, writing in *Hidden Art*, describes the relationship between imagination and art. She writes: “Whatever it is, surely art involves *creativity* and *originality*. Whatever form art takes, it gives outward expression to what otherwise would remain locked in the mind, unshared.”²⁰

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant made similar observation: “The imagination is a powerful agent for creating, as it were, a second nature out of the material supplied to it by actual nature.”²¹

God has made man in His image; as such man is both a Word-Maker (Genesis 2:15) and an Image-Maker (Genesis 6:5). The English author and creator of the Hobbit and Middle Earth, J.R.R. Tolkien, writes that art is the “operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation.”²²

The wonder of man, the *imago dei*, is that beginning with what God has provided, man is able to make *new* things. A composer can create a symphony that no one has ever heard before. A painter can create a painting that no eye has ever seen before. A poet can write a poem that no one has ever read before. While all of this is original, none of it surprises God. Edith Schaeffer captures this sense:

... we are created in the likeness of *the Creator*. We are created in the image of a *Creator*.

So we are, on a finite level, people who can create. Why does man have creativity? Why can man think of many things in his mind [imagination], and choose, and then bring forth something that other people can taste, smell, feel, hear, and see? Because man was created in the image of a Creator. Man was created that he might create. It is not a waste of man’s time to be creative. It is not a waste to pursue artistic or scientific pursuits in creativity, because that is what man was *made* to be able to do.²³

In addition to the ability to create, women and men have also been made to appreciate beauty, to appreciate art. There is a longing built inside of every *imago dei* for Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

The “Transcendent Harmony”: Seeking Unity

Mankind has through the ages wondered about the supreme mystery of the connection, in human categories, between *Mind* and *Heart*, math and music, science and art, reason and intuition. Ultimately, as we shall discover, these flow from God’s Being and *Imagination*.

Mankind has longed to find the greater unity or harmony of the couplets just mentioned. As we look from the human point of view, the Transcendent God has to be the integration point of these couplets. He is their source; they are an integral part of His Being. He is the fountainhead of math and music, science and art, reason and intuition. Two examples, one of a young poet and the other of a scientist, give testimony to this reality.

²⁰ Schaeffer, p. 14.

²¹ Rothstein, p. 170.

²² J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (London: Unwin Books, 1964), p. 44.

²³ Schaeffer, p. 24.

As the young poet William Wordsworth, awaits the dawn on top of Mount Snowden in the Lake District of England, he reflects on where the beauty that lay before him has come from. He then pens what he has imagined, that there is a “majestic intellect” ... “the emblem of a mind.”²⁴

Likewise, the Pulitzer Prize winning scientist Jacques Monod proclaims as he explores the wonders of creation, “... one of the fundamental characteristics common to all living beings without exception: that of being *objects endowed with a purpose or project*...”²⁵

Both the artist and the scientist recognize the Divine Imagination at work in the world. Jamie James, author of *The Music of the Spheres* calls this integration of art and science, “transcendental harmony.”²⁶ James states: “Yet every scholar of the history of science or of music can attest to the intimate connection between the two. In the classical view it was not really a connection but an identity.”²⁷

Edward Rothstein, writing in *Emblems of Mind*, points out that the scientist recognizes the “art in science” and the artist recognizes the “mathematics in music.” He writes of the great astronomer and physicist Johannes Kepler: “Johannes Kepler believed the planets’ revolutions literally created a ‘music of the spheres’—a sonic counterpart to his mathematical laws of planetary motion.”²⁸ Similarly, the great composer Chopin recounts, “The fugue is like pure logic in music.”²⁹

Science explores creation so that we may have a better understanding of the nature of God and the nature of His creation. Art, on the other hand, allows us to join with the rest of creation in communicating to the watching world, the glory of God and the wonder of what He has made.

Bringing Every Thought Captive to Christ

The apostle Paul calls upon Christians to “... demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and *we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10:5) [italics mine]. As Christians we are to integrate our lives and work with the imagination of Christ. Two predecessors who consciously dedicated themselves to bringing “every thought captive to Christ” are one of the greatest composers of all times, J.S. Bach and the astronomer Johannes Kepler. They both stood in amazement of the glory of God and His creation. They also recognized that they were living their lives, in music and science, before the face of God. Bach wrote:

The wisdom of the Lord is infinite; so also are His glory and His power. Ye heavens, sing His praises! Sun, moon, and planets glorify Him... And thou, my soul, praise thy Creator! It is by Him and in Him that all exists. That which we know best is comprised in Him, as well as in our vain science. To Him be praise, honor and glory throughout eternity.³⁰

In a like vein, Kepler writes of his own work:

²⁴ Rothstein, p. 4.

²⁵ Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 9.

²⁶ Jamie James, *The Music of the Spheres: Music, Science, and the Natural Order of the Universe* (Location: Copernicus Press, 1993), p. 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁸ Rothstein, p. xvi.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Quoted in Rothstein, p. 198.

I undertake to prove that God, in creating the universe and regulating the order of the cosmos, had in view the five regular bodies of geometry as known since the days of Pythagoras and Plato, and that he has fixed according to those dimensions, the number of heavens, their proportions, and the relations of their movements.³¹

Both Bach and Kepler worshiped the Supreme Scientist and Glorious Artist. They understood that Truth, Goodness, and Beauty reign in the universe. Because of this, there is no inherent disconnect between science and art, music and mathematics. They find their final integration in God Himself. And these men understood that as image bearers of the Living God, they dwelled in His presence, not only in their religious life but also in their art and science.

Science and art have lost their soul!

Today, both science and art have lost their “soul.” Both have been separated from their source in the Creator and from the pursuit of Truth and Beauty. Instead, they have been reduced to mechanics and technique. Science has replaced the pursuit of Truth—“thinking God’s thoughts after Him”—with the making of technology and consumer goods. Music has replaced the pursuit of Beauty with the production of what is often crass and vulgar entertainment. Disorder reigns in the arts.

With the rise of a secular worldview, in which the transcendent is abolished, the concept of art and science has dramatically changed. Jamie James writes:

“In the modern age it is a basic assumption that music appeals directly to the soul ... and bypasses the brain altogether, while science operates in just the reverse fashion, confining itself to the realm of pure ratiocination [reasoning] and having no contact at all with the soul.”³²

The creation of Narnia

C.S. Lewis, a professor of Medieval and Renaissance literature at Oxford and later Cambridge University, captures the sense of God being the Transcendent Harmony when he writes of the creation of Narnia in the children’s story series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In the book, *The Magician’s Nephew*, the lion Aslan, the figure of Christ, creates the land of Narnia by singing.

The Bible reveals that God created the universe by speaking. Some scientists have pointed out that “mathematics is the language of creation.” Lewis captures the Transcendent Harmony, the bringing together of math and music, reason and intuition, by having Aslan *sing* creation into existence. Lewis writes:

In the darkness something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. It was very far away and ... it [was] hard to decide from what direction it was coming. Sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once. Sometimes ... [it seemed as though] it was coming out of the earth beneath them. Its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself. There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise he had ever heard....

³¹ Quoted in Rothstein, p. 197.

³² James, p. 12.

Then two wonders happened at the same moment. One was that the voice was suddenly joined by other voices; more voices than you could possibly count. They were in harmony with it, but far higher up the scale: cold, tingly, silvery voices. The second wonder was that the blackness overhead, all at once, was blazing with stars. They didn't come out gently one by one, as they do on a summer evening. One moment there had been nothing but darkness; next moment a thousand, thousand points of light leaped out—single stars, constellations, and planets, brighter and bigger than any in our world.... The new stars and the new voices began at exactly the same time. If you had seen and heard it, ... you would have felt quite certain that it was the stars themselves who were singing, and that it was the First Voice, the deep one, which had made them appear and made them sing.³³

As Aslan continues to sing, the sun and moon appear, then living things, plants and animals. Different “songs” accompany each part of the creation that all crescendo into the wonder of Narnia.

The heart of the intimacy

Rothstein, James and others ponder what lies at the heart of this intimacy between math and music. Rothstein writes:

What could the links between mathematics and music possibly be? Why does the imagery of the eternal and the divine, the natural and the unnatural, seem to hover so persistently around mathematics and music? ... How also are we to understand the ‘art’ of mathematics and the ‘science’ of music?³⁴

Without the Creator, attempts of harmony between math and music end with *words* like “transcendent harmony.” Such words and phrases point to something greater, but have no foundation to reveal what is beyond the words. This is similar to the dilemma of the Greeks on Mars Hill in Athens. Paul’s address is recorded in the book of Acts (17:22-23):

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.”

The Greeks had many finite gods. But then they had an altar to “AN UNKNOWN GOD.” This inscription pointed to something and someone they did not know. Paul came to proclaim the Living God as the one whom they were “looking for,” whom they had not yet discovered. James’ “transcendent harmony,” points to the one who is “The Transcendent Harmony.” The God of the universe is in His being the “Supreme Artist and Perfect Scientist.”³⁵ Both the science of music and the art of mathematics spring from the Imagination of the Creator.

In *The Magician’s Nephew*, Lewis captures the sense of the creation, that art and science, music and math, are not dichotomized, but are complementary. They spring from the voice of Aslan (which is the metaphor for God).

³³ C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966), pp. 87-88.

³⁴ Rothstein, p. 30.

³⁵ Schaeffer, p. 16.

Behold the Beauty of the Lord

Where does beauty come from? Why do women and men around the world long, in the depths of their soul, for beauty? Why is it that drabness and ugliness create a void in man's soul?

The Psalmist David

King David of the Old Testament answers these questions with the longing in his own soul. He records in Psalm 27: 4:

“One thing I ask of the LORD,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon *the beauty of the LORD*
and to seek him in his temple.” [italics mine]

David had a hunger for beauty. He knew the source of the beauty that could fill the longing of his soul. In another of his hymns, David calls upon the people of Israel, to worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness:

“Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
²Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the **splendor of his holiness**” (Psalm 29:1-2).

We find here that God's holiness is beautiful. When we worship the Lord, we come into the presence of His beauty and splendor. Our worship should increasingly reflect this reality. In His being, God is True, Good, and Beautiful. These “God qualities” also produce beauty in us and around us. God's Goodness and Holiness are Beautiful. As light refracts off the nature of God, we see the glory of His Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in the world.

To live before the face of God is to live in the presence of beauty. This is to be reflected in our lives. Douglas Jones and Douglas Wilson, writing in their wonderful and provocative book *Angels In the Architecture*, proclaim that “... a love for the triune and holy God is the foundation of any true love for beauty.”³⁶

Cynthia Pearl Maus, writing in her book *Christ and the Fine Arts*, captures the wonder of beauty:

We are so accustomed to thinking of beauty as merely decorative and ornamental that we forget that beauty is a moral necessity. God wrought beauty in the structure of the universe. Beauty is the high form of righteousness. Beauty and truth are not separated in God's world, and they ought not to be in human thought. God, who gave as much care to paint a lily as to forming the eternal hills, joined truth and beauty in holy union; and what God has joined together, man ought not attempt to put asunder, *because beauty has a moral value for truth.*

This universal love of beauty is one of the resources of human life that Christianity ought to pervade with its spirit and claim as its own. It is to this instinctive love of the beautiful that the

³⁶ Douglas Jones and Douglas Wilson, *Angels In the Architecture* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 1998), p. 26.

artist makes his appeal, and gets, therefore, *a wider hearing for the truth* he presents in this universally loved form.³⁷

We are overwhelmed with beauty that surrounds us. We see beauty expressed in the evening sunset or in the chorus of birds that greet the morning sun. We witness the splendor as we gaze at a mother with her newborn baby or listen to Handel's "Messiah." We behold the beauty in a rainbow, in the colors of tropical fish in a turquoise lagoon, or in the blaze of stars at night. How can one stand before Michelangelo's painting in the Sistine Chapel and not marvel at the One who made and gifted this greatest of artists? God is beautiful and we recognize it in the things that He has made.

Aesthetic poverty in the church

As Western Culture turns its back on the Living God, it becomes utilitarian in imagination and taste. The modern world asks the pragmatic questions, "Will it work?" instead of "Is it true?"; "Is it valuable?" instead of "Is it good?"; and "Is it functional?" instead of "Is it beautiful?"

In the midst of material wealth, the West today is morally, spiritually, and aesthetically bankrupt because we have abandoned the Living God and the beauty of His holiness. As we have moved from an objective standard for beauty found in the beauty and holiness of God, to a standard steeped in relativism, beauty is truly "in the eye of the beholder."

This bankruptcy in the general culture has spread into the Church. While there is still a form of spirituality (or in some cases religiosity), the Church today is plagued by Greek Gnosticism, leading to anti-intellectualism, rising immorality, and an anti-aestheticism. As the Church in the West lives in a post-Christian culture that denies the God who is Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, she takes on the values of the general culture.

The war against beauty in the Church is found in music of trite words and poor, shallow choruses and musicology. It is seen in buildings designed for utility (sometimes metal warehouses), and worship that focuses on making people feel good rather than glorifying God in the beauty of His holiness. This is all a reflection that we no longer "see" nor live in the reality of the beauty of His holiness.

We were made to create beauty and bring it into the fabric of our lives. Music is for our ears, painting for the eyes, meals for the eyes and palate, dance for the body, and sculpture for the touch. From the grand scale of a cityscape, to the flowers planted in a window box, man-made environments are to be infused with beauty. God is beautiful; He made a beautiful world (though marred by the Fall) and made His human family to create beauty in their lives and the world.

The Cultural Mandate

Flow of biblical history

The Bible records what some have called Redemption History. The flow of biblical history involves Creation, the Fall, Redemption, and Consummation. It is within this framework that we are to live our lives.

³⁷ Cynthia Pearl Maus, as quoted by Carole G. Adams in "Beholding the Beauty of the Lord: The Fine Arts In Education" in *The Journal of the Foundation for American Christian Education*, VOL. III, F.A.C.E., San Francisco, CA (1991), pp. 63-68.

In Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15, God gives the *Cultural Mandate* for man to develop the earth. The Genesis account of the Fall reveals the distortion and corruption of that mandate. Redemption—the work of Christ on the cross—restores the cultural mandate. The final chapter—Consummation—reveals the return of Christ with His kingdom and for His bride. In this chapter, the gifts of the kings at the wedding feast (Revelation 19:6-9; 21:22-26) mark the end of the Cultural Mandate.

Key elements of the cultural mandate

God created out of nothing, simply by speaking. He created the “stuff” from which human beings are to be creative. He then made man to be His co-creator and gave him the Cultural Mandate to develop the earth (Genesis 1:26-28):

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

God made the world *perfect* and yet *not finished*. God had finished His work and now the steward was to begin his.

There were two parts to the Cultural Mandate, a social component and a developmental component. He charged the *imago dei* to fill the earth with fellow image bearers (social mandate) and then to have dominion over creation (developmental mandate). The world was perfect, but there was much to be discovered—a science mandate, and much to be created—an art mandate. Roman Catholic economist and theologian Michael Novak captures the sense of expectancy in the Garden when he writes:

Creation left to itself is incomplete, and humans are called to be co-creators with God, bringing forth the potentialities the Creator has hidden. Creation is full of secrets waiting to be discovered, riddles which human intelligence is expected by the Creator to unlock. The world did not spring from the hand of God as wealthy as humans might make it.³⁸

The Cultural Mandate is unfolded further by calling man to employ both his hands and his mind and heart in the task. In Genesis 2:15 man is called to use his **hands** to *cultivate the soil*: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” In Genesis 2:19-20 man is called to use his **mind** and **heart** to *cultivate his soul* through the naming of the animals:

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

³⁸ Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), p. 39.

The Cultural Mandate begins in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8), but where does it end? The end of the mandate is expressed in a number of vivid pictures: “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9), “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). It ends with the coming of the Kingdom of God, the new Jerusalem—the City of God. The apostle John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ...” (Revelation 21:2a). The mandate began in the Garden but it ends in a city, The City of God (Revelation 21:1, 23-26), a Garden-City (Revelation 22:1-2).

The Cultural Mandate is not a mandate for one person. It takes community to create culture. Note that God Himself is *community*—“Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness...” (Genesis 1:26), and that the Cultural Mandate requires *community*: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male* and *female* he created them” (Genesis 1:27). It takes both female and male to transform the garden into the garden-city.

The Cultural Mandate requires God-given capital, community, and a multiplicity of skills and talents. We see this expressed in the book of Exodus, when God calls upon Moses to build the tabernacle:

³⁰ Then Moses said to the Israelites, “See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³¹ and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts— ³² to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, ³³ to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship. ³⁴ And he has given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. ³⁵ He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers—all of them master craftsmen and designers. ¹ So Bezalel, Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary are to do the work just as the LORD has commanded” (Exodus 35:30-36:2).

Note in this passage that the craftsmen had a variety of skills, all needed for the completion of the project, and that they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Each had a part to play in the building of the Tabernacle. Likewise, each artist has a part to play in the Cultural Mandate.

Truth, Goodness, and Beauty as the basis for culture

Every culture is a reflection of the god that it worships. Or more simply, *cult* produces *culture*! The living God is True, Good, and Beautiful. Therefore, a culture that stems from the worship of the Living God will manifest His nature to the world. The *three faces of culture* of Judeo-Christianity are manifest in the God of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

In a world filled with confusion, the veracity of God answers man’s longings: “Is there Truth?” “What is Truth?” It presents the biblical *metaphysic*! In a world filled with evil, the Goodness of God answers man’s longings: “Is there Goodness?” “What is Good?” It presents the biblical *ethic*! In a world filled with vulgarity and mediocrity, the Splendor of God answers man’s longings: “Is there any Beauty?” “What is Beauty?” It presents the biblical *aesthetic*!

These three—Truth, Goodness, and Beauty—present to the world what Jones and Wilson call “the three faces of culture.”³⁹

The Mission

God has a mission! That mission is to redeem the lost and to restore that which is broken. It is to see that all nations will be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3) and to disciple the nations (Matthew 28:19-20). He has delegated this mission to man. He asks us to fill the earth with the knowledge of God (Habakkuk 2:14) and to put feet to our prayer “thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

The mission has two components: a horizontal component, which is spreading the gospel around the world, and a vertical component, which is penetrating cultures with the kingdom culture. We will examine these by looking first at the spread of the gospel and then by examining the Great Commission.

The spread of ideas

It is ideas and ideals that shape lives, communities, nations, and the destiny of the world. Ideas and ideals spread three ways: horizontally, temporally, and vertically. Horizontally, they travel around the “surface” of the globe, from one geographic region to another. We see this in the spread of the Christian gospel from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth. They also spread temporally, through time, from one generation to another. We see this in the West today. The modern world is governed by the ideas of a number of dead men: Thomas Malthus with his “*over population problem*,” Charles Darwin with his “*survival of the fittest*,” and Friedrich Nietzsche who said, “*God is dead, therefore, man is dead!*” While these men are long dead, their ideas live on and are governing the thoughts and actions of modern civilization.

The third way that ideas spread is vertically, penetrating culture through the different classes of society from the intellectuals to the balladeers, to the professionals, to the general population. The intellectuals are the reflective members of society. They love to ask and answer questions. They often are found in the universities and monasteries. They are the professors and priests. They are the generators of the ideas that will shape future generations.

Artists tend to be the most sensitive people in a society. Thus, they absorb trends and ideas long before the general population is aware of them. They then proclaim these ideas through the arts. Someone has said, if you want to know how the next generation will live, listen to the music of this generation. The Greek philosopher Plato summarized the importance of the arts in shaping the future of the nation: **“Give me the songs of the nation and it matters not who writes its laws.”**⁴⁰

The professionals are the doctors, lawyers, teachers, politicians, engineers, and businessmen. These are the people who take the ideas and create laws and social, economic, and political institutions that reflect these ideas. They are the people who transform philosophy into policy and policy into programs. It is at this level that the ideas are concretized.

³⁹ Jones and Wilson, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Alvin J. Schmidt, *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), p. 342.

The common person—the fireman, farmer, homemaker and carpenter—then lives under the laws, institutions, and structures created by those ideals. To the extent that these institutions represent Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, the society will flourish. To the extent that they are born of lies, evil, and ugliness, the society will suffer and degrade.

The Great Commission

Jesus had a commission for His disciples. It is first revealed in the prayer He taught His followers (Matthew 6:9-10):

This, then, is how you should pray:

”Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.”

Jesus taught us to pray for His kingdom to come and His will to be done *on earth as it is in heaven*. The Great Commission is the feet to the Lord’s Prayer. Too often we think of the Great Commission as one dimensional. But it is not. It is multi-dimensional and dynamic.

There are three aspects to the Great Commission. The first is geographic. Acts 1:8 says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” The Great Commission is for the *whole geographic world*.

The second aspect is demographic. This is expressed in Matthew 28:19-20. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” The Great Commission is for *all nations, all people groups*.

The third aspect of the Great Commission is what I would call *Ktizographic*.⁴¹ This is expressed in Mark 16:15. “He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.” The Great Commission is for *all creation*.

While it is fundamental that there is a spiritual component to the Great Commission, these verses reveal a more comprehensive picture. The Great Commission has a physical and geographic component (the entire world), a social and political component (all nations), and an ecological and economic component (all creation).

The Great Commission is also progressive. God expects that when people are saved, there will be substantial healing in their lives which will bring changes in society. There is progressiveness reflected in the “coming of the kingdom.”

There is a battle going on for the minds and hearts of men and for entire nations. It is a battle between Christ and Satan. Both Christ’s kingdom and Satan’s are engaged in the conflict. Christ’s death on the

⁴¹ *Ktizographic* is a construct of two Greek words: *ktizo*, the root for *ktisis*, meaning creature or creation, and *grapho*, meaning to describe or delineate.

cross defeated Satan (Colossians 2:15) at the critical moment of the battle. Satan is a conquered enemy. Christ has called His kingdom onto the offense (Matthew 28:18-20a). While the war continues, there are times and places where the kingdom is advancing and times and places where Satan and his minions are “gaining.” Jesus reminds us that the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of Light are growing side by side (Matthew 13:24-20).

Yet while this is going on, the Kingdom of God is advancing. We see this in Isaiah 9:6-7 where it is prophesied that the “increase” of His government *shall have no end*:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. *Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.⁴²

Likewise, in Matthew 14:12, Jesus states that His kingdom is not only advancing, but it is *forcefully advancing*: “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been *forcefully advancing*, and forceful men lay hold of it.”

In Matthew 16:18, the Conquering King reminds His followers that the gates of hell will not prevail against the onslaught of the Church: “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*”⁴³

To summarize, Kingdom Culture involves the proclamation of and living on the basis of God’s Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. The Kingdom of God is on the offensive and it is progressing. It is to be advanced into every dimension of the Great Commission—to the entire world, to every nation and to all creation. The artist who is a Christian has an important part to play in this unfolding drama.

Man’s Art Communicates!

As we have seen previously, God’s creation communicates. Now we want to see that man’s art communicate as well. The question is, what does it communicate? Does it communicate beauty or hideousness, truth or a lie, reality or an illusion, goodness or evil?

The artist is to reflect the Primary Creator and the primary creation

God is the Primary Creator. He imagined the creation, and then He formed it by speaking with his Word. God is the Primary Image-Maker and Word-Maker.

God’s creation is primary reality. Before the Fall, creation was in harmony with God and with itself. Creation manifested God’s Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

God made man *imago dei*—the image of God. As God is the Primary Creator, man is the secondary creator or “sub-creator.” Art is the making of sub-creation or, to use another J.R.R. Tolkien phrase, “Secondary World(s).”⁴⁴

⁴² *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

⁴³ *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

⁴⁴ Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, p. 45.

The joy of discovering Truth, Goodness, and Beauty

The reader of the poem, the student of art, the participant in the drama are surprised by joy when they discover the Primary Creator or His primary creation revealed in the artistic piece. Contemporary Christian songwriter John Michael Talbot captures the sense of the relationship of the artist and the revealing of the Primary Creator:

In every work of the artist he praised the divine Artist. What ever he found in the things made, he refers to the Maker. He rejoiced in all the works of the hands of the Lord, and in beautiful things he saw divine beauty in itself. Whoever is not enlightened by such brilliance of things created must be blind. Whoever is not awakened by their mighty voice, must be deaf and whoever fails to praise God for all His works must be voiceless.⁴⁵

J.R.R. Tolkien captures the sense of this in the epilogue of *Tree and Leaf*. His medium of artistic expression is the “fairy story.” There are two elements to this expression. The first is that secondary creation is to manifest the Primary Creator and primary creation. The second is that biblical history, redemption, and the incarnation are in themselves High Art. They are HIStory. Let’s look at these in their turn.

First, is that art—secondary creation—is to reveal REALITY—the Primary Creator and the primary creation. Tolkien writes:

Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality that can fairly be described by the dictionary definition: ‘inner consistency of reality’, it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not on some way partake of reality. The peculiar quality of the ‘joy’ in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is not only a ‘consolation’ for the sorrow of this world, but a satisfaction, and an answer to that question, ‘Is it true?’ The answer to this question that I gave at first was (quite rightly): ‘If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world.’ That is enough for the artist (or the artist part of the artist). But in the ‘eucatastrophe’ we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater—it may be a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world. The use of this word gives a hint of my epilogue. It is a serious and dangerous matter. It is presumptuous of me to touch upon such a theme; but if by grace what I say has any respect any validity, it is, of course, only one facet of a truth incalculably rich: finite only because the capacity of Man for whom this was done is finite.⁴⁶

Second, is that the reality of the cross is itself an expression of art. Tolkien muses that the gospel, the good news of Christ, is the story that all human beings would long to be true. And in fact it is true. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the most powerful story the world has ever heard, is High Art, from the First Artist. Tolkien writes:

I would venture to say that approaching the Christian Story from this direction, it has long been my feeling (a joyous feeling) that God redeemed the corrupt making-creatures, men, in a

⁴⁵ John Michael Talbot ?

⁴⁶ Tolkien, pp. 61-62.

way fitting to this aspect, as to others, of their strange nature. The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels—peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving: ‘mythical’ in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe... of Man’s history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the ‘inner consistency of reality’. There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical [*sic*] men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath.

It is not difficult to imagine that the peculiar excitement and joy that one would feel, if any specially beautiful fairy-story were found to be ‘primarily’ true, its narrative to be history, without thereby necessarily losing the mythical allegorical significance that it had possessed.... But this story is supreme; and it is true. Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men—and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused.⁴⁷

C.S. Lewis summarizes it well: “...an author should never conceive of himself as bringing into existence beauty or wisdom which did not exist before, but simply and solely as trying to embody in terms of his own art some reflection of that eternal Beauty and Wisdom.”⁴⁸

Elements of Great Art

How do we judge the goodness of art? Might I suggest that good art is not necessarily “religious” art, or art with overtly religious themes? There are three elements of great art: excellence of technique, artistry that stirs the soul, and content that shows forth the glory of God. Let’s examine these briefly.

In **technique**, the Christian artist is to pursue excellence. Christ is the standard of excellence (Colossians 3:23) and thus Christians should not be content with mediocrity. We are to do our work for an audience of One; we are to give, to play on Oswald Chambers’ phrase, “our utmost for His highest.” Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), one of America’s great theologians and philosophers wrote: “God is the head of the universal system of existence from whom all is perfectly derived and on whom all is most absolutely dependent, whose Being and Beauty is the sum and comprehension of all existence and excellence.”⁴⁹

In like vein, Frank Gaebelain writes:

It is because of who and what God is, it is because of the beauty and truth manifest in his Son, it is because of the perfection of his redeeming work, that evangelicals can never be content with the mediocre in aesthetics. Here, as in all else, the call is to the unremitting pursuit of excellence to the glory of the God of all truth.⁵⁰

In **artistry**, the Christian artist is to seek to stir the soul, to touch the longing in the *imago dei* for the beautiful and the holy. Why? Because God is the source of all beauty and holiness. All over the world,

⁴⁷ Tolkien, pp. 62-63.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Colson, p. 449.

⁴⁹ Frank E. Gaebelain, *The Christian, The Arts, and The Truth: Regaining the Vision of Greatness* (Portland, Oregon: Multnomah Press, 1985), p. 59.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

human beings are longing, whether they can articulate it or not, to be connected with *beauty*. This is not merely to see beauty, nor to merely appreciate beauty; it is a longing to have one's life connect to beauty, to live in the presence of the beautiful. The artist's artistry is a living connection to the One who is beautiful.

Remember the Psalmist's words that we are to worship God in the beauty of holiness. The artist has the ability to usher us into worship in the presence of the Living God. The artist will want to paint or sing or sculpt for the glory of God. It is their great challenge and joy to connect mankind to the eternal.

In **content**, the Christian artist should seek for nothing less than to show forth the *glory* of God. The artist's supreme joy is to reveal the Primary Creator and the primary creation to the watching world. It is a call to manifest Truth, Goodness, and Beauty to a world longing for all three. Bad art deals with "unreality" or "illusion." It distorts reality; it disorders God's order. It replaces Truth with a lie; it calls bad good and revels in ugliness and mediocrity at the expense of the Beautiful.

Cynthia Pearl Maus reminds artists of their profound cultural call. She writes:

Art is the interpretation of the great eternal realities of life, and as soon as the artist tries to embody the greatest feelings and aspirations of the human soul, he gets on Biblical ground, for there is no great interest or aspiration of man which the Bible has not treated. It is for this reason that the great artists have dealt so largely with Biblical themes. Painting and the Bible could not be kept separate. They are congenial companions, because they have one common characteristic: both deal, not with the immediate and material, but with the eternal and spiritual. The function of art is to embody the universal and the eternal.⁵¹

Balladeers

What is a balladeer?

The word "balladeer" was used during Medieval times to refer to people who sang ballads— stories put to song—in public places. My desire is to take this word that is seldom used today, and fill it with new content. By the word balladeer, I am referring to those Christians who are artists (not just songwriters and singers) who are called to provide a prophetic voice within their culture and to the nations. Their call is to consciously bring Kingdom Culture—Truth, Goodness, and Beauty—into the marketplace and public square through their artistic expression.

A balladeer is someone who is in love with the Creator and is thankful for salvation. It is someone who is gifted in the arts and has a commitment to lifelong learning from both God's Word and His works. A balladeer has a commitment to conscientiously seek to function from a biblical worldview. This would include understanding the *breadth* of Scripture (the whole story from Creation to the Fall, from the Fall to Redemption, and from Redemption to Consummation), and the *depth* of Scripture, its Hebrew metaphysic. In sum, the balladeer has a commitment to be a "lay" theologian, enough to be able to articulate what is True, Good, and Beautiful.

In addition to being a student of God's Word, a balladeer is a student of His works—creation. It is someone who is awed by creation and who consciously seeks to understand the reality God has made. I think here of Michelangelo's studies of the human body. He appreciated the beauty and order built into created things. In short, a balladeer is someone who is humble before the Divine Creator.

⁵¹ Cynthia Pearl Maus, quoted in Carole G. Adams, p. x.

Art is a God-given gift. Artists need no other justification than that they are called to the arts. The arts are to be a major element of “*worship*[ing] the LORD in the **splendor of his holiness**.” They are to be used in worship. They can be used in *evangelism*. Music and drama create a way to speak to the needs of broken women and men in a way that words cannot. Having said this, the focus for being a *balladeer* is not on art for art’s sake, or for worship and evangelism, but rather it is a conscious process of revealing the glory of God and REALITY to broken people, cultures, and nations.

A balladeer speaks with a prophetic voice. The prophets of old spoke the truth to the nation. They would call evil, evil, and good, good. They were not afraid to challenge the evils found in society. So too, the balladeer exposes the lie, the evil, and the hideousness in the nation. He or she uses his or her art as a vehicle for speaking prophetically to the nation. A balladeer is a conscious conveyor of Kingdom Culture whose purpose is to extend Truth, Goodness, and Beauty through the arts to their culture in a way that seeks to redeem culture.

In a culture that degrades women, the balladeer uses his art to speak of the dignity and honor of women. In a nation where racism or corruption prevails, the balladeer calls for justice. Where human life is trampled, the balladeer speaks of the dignity of life. In a culture where work is seen as a curse, the balladeer writes poems or songs about the dignity of work. In a culture enslaved by fatalism, the balladeer sings of freedom and of people as history makers. In a refugee camp where there is no hope, the balladeer plants a flower garden. In a society where life has been sucked from the people and the walls of the buildings are filled with graffiti, the balladeer paints a mural. In a culture marked by cruelty, the balladeer writes about compassionate people.

A balladeer is a secondary creator who seeks to glorify God, the Primary Creator, and reveal the primary creation through art. In doing so, the artist will be a balladeer who is redeeming culture and discipling nations.

Those Who Have Gone Before!

As we near the end of our study, let us briefly examine a number of balladeers, both contemporary and historic.

Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) was a writer who was so concerned about the moral evil of slavery that she wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, an anti-slavery novel. Her book stirred a nation, changed public attitudes, and brought pressure upon the government to change policy in relationship to slavery. Storytelling stirs the mind and the heart. Stowe’s story changed the nation and eventually contributed to the ending of slavery in much of the world. When Abraham Lincoln welcomed Stowe to the White House he greeted her as “the little lady who made this big war [the U.S. Civil War].”⁵²

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) was a poet and songwriter. When God raised up John and Charles Wesley, England was an impoverished and decadent society. When the brothers died a half a century later, the society was on its way to being transformed. John Wesley, the great evangelist and founder of Methodism, preached Christ and Him crucified. The Wesleys knew that the truth which could transform individual lives could also transform society. Not only did they develop “methods” (and thus the name “Methodists”) for discipleship, accountability, and multiplication, they also used music as a vehicle for bringing transformation to minds and then to society.

⁵² William R. Mattox, Jr., “A Novel Idea: How Harriet Beecher Stowe Changed the World,” *Citizen Magazine*, Focus on the Family, March 1998, p. 18.

The Methodist movement began primarily among the working class—multitudes of the illiterate and impoverished. Charles Wesley composed over 6,000 hymns during his lifetime. These hymns were used of God to fill “empty” minds with theology and biblical principles for life. As the truth and virtue of Scripture touched the hearts and minds of the masses, lives and behavior were transformed. Corruption in society was challenged. Drug abuse and alcoholism declined. Child labor and sweatshops were regulated, and eventually slavery was overturned. In short, the nation was transformed. Much of the transformation can be accounted to the Holy Spirit’s using the hymns of the poet Charles Wesley. Dr. James Martineau, writes concerning the Methodists’ hymns: “*The Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, issued in 1780, was, after the scriptures the grandest instrument of popular religious culture that Christendom has ever produced.”⁵³

Johann Sebastian Bach (1735-1782) is one of the greatest classical composers of all time. Someone has observed that Bach was a musician who “lived the Bible.” Albert Schweitzer, the missionary medical doctor and Bach scholar, called him “the Fifth Evangelist.” It is well known that Bach would write the letters J.J.—Latin for *Jesu Juva* (Jesus Help Me!) at the beginning of his compositions. At the end he would write S.D.G.—Latin for *Soli Deo Gloria* (To the Glory of God Alone!). Bach lived one life, in one world. His music was for the glory of God.

Bach understood that music is mathematical because the First Composer is the Orderer of the universe. Bach’s compositions have set the standard for those who followed. Chuck Colson, the founder of Prison Fellowship, wrote an article for his BreakPoint e-newsletter entitled *Bach’s “Fifth Gospel”*: *The Enduring Power of Artistic Excellence*. In it he says:

Christianity has never had a very strong presence in Japan. In fact, with industrialization, Japan has become one of the most secular nations on earth. But right now, thousands of Japanese are hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ in a new, or should I say an old, way—and they’re embracing it.

The evangelist responsible for leading this spiritual awakening might surprise you. He’s none other than Johann Sebastian Bach.

That’s right. The German composer who died 250 years ago is bringing Christianity to Japan through the beauty of his music. Now there are reports of thousands of Japanese, inspired by his cantatas, converting to Christianity. *It’s a testament to the power of art steeped in a biblical worldview.* [italics mine]⁵⁴

Note that Bach did not set out to do evangelism with his music. What he did set out to do was to glorify God and bring biblical Truth, Goodness, and Beauty to the culture of his own day. And God is now using these same compositions to make Christ known in Japan.

Bengal Creative Media is a contemporary company of artists—balladeers—who are using the creative arts to address critical issues in Bengali society. They do live theater performances in cities and villages throughout Bangladesh. Drama is a favorite form of both entertainment and instruction in low literate Bengali society. These gifted artists have a Creative Arts Center where they train people in theater development, music, song, and dance. They produce videos to be distributed widely in Bengali society. Their work deals with critical issues facing the society, using biblical wisdom to address these

⁵³ Quoted in D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, Indiana: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), p. 155.

⁵⁴ Charles Colson, BreakPoint Commentary #000309, *Bach’s “Fifth Gospel”*, 3/9/2000.

issues. Some of the issues they address are abortion, polygamy, dowry, corruption, health care, illiteracy, child rights, and godly living. God is using this group of Christians to bring Beauty and Truth into this very needy culture.

Kathryn Graham is a contemporary Canadian singer and songwriter. Her passion is to raise awareness and action for the persecution of Christians around the world. In order to do this, she has formed MakePeace International. Kathryn has created a CD entitled *Crosses Are Burning*. It tells the stories, through song, of Christians who are being persecuted around the world. Kathryn writes: “Art is a wonderful bridge, because it bypasses the intellect and reaches directly into the imagination. It brings truth to the deepest part of us, where we can really listen and be inspired to act.”⁵⁵

Rajesh Kumar Masih is an Indian theologian and songwriter. His home is in DehraDoon, a city in the foothills of the Himalayas in Northern India. Rajesh is one of the few Christians in his ethnic group that is largely “unreached.” His people’s dialect is a dying language. Rajesh writes ballads in his native language in an attempt to help preserve the dialect and to reach his people in their heart tongue. His chosen instrument is a locally popular harmonium, similar to an accordion. Rajesh transforms biblical stories into ballads to convey biblical principles and virtues. A wonderful example is his ballad of the Good Samaritan that calls his people to love their neighbor and to care for the broken in their own society.

God has used artists and the arts, throughout history, to reflect His priorities, principles, and concerns. My hope is that this paper will inspire others to be balladeers to their culture and generation for the glory of God. Listen to the challenge of social critic and apologist Dr. Os Guinness: “Our gifts are ultimately God’s... This is why our gifts are always ‘ours for others,’ whether in the community of Christ or the broader society outside, especially the neighbor in need.”⁵⁶

Our Task Today!

There are a number of things that the Church can do to encourage the arts and artists. Here are several suggestions.

Establish schools for kingdom balladeers. In these schools there will be an emphasis on Truth and Beauty. Students will study both the arts and the Bible and learn to integrate Truth, Goodness, and Beauty into their art.

Encourage Christian artists to create art that intentionally reflects the Primary Creator and the primary creation—“for glory and for beauty” (Exodus 28:40b).

Consciously seek to employ the arts as a vehicle to redeem culture and to build godly nations.

Bring beauty into the “mundane” and simple—into our homes, the marketplace, and the public square. Edith Schaeffer’s book *Hidden Art* is a good place to get ideas for this expression.

Recognize that art is a calling and that it is as valid a call as a call “to ministry.” Churches should disciple and nurture. They should create platforms in the marketplace for balladeers to express their art.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Charles Colson’s BreakPoint Commentary #000602, *Getting the Message Through*, 6/2/2000.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The Church should make room in her budget for supporting artists and the arts. Christians can set up endowments to support the arts. The Church should function as the wellspring for the arts in a society.

Churches can add to their budgets to make the building where the Church meets a place of quality and beauty.

Rather than following society's trendsetters in the arts, Christians working in the arts should set the trend in society by experimenting with new forms of art that reflect a biblical worldview.

Last, we should encourage the planting of flowers in refugee camps. Let artists work among the poor. Let them encourage the artist among people who are materially poor, to blossom, so that their material poverty can be transformed into a wealth of beauty.

Ode to the Balladeer

Let us end with a poem from Ugandan playwright and balladeer Okaka Opio Dokotum. Okaka penned this poem in response to a conference in Uganda where Christians were called to engage in their world.

I Take My Place In Creation

**I take my place in creation
To do that I was created for;
Fitting in the praise-empire
Of the indescribable Sovereign God.
I stand in creation
To fit that unit of space
That length and breadth
That height and depth
That volume reserved for me alone.
As entire creation explodes with praise
As cotyledons clap their protein hands
And elephants gallivant trumpeting
While ants lead worship processions,
My pen shall curve out on paper;
My tongue shall engrave on sheet of air
High praises to my God
As I join my neighbours
And their neighbours
And their neighbours' neighbours
In other places, other countries
On earth and in heaven
To lift one solid sacrifice of praise,
A sweet smelling savor
To the creator of all things:
And to think that my own quota is there to fill!⁵⁷**

⁵⁷ Okaka Opio Dokotum, Collin Hotel Mukono, Uganda, July 31, 2001.