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Soli Deo Gloria: The Relationship Between Christianity and the Arts

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SOLI DEO GLORIA:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS

A Research Paper Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the
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by
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CONTENTS

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Introduction	1
I The Biblical Basis for Creativity	3
God as Creator	3
Man as Creative	6
Christians as Creative	8
The Tabernacle	9
David and Solomon	14
The Temple	19
New Testament Guidelines	26
II The Relationship Between Christianity and the Arts in Western Civilization	33
Greek and Roman Sources	33
Christendom	34
Two Streams	36
The State of the Arts in American Lutheranism	40
III Current Work of Christian Artists	46
An Ecclesiastical Magician	46
A Musical Poet	52
A Club Near the Old Vic	54
IV Conclusions and a Look Ahead	60
Potential in the LC-MS	62
Three Options	68
A Society	68
A Synodical Board	70
A Congregational Initiative	73
Some Suggestions	78
Bibliography	81

SOLI DEO GLORIA:
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INTRODUCTION

Lord, shall we not bring these gifts to Your service?
The Lord who created must wish to create,
And employ our creation again in His service.
--T.S. Eliot,
"Choruses from the Rock"

It is in a way supreme irony to read the above words by T.S. Eliot, of all poets. It was his Wasteland that broke modern poetry free from traditional forms, and first expressed the alienation that continues as the dominant theme in all twentieth century art. His later conversion to Christianity is largely glossed over or ignored entirely by college English professors. Yet Eliot's conversion stands as a kind of parable of Christ's power to cut through even the angst of modern man. Happily, we find in Eliot's words quoted above almost a formula for Christian creativity. We find in these words an echo of the formula of a Christian composer of an earlier age, J.S. Bach. Bach was in the habit of scribbling the letters "S.D.G." above all his compositions--sacred and secular alike. The initials stood for the Latin phrase, "Soli Deo Gloria", or "To God alone be the Glory."

For Eliot, for Bach, for the redeemed of every age, "Soli Deo Gloria" sums up the relationship between Christianity and the arts. It is the purpose of this paper to examine that relationship, past, present, and future.

A look back into the Bible in Chapter I will give us a Scriptural basis for creativity in man. In Chapter II, we will see that the history of Western culture illustrates how the Church applied that basis for many centuries, but then departed from it in more recent times. We will note how the mainstream of artistic work ^{was} carried on under secular patronage. Nonetheless, creative work is still being done by Christians, and we will take a look at a few examples in Chapter III. Chapter IV will summarize and draw conclusions for the future, in hope of a renewal of the arts in Christendom.

CHAPTER I
THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CREATIVITY

God as Creator

"B'reshith bara elohim eth hashamaim v'eth haaretz."
These are the first words we encounter in Scripture. In these majestic cadences we first encounter the Triune God, and we see Him as Creator. God is creating all things out of nothing, by fiat, by His Word alone. This kind of creative activity is unique to God. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word "bara, create" is used only in reference to God.¹

In Genesis 1:1, quoted above, God created the heavens and the earth. In Psalm 51:10 God is able to create a pure heart in the penitent sinner. Not only does God deal with the individual, but he forms a redeemed community: "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine." (Isaiah 43:1)

Man himself is a special creation of God, and the Bible uses three words to describe this act of God. They are bara (create), asa (make, fabricate), and yatzar (form, fashion).²

¹ William L. Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 47.

² Benjamin Davidson, The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 113, 338, 616.

In Genesis 1:26 we read, "And God said, Let us make (asah) man in our image." This is followed by Genesis 1:27, "So God created (bara) man in His own image." Then in Genesis 2:7 we are told, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground." The terms are used synonymously in these passages. Whether God is speaking things into existence ex nihilo (bara) or forming them out of existing materials (yatzar) like the dust of the earth which He had previously spoken into existence ex nihilo, God is still the Omnipotent Creator.

The creativity of God is universally accepted as a central tenet of the Christian faith. Two of the Three Chief Symbols, or Ecumenical Creeds, have a tripartite construction. These are the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, and the three parts are Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification. The doctrine of Creation is seen by the historic Church as something every Christian must believe. We note that in the original formulations of these two creeds in the Greek language, the word "poieo" is used, which, when used of God means "create", but also carries the meaning "make (of existing materials)."^{3,4}

In classifying the attributes of God, Pieper adheres to the negative and positive designations.

³ Barclay M. Newman, Jr., A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament (London: United Bible Society, 1971), p. 146.

⁴ Reproduced in F. Bente, Historical Introduction to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp. 12, 13.

Those who classify the divine attributes as negative and positive designate as negative such attributes as unity, simplicity, immutability...; in other words, the imperfections of creatures cannot be ascribed to God. All those attributes which are found in man, but which are ascribed to God in a higher degree or in an absolute sense are known as positive attributes, such as life, knowledge, wisdom, holiness, righteousness, truth, power, love, goodness, grace, mercy.⁵

For Pieper, God's creativity is to be classified under the heading of "The Attributes of the Divine Will: The Power of God (Potentia Dei)".

The Power of God differs from the power of creatures both in the manner and in the extent of its activity. Concerning the mode, Scripture teaches us to say that God effects His works by an act of the will. God creates by His will, by His fiat (Gen. 1:3)...Whatever God wills He accomplishes in one of two ways: either by His appointed means (causae secundae, potentia ordinata) or without them (potentia absoluta, immediata). In either case, however, the one and selfsame divine power is operative. The same divine omnipotence is at work when God according to His established order sustains life by food and drink or immediately, as He sustained Moses for forty days without meat or drink (Ex. 34:28).⁶

We see then that God creates with or without means, but even the means themselves He has created without means. As a Positive Attribute, creativity is an attribute common to both God and man, but to God in "a higher degree or in an absolute sense."⁷ God creates; man creates. But God's

⁵ Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 453.

⁶ Ibid., p. 459.

⁷ Ibid., p. 453.

creative capacity is infinite, whereas man's is small. God can create immediately; man cannot. Man is himself a being created of God. God creates mediately; man also creates mediately, or through a variety of artistic media which exist as materials provided by God. For Miriam it was a dance, for Bezaleel it was sculpture, for David it was poetry and music.

Man as Creative

Let us now examine in more detail the creative activities of man as recorded in Scripture.

In Genesis 2:15 we read, "The Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." Here we see man in his original state engaged in purposeful work. Now in the original creative act of God, we remember that the earth was tohu wabohu, and God brought order into the chaos. This bringing of order remains a mark of all the creative activity of man. We see it in Adam as he dresses and keeps the garden. We see it in the mathematician as he solves a great problem. We see it in the housewife as she invents a new recipe in her kitchen. We see it in the composer as he struggles to bring forth a sound that echoes in his mind. Creativity is essential to God and leaps out in all His activity. The same is true for man. We often take a too narrow view of creativity in man, and confine it to artistic work. Man is creative in all he does, and all men can think of themselves as creative. It is our heritage as creatures made in the tzelem Yahweh.

Adam's first creative act was manual, and his second was verbal. "Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." (Gen. 2:19) This is a marvelous picture of man perceiving the essence of things that God has made, and giving expression to that essence in words. The animals could not name themselves. Man alone could do it. The poet's job is similar. His sensitive nature feels what we feel; his poetic gift puts into words as we cannot. We read, and think, "Yes! That's it exactly. I just couldn't put it into words." Thus the poet is called to be a servant to his fellow man.

We know too well in our own day how very little the poet fulfills his servant role. Adam, in his sinless state, kept all his creativity God-centered. But the temptation was to "be as Gods." (Gen. 3:5) God is the center of all things. Thus man's creativity also becomes man-centered. "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." (Gen. 11:4) Architecture is always named as one of the fine arts. And here we see man's creative gifts being used in a man-centered way in the story of the tower of Babel, as architecture is employed to "make a name" for man. The tower is gone into dust, but the motive lives on. The lust for fame

is common to artists of every age. Their names are forgotten with their works.

Christians as Creative

We have seen creative man in his original state and in his fallen state. But there is an in-between state which is central to our considerations: The redeemed state. Those included in that redeemed state are all those who have been justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The list of those in that in-between, "simil iustus et peccator" state is a long list, and begins early in the annals of man. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous." (Heb. 11:4) Thus the true Church, invisible to our eyes but visible to God's, includes St. Abel and many heroes of the faith whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament. Their faith looked forward to the Messiah who was promised in Genesis 3:15. Many of them were engaged in artistic work. Their lives are instructive to the Christian artist, as is the Scripture as a whole.

Moses may have been diffident about his speaking ability, but he certainly was not at all hesitant to sing when the occasion demanded it. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." (Ex. 15:1) This was certainly a God-centered work of art in poetry and music. It

must have been an enduring work as well, for we read of this scene from the immortal courts of heaven: "And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God." (Rev. 15:3) Well should the song be sung, too, for in the Apocalypse we see Christ in judgement throwing down the riders of Satan. Here, then, is a key for the God-centered song writer: keep as a central theme the victorious atoning work of Christ crucified which has cast down the Prince (or Pharaoh) of this world.

Upon this great occasion of deliverance it is a good thing the Israelites were not assembled in a Lutheran church basement where tanzen ist verboten. "And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." (Ex. 15:21) Here we see dancing along with percussion instruments used freely and joyously in the worship of God.

The Tabernacle

Later on in the pilgrimage of the children of Israel, we see the Lord Himself get directly involved by commissioning a work of art. He takes Moses up into the mount and says to him, "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it." (Ex. 25:8, 9) There follows a full seven chapters of detailed instructions for the plans of the tabernacle. A proper study of this God-ordained work of art would require a book in itself, but we must limit ourselves here to a few observations. The whole

project was contingent upon the free offerings of the people. "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering." (Ex. 25:2) Then God goes on with a specific list of the very finest materials available at that time. It was to be an absolutely extravagantly costly undertaking. If God were to submit this proposal to an average building committee, our thrifty German minds would find a way to table it indefinitely. There are always more pressing practical concerns and priorities...until we remember the act of worship in Mark, chapter 14. The sinful woman anointed Jesus with a spikenard worth three hundred denarii. A denarius was equal to a day's wages. Even at minimum wage today that would come to about \$7,800. Very precious, indeed!

Let us take note also of another principle in this passage. "Thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty." (Ex. 28:2) There is no mention here of utilitarianism. These vestments were for the glory of God. They were to be God-centered works of art. And they were to be for beauty, as well. This corresponds with ordinary usage and understanding of the purpose of art.

fine art: 1a art (as painting, sculpture, music)
concerned primarily with the creation of beautiful
objects.⁸

⁸ Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam, 1963), p. 313.

Illustrator Michael Johnson, in a lecture at First Immanuel Lutheran Church in San Jose, California, on May 2, 1980, made an interesting observation on a verse in this passage. Concerning these same vestments we read, "And beneath upon the hem of it thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, round about the hem thereof." (Ex. 28:33) Johnson pointed out that in all of God's creation there is no such thing as a blue pomegranate! He went on to say that many Christian painters feel bound to represent photo-realism in their work, whereas here we see the freedom (and perhaps a touch of humor) of God Himself involved in a work of art.

The concluding chapter of this passage of Scripture contains a few verses that are referred to very seldom, but certainly warrant our attention as we study the relationship between Christianity and the arts.

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship. And behold, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill, that they may make all that I have commanded you. (Ex. 31:1-6)

Now we have seen that men are creative in a general way since man is made in the image of God. Normally we think of creative gifts as belonging to the natural abilities of man.

The same cannot of course be said of God since He is Spirit, and all His traits are supernatural. Still, in this context it is interesting to note that in God's creative act, it was the Spirit of God that hovered tremulously over the primordial chaos. In the passage quoted on the previous page, we see the Holy Spirit specifically named as the person of the Godhead empowering the person called as artistic director of the divinely commissioned work of art. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed in I Corinthians chapter 12, and the first two items mentioned are wisdom and knowledge. As the Holy Spirit is to empower Bezaleel, the first things mentioned are wisdom and understanding and knowledge. But we also see mentioned here craftsmanship, more specifically, craftsmanship to make artistic designs. Now regarding the spiritual gifts mentioned in I Corinthians 12, we know that only a partial list is given. We know also that whatever gift is given, it is given for "the common good" (I Cor. 12:7) and for the "edification of the church" (I Cor. 14:4). Perhaps then we may infer that in a sense the Holy Spirit can "inspire" artists in their work to the purpose of creating works of beauty which will glorify God and edify the Church. The music of J.S. Bach surely seems to satisfy these requirements, and in commenting on the purpose of art Bach himself said:

All music should have as its sole aim the glory of God and the recreation of the soul. Where this rule is not observed there is no real music, but only a devilish blubbering and whining.

Dem hoechsten Gott allein zu Ehren,

Dem Naechsten draus sich zu belehren.

The Highest God alone to glorify,
The neighbor without to edify.⁹

By contrast, most music written today has as its sole aim the glory of man and the agitation of the soul, and Bach's phrase, "a devilish hubbub", seems to describe it aptly.

If it is true that Scriptura Scripturam interpretans, then we may bring another verse from I Corinthians to bear on our passage from Exodus.

One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one as He wills. For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ...And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' (I. Cor. 12: 11,12,21)

All Christians have a little wisdom; all have a little knowledge. Yet the Holy Spirit in His wisdom and knowledge gives an extra measure to some that they might work to build up the Church. In the same way all Christians have a little creativity, but to some the Holy Spirit gives an extra measure that they might also glorify God thereby and edify God's people. According to Scripture at least, there is a place in the body of Christ for each member, an opportunity for every gift to function. The scholarly mind works analytically; the artistic mind works intuitively. In the visible Church, we have set up institutions which sustain and reward the scholar as he works to acquire wisdom and knowledge, but....

⁹ Paul Nettl, Luther and Music, trans. by Frida Best (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), p. 149.

David and Solomon

Let us turn now to one of the great figures in all of Scripture, David the King. Also David the Warrior, David the Statesman, David the Many-talented. For our purposes here we take a look at David the Musician and Poet.

We first encounter David in I Samuel 16. Saul is nominally still King of Israel, But God has rejected him and withdrawn His Holy Spirit from him. Thus Saul is tormented by an evil spirit.

Saul's servants then said to him, 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play the harp with his hand, and you will be well.' (I Sam. 16:15, 16)

David is brought into Saul's court, since he was known as "a skillful musician". (I Sam. 16:18) Then we read:

So it came about whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him. (I Sam. 16:23)

We have noted that art can function to edify the body of Christ, the Church. Bach said as much in regard to music. While we cannot judge the fate of Saul's eternal soul, we see in this passage a specific example of how one of the arts has potential at least to fortify the believer, and perhaps the unbeliever, too. Some of Luther's remarks on this subject are instructive:

Music is a beautiful, gracious gift of God. It has often been the inspiration of my sermons. Music

rouses all the emotions of the human heart; nothing on earth is so well suited to make the sad merry, the merry sad, to give courage to the despairing, to make the proud humble, to lessen envy and hate, as music.¹⁰

The winsome art of music is one of the fairest and most glorious gifts of God, to which Satan is hostile, since it drives away temptation and evil thoughts. The devil does not care for music.¹¹

David played the harp, the most common stringed instrument of his day. Luther played the lute, the most common stringed instrument of his day. I play the guitar. And perhaps a little personal experience would not be amiss at this point, introduced by way of eyewitness evidence.

I knew a man in Tallahassee, Florida, about nine years ago, and this man had many personal psychological problems. He dropped in to see me one afternoon, and as I was right in the middle of practising, I invited him to make himself comfortable on the living room couch while I finished practising in the next room. When I came back in about twenty minutes later, he was fast asleep! Upon waking, he told me that the music made him feel so peaceful he fell right asleep, and had his first good rest in some time. I thanked God for so ministering to this troubled soul, but with the stipulation that He would not produce the same effect upon my concert audiences.

And what shall we say about David the Poet, the sweet singer of Israel? The Psalms are universally acknowledged to

¹⁰ Nettl, op. cit., p. 12

¹¹ Ibid., p. 17

be some of the greatest literature the world has ever produced. In great cadences the poet articulates the moods of man's soul from the depths of despair to the heights of joy. Men in every age have rediscovered the Psalms and seen in them their souls reflected as in a mirror. David the Poet has done his job well. He has been a good servant to us. But more, much more than this, the Psalms are the Word of God. We have seen in our study how the Holy Spirit was involved in the arts of architecture and music. But here we see true inspiration, verbal inspiration, as God speaks to man through the art form of poetry.

Though the Holy Spirit may be guiding us in our art work today, none of us can claim inspiration in the strict sense of the word. It is with a shiver that I listen to contemporary Christian songwriters say, with the most prideful humility, "The Lord gave me this song." David could say that. We cannot. If we could, then our words would be binding upon the entire Christian Church, and would have to be added to the Canon of Scripture. Then to us would be also added the plagues written in the book of Revelations. (Rev. 22:18)

David's son Solomon, like his father, was a poet and a lover and wrote the Song of Solomon which, as I hear, no good Jewish Rabbi is allowed to read until he is forty years of age. While the Song of Solomon can be interpreted as a love song of Christ the bridegroom to His bride, the

Church, it is obviously at the first level of meaning a poem of human love and courtship, "replete with erotic imagery."¹²

While not going so far as to endorse ribaldry in the writing of Christian literature and poetry, we may still take note of the fact that the Bible includes a great range of expression and style. One observes today that many Christians working in artistic fields feel obligated to produce only religious works. The painter somehow feels that when he takes up his brush he must produce a scene from the Bible. The Bible itself, however, provides another example. The Song of Solomon is sensual in its expression of love between a man and a woman, but it is not promiscuous. It is erotic within the boundaries of marital faithfulness; it has found freedom within the third use of the Law.

We have seen the approval with which God looks upon music, especially in reference to the harp playing of David. At this point we should note the first reference to music in the Bible: "Jubal was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ." (Gen. 4:21) In the context, we might think the Bible gives to music a negative connotation since most of the fourth chapter of Genesis deals with the sordid exploits of the descendents of Cain. Jubal is a harp player. This makes it all the more interesting since David is a harp

¹² Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, editors, The Oxford Annotated Bible (New York: Oxford, 1962), p. 815.

player as well. This shows how God can take things of a very disreputable background and use them to His own good ends. God's "baptizing" of art forms is in a small way parallel to God's redeeming of man. No man is good enough for God. God in His love and for the sake of Jesus Christ simply reaches down and says, "I'll take you." In the same way God is able to take up a secular art form for His own glory, and for the edification of His beloved people. God is Emmanuel. He comes to us, makes Himself understandable to us. He uses our words and shapes to communicate Himself to us. "Here I am in these poems of David," He says to us. "Here I am in this man Jesus. Here I am in this bread and wine. It's really Me." Of course God is not present in the same way in works of art, literature, and music. But nonetheless we see how He cares to communicate to us in ways we can understand.

It would appear that the Reformers grasped this principle and put it into practise.

In 1574 the seniors of the Bohemian Brethren wrote to the Prince Elector Frederick III of Saxony, referring to their song book: 'Our melodies have been adapted from secular songs and foreigners have at times objected. But our singers have taken into consideration the fact that the people are more easily persuaded to accept the truth by songs whose melodies are well known to them.'¹³

Luther had set the precedent, according to Nettl:

Luther adapted the older church service and introduced simple congregational hymns in the vernacular.

¹³ Nettl, op. cit., p. 29

He adapted the finest old melodies and folk songs, and created hymns which have never failed to move the hearts of believers.¹⁴

We have observed that the passion of the Song of Solomon is restrained by the Law of God. In the same way the zeal of the Reformers was tempered by common sense and good taste.

Nettl comments:

To be sure, both text and melody of many secular songs were put into use for church music, but most of them were repudiated. These were called "Schamlieder" (licentious songs), and deemed improper by both Catholics and Protestants.¹⁵

Thus at one and the same time, we see a rationale for adaptation of the secular, contemporary idiom in Christian art and music, but we also applaud the horse sense of good, honest Christian people as they recoil in horror at the musically and lyrically third-rate "folk masses" accompanied by cheap, badly-played, and out-of-tune guitars.

The Temple

As we proceed chronologically in our study, we turn back now to the historical books. The tabernacle which was constructed under Bezaleel had served Israel for many years. But David yearned to see a temple built. This monumental work of architecture was built under the reign of David's son Solomon. As the temple developed in plan and execution under both David and Solomon, several features are instructive

¹⁴ Nettl, op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 97

as we consider the relationship between Christianity and the arts.

The plan for the original tabernacle was given Moses by God on Mt. Sinai. In like manner, David received a divine plan for the temple. "All this," said David, "the Lord made me understand in writing by His hand upon me, all the details of this pattern." (I Chr. 28:19) Here we see God involved in one of the fine arts: architecture.

In organizing the priesthood of Israel for the new temple, David made some important changes. He establishes the family of Asaph as responsible for the music of the worship service.

David and the commanders of the army set apart for the service some of the sons of Asaph and of Heman and of Jeduthun, who were to prophesy with lyres, harps, and cymbals...The sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied under the direction of the king...The sons of Jeduthun were under the direction of their father Jeduthun with the harp, who prophesied in giving thanks and praising the Lord. (I Chr. 25:2, 3)

Clarke notes on this passage:

Ancient prophecy had been associated with ecstasy and music. The Chronicler supposes an order of prophets who can be trained. But there may be a core of fact in the chapter, prophets associated with the sanctuary having been turned into singers.¹⁶

In whatever sense prophecy, static or ecstatic, was associated with music in temple worship, we note that all was done decently and in order under the direction of the king

¹⁶ W.K. Lowther Clarke, Concise Bible Commentary (New York: MacMillian, 1953), p. 448.

and the patriarchs of the families. We see also that prophecy was associated in music with the giving of thanks and praising the Lord (v. 3). In the Lutheran church we speak of preaching prophecy, or proclaiming the Word of the Lord as taken from Scripture. Taken in this broad sense of the term, then, we might see as a prophetic function the orderly worship of God under a trained and dedicated leadership. Prophecy, or proclamation, is for the edification, exhortation, and comfort of the Church (I Cor. 14: 3, 4). It is the Word of God which builds us up, whether in a sermon or a song. And as in the above mentioned verses of I Chronicles, so in the New Testament are prophecy and music associated. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col. 3:16)

We should observe from this that the hymnwriter for the Church of Jesus Christ should be as competent a theologian as the preacher. Sadly, this is a rare combination to find. Even in Reformation times the need was felt. Luther himself laments:

I wish we had more hymns which the people could sing during mass. But the poets are few, or not yet known to us, who could fashion pious and spiritual songs that would be fitting to be sung in church. For few poets savour of the Spirit. I speak thus to encourage any among you who might be induced to create spiritual songs for us...We have planned to follow the example of the prophets and the church fathers and to compose German songs for the German people so that God's Word may resound in the singing of the people. We are seeking poets and musicians everywhere for this purpose. Avoid new words and the expressions

of the court, so that the people may easily understand. Let the words be as simple as possible but at the same time pure and suitable.¹⁷

We may also infer from Luther that the theologian who sets himself to prophesy in song should strive for poetic simplicity, avoiding archaic terminology and phrases which do not communicate to the man in the pew.

Finally all the singers were set in order and the temple was built, and the great day came for its dedication. It must have been the most amazing divine service there ever was, and it came to an unexpected climax. So many sacrifices were offered they could not be numbered (II Chr. 5:5). The ark of the covenant was brought up and set in place in the holy of holies. The priests came forth from the holy place and the music commenced.

All the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the Lord saying, 'He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting,' then the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God. (II Chr. 5:12-14)

This must be named with the most thrilling passages in all of Scripture in describing the worship of the Lord. It

¹⁷ Nettl, op. cit., pp. 38, 39.

is followed by the great dedication prayer of Solomon, truly a prophecy or proclamation of the goodness of God. But the passage itself illustrates dramatically how God smiles upon man as he uses his creative ability to the glory of God and the edification of his neighbor.

It is noteworthy that in the artwork of the temple, God dictated the architecture but left the music up to Asaph and his men. They were free to come up with something new. Whatever Adam called the animals, that was their name. Whatever Asaph played, that was the temple music. God left it up to the creature He created to create. And God accepted the results.

But we do not love freedom. We feel more safe with rules and regulations. The great temple is gone, its music forgotten. Perhaps it is for the good. If they still existed we would pattern all our church buildings and music upon them inflexibly. But the most important thing has been preserved throughout history: the great doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

There is no room for creativity in doctrine. It is enough to articulate it afresh for each new generation. But as that great doctrine of grace is handed down to us, we find the freedom of the Spirit in joyfully expressing that faith in a multitude of creative and innovative ways.

As we consider the worship of the Lord in this great temple, it will be worthwhile to take up another interesting point.

And the priests waited on their offices: the Levites also with instruments of musick of the Lord, which David the king had made to praise the Lord.
(II Chr. 7:6)

If David had been a maker of musical instruments, so was his son.

And the king made of the algum trees...harps and psalteries for singers: and there were none such seen before in the land of Judah.
(II Chr. 9:11)

The passage is not clear as to whether the "none such" refers to the instruments or the algum trees. But in a general way we find the creativity involved in the tabernacle carried over into the temple building. David tells Solomon:

Behold, the courses of the priests and Levites, even they shall be with thee for all the service of the house of God: and there shall be with thee for all manner or workmanship every willing skilful man, for any manner of service. (I Chr. 28:21)

Now David had made a lot of instruments. "Four thousand praised the Lord with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith." (I. Chr. 23:5) Given these facts, I think it not unreasonable to conjecture that at least a few of these instruments were newly invented. J.S. Bach himself was an experimenter in this area, and at one point built a keyboard instrument which reproduced exactly the sound of the lute. He had the great lutenist Silvius J. Weiss listen to the contraption blindfolded while Bach played. Weiss was completely fooled! He thought he was hearing a lute. To our present situation, we may ask why the Church is not producing new instruments "to praise therewith." At any rate, new instruments are

constantly being invented. Why are we not using the new instruments available today? The organ was newly invented at some point in history. It is not so much an instrument as a machine which produces different tonal effects through the use of various registrations: flute, violin, trumpet, etc. How is this basically different from the Moog Synthesizer, or the electric guitar with its reverb, phase shifter, and wah-wah pedal? The list of instruments in Scripture is large. In Psalm 150 alone we are exhorted to use a variety of brass, string, and percussion instruments, along with dancing, in the worship of God. The Scriptural precedent for various and imaginative use of musical instruments in the house of God is patently evident.

We are familiar with the history of Israel, how apostasy crept in and leapt in, how God sent judgement in the captivity of the people and the destruction of the great temple...and how God once again mercifully restored the people to their land. They were led back by Ezra and set about at once to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. It was a time of setting old things in order once again.

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. (Ezra 3:10)

But it was a time of difficulty as well, for "the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building." (Ex. 4:4) Later on work commenced on

rebuilding the wall under the leadership of Nehemiah. The Israelites were opposed by Sanballat, and the situation grew very tense.

And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held the spears, the shields, and the bows...They which builded on the wall... with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. (Neh. 4:16, 17)

God gave grace, and all was completed.

And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites...to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps...So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me: and the priests...and the singers sang loud. (Neh. 12:27-28, 40-42)

We take note here that when the wall was completed, the music was ready--even with antiphonal singing! In our situation today, we build the church first and worry about the choir later. But what impresses us even more is how in this perilous time the art of music for worship remained a top priority. There was hunger, there was the threat of enemy attack, there was back-breaking labor. Even with all these negative factors, the matters of art and beauty were given careful attention. Beauty was a clear priority, even in a time of economic uncertainty, and even when they might have made justifiable cut backs in the music program in the face of concerns of a more practical nature.

New Testament Guidelines

We have considered many notable examples of artwork in the Old Testament, and in sum, they provide ample precedent

for creative and imaginative labor by the Christian. Before leaving this section, however, a few more lessons from Scripture must be briefly taken up.

First of all, it must be obvious that the Bible itself is a work of art of the greatest magnitude. It contains every type of literature: war stories, love stories, intrigue, poetry, history. The Psalms are universally acknowledged to rank among the world's greatest literary treasures, solely upon their merit as poetry. We must note also that the Gospel writers are credited with the creation of a totally new and unprecedented literary form. They were clearly men of genius. This all goes without saying that the Bible is the Word of God. It should give us pause to consider deeply that God has chosen to communicate His revelation to man by means of a work of art.

Secondly, there is a general principle given in the New Testament which pertains to the Christian artist and his work. This was articulated in the Reformation as the sanctity of the vocation of the individual believer.

Melancthon refers to:

the works that God commands, like the tasks of one's calling, the administration of public affairs, the administration of the household, married life, and the rearing of children.¹⁸

This is just saying the same thing that Scripture says in many places, such as I Thessalonians 4:11, where we read:

¹⁸ Theodore G. Tappert, translator and editor, The Book of Concord (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 218.25.

Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without and that ye may have lack of nothing.

The plain meaning of this is that no one vocation is more holy than another. To be a carpenter is in God's sight as worthy as being a preacher. We are justified by grace, not by our jobs.

The application of this is very simple really. No Christian is to look down on any other Christian because of his calling in life. Paul is very specific on this:

Now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee... (I Cor. 12:20, 21)

Naturally one would question a situation like that of the girl who wanted to be "a Stripper for Christ," but we may safely say that in a very broad sense any honest calling is acceptable by God for the Christian's involvement. This includes vocations of art, music, literature, dance, and the like. We can refer to Luther on this subject:

I do not believe that art is to be overthrown by the Gospel, as some hyper-spiritual people maintain; but I should like to see all the arts placed in the service of Him who made them.¹⁹

It is pretty obvious that the only way for this to be done is to let the artists get to work. It goes without saying that a Christian artist need produce only religious art, no more than a Christian carpenter need build only churches.

¹⁹ Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "The Church of the Augsburg Confession in the United States and the Fine Arts", The Lutheran Scholar, Vo. IX, no. 3 & 4 (July-October 1952), p. 215.

The beauty of it all, though, is that the carpenter can build churches as the occasion demands, and the artist can very definitely express Gospel content through his work. It is more difficult for the Christian computer engineer to express Gospel content through his work. But for the artist, so much can be expressed that it is not without reason that J.S. Bach is sometimes called "the Fifth Evangelist," even though he wrote a great many "secular" works under patronage of the nobility.

It is noteworthy that the New Testament gives a very clear word on the musical arts, then follows it with encouraging words for every man's vocation.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him. (Col. 3:16, 17)

Every Christian, no matter what his calling, is commanded by Christ to conform to one important thing. "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." (Matt. 20:27) This command cuts to the quick, and mortifies our sinful flesh. It is our tendency to "Lord it over" everyone, whether our station in life is that of king or a beggar.

We may ask then, how can the Christian artist be a servant? Scripture presents several specific guidelines. The Christian artist as servant is to:

1. Glorify: As a primary goal the Christian artist can

praise God through the creative work of his hands, as the Old Testament has clearly shown us. This is the perfect counter-balance to the artist's pride, which wants to glorify himself. The act of worship can be very private. No one need recognize it. The best work on the tabernacle went into the ark of the covenant, which rested in the holy of holies where nobody ever saw it.

2. Edify: this is more public service to the congregation of the redeemed, and can take several forms.

a. Instruct: We all know that some very succinct doctrinal formulations can be contained in hymns. We note Colossians 3:16, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

b. Enlighten: Most Christians have had the experience at one time or another of singing along and all of a sudden getting a flash of insight into God's Word. "I will open my saying upon the harp." (Psalm 49:4)

c. Challenge: Sometimes a word of confrontation or Law is communicated most effectively by artistic means, as in the little drama enacted by Ezekiel.

Though also, son of man, take thee a tile,
and lay it before thee, and portray upon it
a city, even Jerusalem: and lay siege against
it...This shall be a sign to the house of Israel.
(Ezek. 4:1-3)

We see this worked out in the life of Dante (1265-1321).

Banished in consequence of his antipapal
politics...In the Divina Comedia he demands

thorough reformation, lashing the moral degeneracy of the time and the corruption of the church and the papal see.²⁰

We must observe also that the Christian artist has a calling of service to the world in which he lives. Our Lord tells us, "Ye are the salt of the earth." (Matt. 5:13) Here is the Christian in his role as challenger. Salt stings when applied to a wound, but it acts as a disinfectant. Salt works as a preservative, too. Many of the presuppositions of the secular art world remain unchallenged to this day. The Christian artist can be a servant by questioning, stinging, stopping the progress of decay.

The word of Law must be followed by a word of Gospel. Thus our Lord tells us, "Ye are the light of the world." (Matt. 5:14) The Christian artist can be a servant by letting the light of the Gospel radiate clearly through his artistic expression. The beauty of great Christian art of the past in music and architecture still shiningly testifies to the reality of Christ who inspired the artists to create them. In our own disoriented age the possibility is still there for the Christian artist to hold up a point of light, and give focus and direction to a darkened world.

²⁰ Erwin L. Lueker, editor, Lutheran Cyclopedia (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), p. 282.

CHAPTER II
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
CHRISTIANITY AND THE ARTS
IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Many fine and very thick books have been written on the history of the arts in western civilization. For our purposes here we must content ourselves with only the most superficial overview, lest we find ourselves in the midst of another thick book. But all the books, thick and thin, agree that the Church has had a tremendous influence upon our civilization. In fact, for many centuries during the so-called Dark Ages the Church was our civilization. The monumental presence of the Church so dominates the scene in our western culture that it cannot be ignored. Thus whatever their orientation, the thick books are obliged to devote long sections to the art, music, literature, and architecture that Christianity has produced.

Greek and Roman Sources

Much of our own civilization is built upon a Greek foundation. Their philosophy and law, their art in particular have decisively shaped our own. The origins of the democratic political system are to be found in the Golden Age of Greece, or Athens under the reign of Pericles (490-429). It was during his rule that the Acropolis was built. The Greeks were innovators in many fields. Theirs were the great thinkers:

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; the great dramatists: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes; the great sculptors: Phidias, Praxiteles, and Lysippus.

It was for sculpture to capture the Greek vision. We see in the Greek statues an image of man in perfection: ideally developed in mind and body. Greek sculpture, as all other Greek art forms, was wedded to Greek religion. Fleming's notes here are worth considering.

Taken as a whole, the Parthenon marbles present a picture of the Greek past and present plus aspirations for the future. The attempt to interpret the dark ancient myths of a people into more enlightened contemporary terms is to be found here in the sculptures as well as in Greek philosophy, poetry, and drama. The metopes on the east portray the primeval battle of the gods and giants for control of the world. The metopes on the south show the Lapiths, oldest inhabitants of the Greek peninsula, subduing the half-human centaurs with the aid of the Athenian hero Theseus. This victory signals the ascendancy of human ideals over the bestial side of human nature.¹

We must note also that the Greek modes formed a basis for the later medieval modes in music.

Like Western civilization after the Renaissance, Rome was a pupil of Greece. Many of the greatest Greek sculptures we know only from Roman copies of the Greek originals. The Roman genius was a building genius. Roads, cities, aqueducts, laws, an entire empire itself bore the stamp of the practical Roman mind. They say that all roads lead to Rome. To the

¹ William Fleming, Arts and Ideas (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), p. 22.

point here is that culturally all roads have led through Rome: "Rome was the gateway through which all the styles, forms and ideas of the Mediterranean civilization passed in review."²

Christendom

As Rome fell, Christianity arose. By around 400 A.D., both Christians and Romans were blaming each other for the decline of the Empire, and in response to this debate St. Augustine wrote the City of God (426). By 600, Rome was the center of Christianity, and the papacy was established under Gregory the Great, who codified the liturgy and established the chant.

In these early centuries of Christendom, Byzantium was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire and Eastern Christianity as well. It was when Constantine legalized Christianity with the Edict of Milan (313) that the faith emerged from underground. With legal recognition by the state, the Christian religion found itself with money and without enemies. These are primary conditions requisite for a flourishing artistic activity, and we are not surprised to find a wealth of great art from this period. Marvelous mosaics depicting Biblical scenes were produced. Architecture reaches a tremendous climax with the Church of Hagia Sophia (532-537) in present-day Istanbul.

As a combination of great art and daring engineering, Hagia Sophia has never been surpassed...While the most ambitious Gothic cathedral nave ever spanned a width of more than 50 feet, the architects of Hagia Sophia achieved here an open space 100 feet wide and 200 feet long.³

² Fleming, op. cit., p. 96.

³ Ibid., p. 112.

This was a period of struggle for the Church (as perhaps are all ages) in matters of doctrine. Heretic followed heretic, council followed council. We take an interesting note on music during this time.

Arius was accused of insinuating his religious ideas into the minds of his followers by means of hymns that were sung to melodies derived from drinking songs and theatrical tunes. Such hymns were frowned upon in orthodox circles because they were too closely allied with popular music. Furthermore, the Arian way of singing them was described as loud and raucous, indicating that they must have grated on the ears of the more civilized Roman Christians.⁴

During the Middle Ages, as previously noted, the Church emerged as the structure which held civilization together. Church and state were one, and the Holy Roman Empire was dominated by the popes. This was the era of the great monasteries, where learning was kept alive, and music and painting were cultivated in the service of Christ. The Romanesque led into the Gothic style of architecture, in which the magnificent cathedrals of Chartres and Notre Dame were built. Modern music has important sources also here at Notre Dame, where the strict chant began to give way to polyphony under composers Leonin and Perotin.

Winds of change began to blow in the thirteenth century. G.K. Chesterton has referred to St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) as the first modern man, and perhaps justly so. The breath of his simple rediscovery of humanness, like a breeze

⁴ Fleming, op. cit., p. 122.

in springtime, began in time to break up the icy fields of the scholastic philosophers. The Basilica in Assisi which grew up in his honor attracted great artists, notably Giotto, a father of modern painting.

The wellspring of the Renaissance are to be found in this era, when classical art was beginning to be rediscovered in Italy.

Two Streams

Speaking in the broadest terms, what are often referred to as the "medieval unities" of faith, language, and culture began to break up with the Renaissance. It was a renaissance, or rebirth, of Roman culture. Therefore by implication and inclusion it was a rebirth of Greek and pagan influences. History, unlike football games, does not divide into neat periods of time. In the fifteenth century the waters of the Christian and Humanist streams are intermingled. For example, we find among the works of the great painter Botticelli (1444-1510) the magnificent Adoration of the Magi (1475) and also the Birth of Venus (c. 1480).

Botticelli was...a member of the sophisticated group of humanists who gathered around his Medici patrons. In this circle...classical myths were constantly discussed and interpreted...This neopagan atmosphere with its Christian concordances is reflected in many of Botticelli's paintings.⁵

It would appear that money is good for art but bad for religion. In the sixteenth century the Vatican was the hub

⁵ Fleming, op. cit., pp. 250, 251.

of a great flourishing of the arts. At one point, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael were all at work there. St. Peter's Basilica, the Sistine Chapel, and other pinnacles of artistic achievement stood in stark contrast to the moral depravity of the popes themselves and the overall decline of Christianity.

As I write these pages, it is Reformation Day, 1980. It was on this day in 1517, that the change began, when Martin Luther posted the Ninety-Five Theses. Reformation ensued in the Church, only to be followed by Counter-reformation, repression, Inquisition, and bloodshed.

Revolutionary discoveries were made in this period, and were opposed by the Church of Rome.

Luther set forth a Christianity in which man is saved by grace through faith, not by works. He was ordered to recant. He did not recant.

Galileo set forth a Copernican universe in which the earth revolved around the sun. He was ordered to recant. He recanted.

In both cases, the discoveries stood. In the one case, the restoration of Biblical doctrine resulted in faith for many. In the other, the beginnings of modern science set the stage for unbelief in many more. It need not have. Real science has yet to refute Christianity. But the old Adam actively looks for and clings to any reason to disbelieve. Here in these trouble times, the properties of the waters of

the two streams become more clearly seen, and the streams themselves begin to diverge.

Subsequent history illustrates that the artboat went down the humanist stream. The arts require an atmosphere of money and creative freedom to live. The Roman Church had the money, but "in Counter-Reformation churches, the arts, which had remained independent media in the Renaissance, became fused into one grand ensemble to make the religious experience as complete as possible. Artists had, of course, to conform to the requirements of Church dogma; otherwise their imagination could soar without hindrance."⁶ The iconoclastic Calvinists viewed the arts with suspicion. Luther's position was much more favorable towards creative activity:

I do not believe that art is to be overthrown by the Gospel, as some hyper-spiritual people maintain; but I should like to see all the arts placed in the service of Him Who made them.⁷

But internal conflict aggravated by harassment from Rome prevented the artistic potential of Lutheranism in Europe from being fulfilled. J.S. Bach's money woes are well known, and his great achievement stands as a testimony to his Christian dedication. We cannot blame Handel entirely for choosing the greener pastures of London, even though the bulk of his output there consisted of vapid operas which have been deservedly

⁶ Fleming, op. cit., p. 345.

⁷ Quoted in Arthur Piepkorn, op. cit., p. 217.

forgotten. Handel's fame rests chiefly on his Messiah, an exceptional sacred piece among all his works. In a similar fashion, we find that after 1750, solid artistic achievement by Christians remains the exception rather than the rule. Sadly, the bulk of Christian art up to the present has been "kitsch" (German for "trash"),⁸ a prime example being the poster for the recent Missouri Synod Great Commission Convocation, which depicts two enormous and malformed hands reaching down from a red, Martian sky to the St. Louis Gateway Arch, before which flows the Mississippi River, which appears to be swollen with an overflow of red and black licorice from Switzer's Licorice Factory a short way upstream.

With the cresting Enlightenment, thinking and creative men in large numbers broke free from the constraints of faith. Reason and science gave Western man a promise of new and permanent independence from anything other than himself. Beethoven stands out as a great bridge figure of this movement, creating the image of the unowned artist. He tweaked the noses of his patrons and they loved him the better for it. Perhaps the greatest composer of all time, he gave little or no evidence of Christianity in his life. Nineteenth century Romanticism, being once again a return in spirit to ancient and pre-Christian Rome, surged forth powerfully with a trumpet blast heralding once again Man as the center of all things. "I am the master

⁸ For more on this see Richard Egenter, The Desecration of Christ (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1967).

of my fate, the captain of my soul," could only have been written in this period. The utter devastation of the First World War did much to burst the bubble of this Romantic optimism. Thus in the twentieth century we find the fragmented music of Schoenberg, painting of Dali, writing of Kafka all reflecting the alienation of man from God, from others, and from himself. It is as Goya expressed so dramatically in his drawing, "The Dream of Reason Produces Monsters."

The Christian faith seems to function best under the most difficult circumstances. Conflict seems to bring out its best. Darkness causes its light to radiate more clearly. When it is dammed up, it finds a crack, seeps through in a trickle, ~~crumbles~~ the dam, and floods forth again irresistably.

These may be good times for those of us who are Christians and artists as well. In Christ alone we find a true basis for all that art has yearned for: balance, integration, beauty, freedom. All these things are in Him, who in turn creates us to create.

The State of the Arts in American Lutheranism

In the LCMS we have created with our tithes and offerings several efficient systems and institutions for producing and employing men in the service of Christ. We have a system that trains teachers and places them. We have a system that produces pastors and places them. For artists we have nothing. We have institutions which provide some training for artists, musicians, and writers, but no institutions set up to employ

them in their calling. So we make pastors and teachers of them. This lack of artistic employment calls into question the validity of the artistic training, and puts that training on a highly theoretical base. If we are not training artists to do, why are we training them? The answer is clear. We are training them in order to keep the trainers employed. Institutions tend to be fiercely self-perpetuating. To draw an example from an earlier period in Missouri Synod history, let us take a look at the call situation during the depression. Money was tight, and few calls were available. The St. Louis seminary kept producing candidates, but many of them had to go out and pump gas to make a living. It may seem logical on paper to say they should have reduced the number of students in proportion to the number of available calls, but then some of the professors would have had to go out and pump gas. Today, happily, there is not a surplus but a shortage of men, and the Seminary training atmosphere is charged with the anticipation of working in that to which one feels called of the Lord. Employment validates training.

But from another era of history it is evident that there once was a system for training and employing creative people in the Lutheran church. We have J.S. Bach to show for it. He did not spring full-blown from Jupiter's forehead. He was the culmination of a long line of musical Bachs who came through and found their livelihood within the system. No system, No Bach.

Today we have no real system. Our church is no patron of the arts. It would appear that the situation in 1980, has changed little from 1952, when Arthur Carl Piepkorn wrote:

A denomination can make a contribution to the fine arts of a country chiefly in two ways. It can bring forth artists whose are as informed by their religious faith. Or it can engage in the Church's traditional role as patroness of the arts. My thesis is that the contribution of the Lutheran Church to the fine arts of the United States has not been great in either way.⁹

With few exceptions, the Christian artist must shift for himself, find a living by means other than his art, and be content to paint, write, or compose in his spare time. We may puff on our pipes and lament the low state of the arts today in the Lutheran church. What would be the state of our theology if all our pastors were still out pumping gas?

But action must begin with analysis. Admittedly, when dealing with the arts, this is a difficult thing to do, as Piepkorn points out.

The practitioners of the arts in the Lutheran Church, particularly the (American) native-born among them, have a general rule failed to achieve wide fame outside the Church, or their attachment to the Church has been, at best, rather tenuous...At the same time, the Lutheran Church in America, again as a general rule, has neither diligently sought artists to embellish her sanctuaries and her services, nor has she always adequately rewarded or even recognized those she had at hand within her own household of faith. Her patronage of the arts has been exceedingly limited.

⁹ Piepkorn, op. cit., p. 215.

It is not easy to say why this is true. The causes on the surface seem to be sociological rather than theological. They are furthermore not easy to disentangle from one another. We probably can best describe the situation by saying that we have to do with a complex of causes in which the sociological factors and the theological factors reinforce one another.¹⁰

But then Piepkorn goes on to analyze the situation admirably. He isolates eight factors which bear importantly upon our understand of the current state of the arts for Lutherans in America.

1. The Lutheran Church in this country has been... an immigrant Church...As long as the Church feared and resisted assimilation and identified itself with the European component of the immigrants hyphenated culture, it fought a losing battle...The immigrant psychology militates against a notable artistic contribution.
2. The Lutheran Church has been largely a rural Church. The fine arts are largely the products of urban civilization.
3. The Lutheran Church has in the past been a Church of relatively poor people...The money that the fine arts require has largely been lacking...Linked with poverty as a financial factor is the relatively small size of our parishes.
4. The Lutheran Church in the United States...has inherited the cultural genes that made European Lutheranism's great contribution to the fine arts in the field of music, rather than in the domain of painting, sculpture, or architecture.
5. The virtues that Lutheranism in America inculcated were the virtues of thrift, frugality, and unpretentious modesty. These are not inconsistent with the fine arts...but the corrupt extremes of meanness and penuriousness were not always avoided.

¹⁰ Piepkorn, op. cit., p. 217.

Certain of the Arts were frowned upon as worldly-- notably the arts of the theater, and later the arts of the motion picture. The professional painter and sculptor was looked upon with suspicion, as being something of an improvident, shiftless, and immoral parasite.

6. The Lutheran Church rapidly began to reflect the cultural aspect of its American environment. The impact of Protestantism upon the Lutheran Church transmitted Protestantism's radical antagonism toward the fine arts to wide areas of Lutheranism.

7. The weakness of the sacramental emphasis in the Lutheran Church in America deprived the Church of a factor that might have exerted a profound positive influence. The cleavage between the sacred and the secular, between the material and the spiritual, resulted in an exaggerated emphasis upon the intellectual aspects of the Faith and a suspicion of symbols.

8. The environment was marked by a lack of good models which might have inspired emulation.

a. The architecture of the churches, often designed by barnbuilders in the country and contractors specializing in factory and tenement construction in the cities, was generally poor.

b. The mass-produced religious art that was available represented the corruption of already degraded originals...Repulsive crucifixes, sentimental Christs, ugly wall mottoes (more recently reproduced in plastic and sprayed with luminous paint), and trite Christmas cards flooded the market.

c. As a general rule the clergy or laity in charge of obtaining church furnishings do not know any local artist. They quite often do not even trouble to inquire. It is easier and quicker to write off at once to the big church-furnishing firms and obtain stereotyped, mechanically-produced articles which litter the house of the Lord and give it the appearance of a repository. The effect of this method of short-circuiting the praise of the Lord through the skilled work of a man's hands is to degrade the average Christians's taste so that he wants his church to look like a repository.¹¹

¹¹ Piepkorn, op. cit., pp. 217-221.

Of course, the situation is not one-sided. Piepkorn goes on in his article to list notable artistic achievements by many Lutherans such as Siegfried Reinhardt, who was then in the early stages of his career.

Os Guinness has made some perceptive observations about the relationship of the Christian to the current intellectual scene.

We, who spare no effort to train a missionary to speak a foreign language, must be as concerned to learn the intellectual, cultural, and artistic language of those around us in our own countries....

If we were to practice the Lordship of Christ over culture we would be producing naturally a flow of plays, films, novels, poems, and songs, all dealing with universal human questions.... These would have no integrity and little appeal if evangelism were their only motivation (the trouble with so much "Christian art" already) but as one side of their total purpose their value to evangelists would be enormous.¹²

It will be encouraging to examine the works of Christian artists who embody these principles, who have struggled to learn the artistic language of their fluently, and who have gone on to talk back to their very culture in its own idiomatic speech.

¹²Os Guinness, "Evangelization among Thinking People," in J.D. Douglas, ed., Let the Earth Hear His Voice (Minneapolis: Worldwide Publications, Inc., 1975), pp. 720, 721.

CHAPTER III
CURRENT WORK OF CHRISTIAN ARTISTS

An Ecclesiastical Magician

On October 25, 1980, I visited Siegfried Reinhardt at his home in suburban Kirkwood, Missouri. As I approached the house I walked past two cars in the driveway. One was a black Cadillac Eldorado, the other a black Lincoln Continental. Reinhardt came out to meet me. He was dressed in black from head to toe.

A most cordial man, he showed me into his home. On the outside it looked like any other suburban dwelling, but on the inside it was an artistic fantasyland. Everywhere were things to see and touch--wood, glass, metal, paintings. Much of the furniture he had designed and made himself.

I filled my briar and he drew a Pall Mall from its black pack, and we sat down to chat about his work. He was excited about his new project which promised to be his crowning achievement, a gigantic mural for the St. Louis International Airport. He showed me pencil sketches. The mural would illustrate the history of flight. The sketches themselves seemed to soar.

Siegfried first found his own artistic wings while a child in his mother's care. She played the violin and composed poetry, and exposed Siegfried to paintings and encouraged his

artistic interest. By the age of seven, he was determined to be an artist. "I remember as if it were yesterday," he told me. "My father was a wealthy merchant in East Prussia, and we had a large home in a tiny little town. Mother had bought still life paintings from Italy. She would hold me up to them to look, and I would reach out to grab the oranges in the picture. It amazed me that they were real and yet not real. To me, the paintings were magic, and the painters were magicians. I had to become one."

Siegfried also attributed his strong Christian faith to his mother's influence. "My mother was a strong Lutheran. In St. Louis, we lived across the street from an Evangelical and Reformed church and attended there. When I was confirmed, mother told me to repeat everything in the vows except "this represents the Body of Christ." 'No!' she told me, 'this is the Body of Christ.' Really, her ambition was for me to become a pastor."

It seems incredible that an artist of Reinhardt's stature should be entirely self-taught. But like the great classical guitarist Segovia, also self-taught, he caught fire early and nothing could quench him. "The creative force is a perpetual irritant in mind, body, and spirit," he said to me. By the time he was ready for art school, he was too good to get in. The art faculty at Washington University told him to save his money and take a degree in something else. He studied English literature at Washington University, did a thesis on T.S.

Eliot, and even interviewed Eliot who was himself a native St. Louisan. Reinhardt writes constantly, and tosses off sonnetts as easily as limericks.

He suggested lunch, and off we went in his black Cadillac to a nearby restaurant in which many of his paintings were displayed. By now our conversation was deepening, and we were getting down to issues and ideas.

In 1950, Reinhardt took his A.B. from Washington University, and continued his art career full-time. During the post-war period in St. Louis, Gaslight Square was flourishing and with it the Beat movement. It never claimed the allegiance of Siegfried Reinhardt. Discussing his credo, he said, "I believe only in action that is constructive in nature, and I oppose action that is destructive."

"During that time, John Canaday developed a language for abstract expressionism. It was indigenous to the American soil, free from all European influences. Abstract expressionism was anti-art. Creativity was bullshit. Not what you see but what you feel was important. And what was felt was rage and destruction: destruction of traditional forces, and of rational and creative methods. De Kooning painted while stone drunk. He destroyed the image of woman in his Woman Series. Jackson Pollack came up from Texas to study with Thomas Hart Benton, who was a good friend of mine. Benton told Pollack he had no talent. But Pollack was determined to be an artist. He went to New York and fell in with the right crowd. He ended up

destroying himself. To the Beats, suicide was an achievement. The movement was suicidal. Eventually it exhausted itself. It had to.

"This left room for the emergence of magic realism or photo realism. There is a wave of the new realism in New York today."

Siegfried told me that this was foreseen by the star-makers of the art world in the early fifties. He himself was a "proto-allegorical-realist" during this period when abstract expressionism was the rage. Reinhardt had the opportunity to be a superstar in the art world, but he rejected it. "This would have meant a total sacrifice of all the values and convictions that are the substance of what I am as an artist and as a man. The acceptance of that offer would have been an act of self-destruction. I was faced with the same dilemma that Faust was faced with. In that situation all of a sudden I saw in my mind's eye Christ with all the kingdoms of the world displayed and offered Him. His words rang in my ear, 'Get thee behind me.' I rejected the offer. Bullshit. No way. Praise the Lord. It was a miracle."

By this time lunch was over. I'd lost count of how many cups of coffee I'd had and how many cigarettes he had half-smoked, half-chewed.

"Siegfried, you have a black Cadillac, a black Lincoln, and a black outfit. How come?"

"I knew you were going to ask that. I'm not making any theological point. I simply see black as the presence of all

color. White is the absence of all color. Besides, it gives my public an easy way to identify me: 'Oh, yeah, you know, Reinhardt, that artist that always wears black.'"

To pick up the story again, Siegfried and his wife refused to move to New York. They got their house in Kirkwood in return for four paintings and a roomful of handmade furniture. The two black cars were acquired in similar trade-outs. The black clothes I assume he paid cash for. He could well afford them. He was gracious enough to pick up the tab for lunch.

Reinhardt figures that God has prospered his work. He lives in "affluent poverty," as he calls it. The New York scene would have made him a millionaire. But to him "Millionaires are trapped in their wealth. I don't want that."

Concerning his talent, he said, "There is such a thing as a gift. The Lord has given me a gift and a mission. I'm happy with myself, grateful, and gratified. I'm not mixed up or dislocated. I have my act together."

We spoke of how people expect the artist to be a tormented soul, in the way W. Somerset Maugham describes the character based on Paul Gauguin in *The Moon and Sixpence*. "That's it exactly," Siegfried said. "I deny the public that entertainment."

Reinhardt has as an artist chosen the road less traveled. To the world, marching to the sound of different drum has meant rejecting conventional society like Thoreau. It has

meant the development of isolationistic artist colonies from Greenwich Village to Carmel. To Siegfried Reinhardt it has meant plain old St. Louis, and integration into his community and his church. He has accepted the challenge to be a prophet recognized in the land of his birth. "In Greenwich Village," he told me, "the artists are controlled by everybody but the artists themselves." By contrast, Reinhardt is his own man. Ironically, this very kind of independence is sought by the secular artist. Independence for Reinhardt does not exclude involvement in community or commitment to Church. "My Christian faith provides a basis for enthusiastic involvement in my community." Reinhardt founded the Academy of Professional Artists (APA) in St. Louis in order to provide a big show for the opening of the Spanish Pavilion under Mayor A.J. Cervantes. It was a smashing success, and the APA is still going strong.

"I considered art to be magic. The more tricks one knows, the better. I would be an ecclesiastical magician. Yes. I like that. Whatever I do, no matter how un-Christian the images may look, is to the glory of God. Think of the vast panorama of the creative genius of God...lobsters, crabs!"

As he spoke, we were surrounded by examples of his work. There is often a lobster peeking out somewhere. In our particular room at the restaurant were hung paintings from his 1972 Egg Series.

"I began to paint the egg in context of an encounter with a study of the Renaissance painters of Florence who used

a shield upon which was painted an egg to identify themselves. The rationale is this. The egg is the most perfect form in nature upon which no human intelligence could improve. It is the physical source of all life forms, irrespective of size, and is therefore in its perfection a functional symbol for God Himself. It also signifies the Alpha and Omega, infinity, and so forth. Later the egg was used in Christian iconography as a symbol of the resurrection of Christ. You know, as the chick breaks out of the shell, Christ breaks out of the tomb." Reinhardt has a compelling painting of some eggshells empty and broken. It is entitled "Resurrection."

Here was where the destruction became constructive, exclusively in the Christian mystery. Here in the Easter egg was where the enshelled bird took wing to soar the heavens. Here was where selfishness was abolished and all things were made new.

Reinhardt expresses the content of the Christian faith in his painting as in his poetry. The last line from his sonnet entitled "Motto" : "To live is but to give."

A Musical Poet

John Henry "T-Bone" Burnett (b. 1948) is a critically acclaimed songwriter who is best known for his work with Bob Dylan's Rolling Thunder Review, and later his own group, The Alpha Band. As a Christian, he has chosen not to back away from the world of music, but rather continue his work in the mainstream of contemporary culture.

I got to know T-Bone through a mutual friend, and we visited each other while I was on vicarage in California. We spent many a night sitting up late and thrashing out the issues facing a Christian man serious about his art. I found T-Bone to be not only a dedicated Christian and a brilliant artist, but an articulate communicator as well. For this paper, I wrote to him on several key questions, just to get his thinking boiled down and into print.

HOW HAS YOUR FAITH INFLUENCED YOUR WORK CONCEPTUALLY AND PRACTICALLY?

The first way my faith influenced my work was the realization that every one is preaching constantly, and that I had a responsibility as to what ideas I let fly into the culture. Since that first revelation, my problem has been how to best communicate the hope and compassion of the gospel and a true view of the world to a society that doesn't want to hear about it. The Christian faith has given me a unified field of influence; that is, a history of thinkers and artists such as Dante, Pascal, Rembrandt, Bach, Chesterton, who all agree on the nature of reality and have left an example to follow. My influences in pre-conversion days made my work more confused and confusing, since I had many conflicting ideas running around in my head.

HOW HAS YOUR FAITH AFFECTED YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER ARTISTS?

The only way I can say that my faith has affected my relationship with other artists at this point, is the same way my faith has affected my relationship to all people. That is, I am, hopefully, more compassionate, and willing to communicate. Less insecure.

AS AN ARTIST, DO YOU HAVE ANY SPECIAL NEEDS YOU WISH THE CHURCH WOULD FULFIL?

The problem of the Church's relationship to the arts is a very difficult one. Such a wide division has grown between the two that there seems to be next to no one in the Church with any understanding whatsoever of the significance and meaning of art, or the eccentricities of those in the arts.

The need I find as an artist is a certain sensitivity that I do not expect. That sensitivity is to at once be treated decently as a person while being given the distance I need to do what I do. I hope this doesn't sound confusing, but it seems the lack of understanding of art in the church leads to either distrust, or an attempt at familiarity that is not productive. In other words, people can tend to be either aloof or nosy. The real problem lies in the fact that Christians have psychological inroads to each other and are too often not responsible with that access. And the people of the church in their sometimes desperate attempts at unity tend to distrust any individuality among them!

YOU ARE GETTING TOGETHER AN ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE ARTS. WHAT ARE THE GOALS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE GROUP? WHO CAN BELONG?

The goals of the Los Angeles Arts Group are primarily to provide love and support for Christians in the Arts, and address the problem of the place of an artist in the Church. We desire to encourage artists to be deeply Christian and deeply creative. We put on concerts and shows and meet to discuss relevant problems and hear speakers who have something to say to our predicament. Professional artists who are Christian can belong.

A Club Near the Old Vic

It's a long way from Los Angeles to London, England. But in spirit T-Bone Burnett's Los Angeles Arts Group is very close to London's Arts Centre Group.

Nigel Goodwin is an actor. He graduated from the Royal Academy of the Dramatic Arts, and emerged in the 1950's as a major talent in the same group of Angry Young Men that Produced John Osborne. In mid-career Goodwin found Christ. By

the late sixties a group of Christians in the arts was meeting informally in his home, and discussing the need for an organization that would encourage Christians to stay in their artistic callings, and also strengthen them as they stayed. The influences of Christian philosopher Francis A. Schaeffer and Christian art historian Hans R. Rookmaaker were helpful and formative to the group in these early stages.

The primary conflict faced by many members in the beginning was the anti-art stance of the Reformed denominations. Art was seen as a corrupting worldly influence, and a vocation unfit for the Christian. Most of the Arts Centre Group members were in Evangelical churches, and as a result felt very alienated. Schaeffer and Rookmaaker, both Calvinists, stood against this unBiblical position and gave the Arts Centre Group its theological base. The group took form around Goodwin's pastoral and magnetic personality, and continues to be a decisive and positive influence in the lives of many Christian artists on both sides of the Atlantic. Its current membership is around 700. The ACG holds a yearly Festival, which is a weekend of Bible studies, lectures and discussions, concerts, art exhibits, and a general struggling together over the issue of what it means to be a Christian artist in the twentieth century. The ACG has offices and a little restuarant at 21 Short Street, London, near the famous Old Vic Theatre, and members often come by just to meet for informal discussion. The Arts Centre Group is subdivided into smaller groups according

to artistic discipline--Poets, Architects, Dancers, etc.-- and these groups have regular meetings. Members of ACG are from many different denominations. The ACG, however, is right next door to St. Michaels Church, Church of England, and there is close cooperation between the church and the ACG. As people have visited the ACG, and as Goodwin has traveled, the influence of the ACG has spread widely. It has not directly sponsored spin-off groups, but nonetheless has been a kind of spiritual parent to Christian artists' groups in New York, Washington, Palo Alto, and Los Angeles. Here is their descriptive statement:

THE ARTS CENTRE GROUP

is a group of people who are concerned that Christians should be professionally involved in the Arts--in music, painting, literature, journalism, architecture, drama, film, radio, television, etc.

ITS AIMS

To develop a deep and intelligent understanding of the validity of Art as an expression of a Christian's enjoyment of God and as an expression of his understanding and feeling for the world around him.

To encourage Christians to be involved in their chosen art form and develop their abilities to the highest levels.

To help Christian artists work out the relationship between their faith and their work through fellowship, Bible study, discussion, experiment and specialized seminars.

To share Christ with artists so that they in turn will express Him through their art.

ITS CENTRE

is a place for dialogue, befriending, counselling, discussion, weekend and evening sessions--in fact an open house and professional club for those in the Arts.

ITS PRAYER

ministry involves over 500 individuals and groups informing them through letters, tapes and the annual prayer conference.

THE FINANCE

requires over £29,000 per annum simply to maintain the present level of growth. This does not allow for inflation, nor does it allow a reserve to enable us to grasp new opportunities as they arrive.

THE HOPE

is to find a sufficient number of people who will pledge to give regularly to the work in order to guarantee an annual income of £30,000.

THESE FRIENDS

of the ACG, who promise to give regular prayer and covenanted financial support, will receive in return regular news, invitations to special ACG events and priority bookings for concerts and productions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you are professionally engaged in the Arts, the Media or Entertainment and would like to know more about membership;

or, if you are not a professional artist but would like to pray regularly for the work of the ACG;

or, if you would like to help the work financially and become a 'Friend of the Arts Centre Group'

then do not hesitate to contact us in the ACG office.

Reading this statement, we cannot help but notice a concern for finances. The "Friends" would hopefully be patrons of some substance, since no patronage is forthcoming from the Church. The unstated assumption is that the costs of the ACG are not able to be borne by its membership. If they are professionals, they are not earning much. On one visit to London, I had the chance to talk this over with a friend of mine who is an untiring supporter of the ACG and also earning a good living in music. "As I look at the ACG,"

he told me, "I see a lot of hopefuls but not many professionals." He meant this not as condemnation, but as observation. The most recent edition of the ACG publication, Festival Magazine, was printed not on the usual glossy but on the cheapest paper, and the contents of the magazine described the ACG's money woes in no uncertain terms.

This is perhaps an unavoidable problem. From what possible source could an ecumenical Christian arts group get financial support? Its ecumenism would cancel denominational support. Its Christianity would cancel public support. This is all compounded by the fact that the Church's longstanding apathy towards the arts has left the Church with very few artists of truly professional stature. Those few we have are struggling bravely upstream against the current of a secular age, and this is often reflected in their paycheck. Over and above this is the problem of the missionary-barrel mentality of the Church, which expects everything at discount prices. The same man I quoted above also said to me, "I would have been rich a long time ago had I not been a Christian. My fellow believers pay me low wages or none at all."

Nevertheless the ACG has been a tremendous blessing to many, many people, myself included. It has taken an important first step toward the restoration of the broken relationship between Christianity and the arts. "It may be that in the end we produce no great art ourselves," Nigel said to me one day over coffee. As we gazed out into the drizzle of a cold

March afternoon in London, the deep lines of his plastic face were even more serious in contrast to his orchid-hued clothes. "Perhaps our only task will be to prepare the way for the next generation."

CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSIONS
AND
A LOOK AHEAD

My wife and I recently visited the St. Louis Art Museum. As we left the museum and walked to the car, it was a brilliant Indian Summer afternoon, with the trees in full color. We chatted away, and then she pointed out to me that a problem with much art today is that it is produced for, and exists only in, the museum or the concert hall--not in the home and church where men and women live and breathe. In earlier times good art was seen in the home and the church. The homes of the nobility hosted gatherings of learned and artistic people. In fifteenth century Florence, we could almost say the Renaissance itself had its origins under the patronage of the Medici family. During that era and into the sixteenth century, many of the popes were from Florence, and brought a cultivated spirit with them to Rome. We deplore the corruption of the papacy during this era, but commend its support of the fine arts. We note also that not only the popes patronized art and music for the Vatican, but bishops did also for their cathedrals and Abbots for their monasteries. In fact we might even go so far as to say that the popes' refinement contributed to the

Reformation, since money for St. Peter's was gained through indulgences, against which Luther wrote the Ninety-Five Theses.

But in the twentieth century American Christianity, we have a different situation. We do not have a titled nobility as such, yet in our society we do find that wealth and education count for something. Aristocracy tends to support the arts, and in this country the aristocracy centers not so much around land as around business. Thus it is not surprising to find artistic endeavors underwritten by grants from Mobil Oil Corporation or the Ford Foundation. Where we find wealthy and cultivated individuals in a Christian congregation, we might reasonably expect them to be supportive of Christian arts if for no other reason than as members of their class. Congregations with a substantial number of substantial members (the so-called "silk stocking churches") would conceivably be more amenable to authorizing the finances necessary to maintain the arts at the parish level. But not every church has such means. Nonetheless, we have seen from our study of Scripture that every person is potentially creative in some way. Many are creative in artistic ways, and these gifted people are to be found in every community and every parish, however so small. Were we only to look, we would find someone who can sing, someone who can paint or carve or sculpt or throw a pot, someone who can write, someone who can act, even if not brilliantly. Our seminaries do not hesitate to

graduate average candidates and place them in their calling. Shall we then deny to our average artists their divine and rightful calling? But often we rejoice to find great theologians arising from humble origins. It has happened often. It has happened often because we have a fine system which develops them and places them. We may ask how many potentially great artists we have in our midst who may die on the vine for lack of encouragement; shall we then deny to the Church these gifted people for lack of a supportive system?

Potential in the LC-MS

We have seen that the nobility, secular and ecclesiastical, tends to support the arts. Now concerning ecclesiastical nobility, we have none in the Missouri Synod. We have seen that socially we Lutherans tend to be of the middle class origins. (Incidentally, it has been said that of all classes, the middle class produces the most artists.) Thus our churchmen and synodical officials are predominantly out of the middle class. More importantly, our system of church polity is decidedly not episcopal, but rather congregational. Now all this stands in contrast to the situation in Renaissance Italy, where if an aristocratic bishop wanted a Botticelli of himself to adorn his cathedral, he simply ordered it. We may ask whether any of our congregations would even want a portrait of its pastor in the first place, and secondly whether it would ever get through the voter's assembly. Nonetheless, the situation for the arts in a middle class Church

body with congregational polity is probably better than would appear at first glance.

We have noted that the middle class produces a lot of artists. We have also seen that Lutheran theology is favorable toward the arts. We have seen that when conditions were favorable, the Lutheran church, especially in Europe, produced some fine things, notably in the art of music. We have a magnificent tradition, really. However we have seen that the Lutheran church in the United States has not made the contribution to the arts that one would wish. But we hope that this situation may be changed, and the artistic potential of the Lutheran church in this country can be reached.

Our type of polity has several advantages. First of all, it allows for initiative at the bottom. Any parish that wishes could initiate an arts program and probably receive the approval of the Synod.

Secondly, our type of polity allows for initiative at the top. Synod can see needs and get things rolling. The beauty of it is that the Synod, District, and Circuit exist to serve, support, and strengthen the Parish. Things that happen at the top happen to benefit those on the bottom, because the so-called bottom, the parish, is held in higher esteem than anything else. In concrete terms, an arts initiative begun at the synodical level would not build a cathedral nor commission a heroic sculpture of the Fourth Vice-president seated on a mighty steed.

Thirdly, those at the top who would initiate support for the arts at the synodical level share one thing with the old ecclesiastical nobility. Not wealth, but education. Good education. Our Missouri Synod educational system is one of the best, really, and our top officials are products of it. Thus one is pleased to find among our clergy a deep appreciation for the fine arts. There is a certain kind of nobility among well-educated Christian people. We may well boast of a fine classical music station like KFUD.

Fourthly, we find a concern for the fine arts reflected already in the existing structure of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. In the 1979 Handbook we find the following:

p. 71 2.113 Commission on Architecture
The Commission on Architecture shall consist of eleven persons, of whom at least nine members are architects, one is a clergyman and/or teacher, and one an artist engaged in or teaching in the art profession...

p. 131 VI. Higher Education

(Music, literature, and the arts are all included in the curricula of our institutions of higher learning.)

p. 163 VII. Parish Education and Services
A. Christian Education as a function of the Church
7.01 Christian Education in the Program of the Church
One of the basic tasks of the church is to edify the body of Christ.

(We have noted earlier in this paper that J.S. Bach summed up the purpose of music in almost the same terminology. Great works of Christian art were produced in the past to edify the body of Christ, and they continued to do so wherever they are performed or viewed.)

p. 172 J. Commission for Services to the Mentally Retarded

(I am wondering why, in order to balance things, we do not also have a Commission for Services to the Mentally Advanced. We have considered on the previous page how many gifted children may be lost to the Church for lack of a program. We note also that gifts come from God in a variety of packages. Those gifted in science and technology do not have a direct contribution to make to the Church out of their calling. Those gifted in music, literature, and the arts definitely do.)

p. 210 XI. B. Commission on Church Literature
11.41 Personnel...All members shall have a sound judgment in literary matters...
11.45 Duties f. encourage a high standard of scholarship as well as literary and artistic excellence.
11.49 Subcommittees...The following areas shall be provided for, either in separate departments or in combination with another department: h. Christian arts k. Audiovisual Materials
11.51 Advisory and Consultative Members b. The commission may appoint specialists on a temporary basis to examine manuscripts pertaining to specialties such as music, textbooks, art, audiovisual aids...

p. 214 XI. E. Commission on Worship

(It may be pointed out that there is the Lutheran Society for Worship, Music, and the Arts. It has existed to promote artistic activity among Lutherans, and a primary focus of the organization has been Worship. One cannot really contest the fact that worship is itself an art form in which many media focus upon the glorification of God. This is again reflected in the Handbook):

11.113 Functions and Duties
The commission shall--

a. make literature available to members of the Synod, to develop and deepen an understanding and love for the Lutheran heritage in Christian worship and for the various media of expression needed for our worship.

(The phrase "various media of expression" obviously refers to the art forms of architecture, music, poetry, drama, and art which make worship such an experience of beauty.)

p. 219 XII. A. Department of Public Relations
12.01 Statement of Purpose...to interpret the church to the world and the world to the church in such a manner as to facilitate the accomplishment of the church's essential mission...

(We note that the Christian artist, working in his culture, is after the same end.)

...to create an image of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod which will engender confidence in and respect for the church body and acceptance of its message...

(We note that value of the Lutheran Hour and Radio Station KFUC toward this end. We may also note the P.R. value of a high-profile artistic item, such as the Mormons have with their choir.)

12.03 Objectives d. a clear and faithful witness to the Christian ethic in the marketplace of business, finance and labor, as well as in the halls of government...

(We would do well here to add "and the fine arts," where the Christian voice has so long been silent.)

p. 221 XII. B. Radio
12.11 A Statement of Purpose The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod shall maintain and control Radio Stations KFUC-AM and KFUC-FM

(which are to be commended as pioneer efforts of our Church body in a new field of communications, particularly in producing stations with such a fine classical music format.)

p. 227 XII. C. Television

(Our innovative efforts in this field are to be commended as well.)

p. 237 XV. Special Ministries A. Stewardship
15.07 Functions of the Board The board shall a.
assist pastors and congregations in their cultivation
of the total stewardship life of their members...
b. Provide counsel and materials for congregations as
they endeavor to enlist the talents of their members
for Kingdom service in and through their congregations.

(It may be supposed that the phrases "total stewardship" and "talents" would include talents in the creative and artistic areas.)

Beyond merely wishing for a renewal of the arts among Christians, we need to clarify our goals more specifically. It seems obvious that in very basic terms there exists a need to develop a product and a market. The product is the artist and his work. The laborer is worthy of his hire, and needs a market for the work of his hands.

In a certain sense we have a ready supply of artists on hand already, and they are hungering to create. They are actively looking for a market. There is a limited secular market for serious music, art, and literature in this country. There is practically none in the Church. We hope the Church will do better in this regard.

But another important point regarding the product is the human being who produces the product. He is a whole man with needs of the soul as well as the body. In plain language, the artist needs a community to belong to, with which he can

identify, and to which he can contribute identity. The artist is often drawn to the artists' colony. The Christian artist needs his parish. All too often, the nurturing environment is difficult to find in both instances, especially for the Christian. Jeff Roy addressed this issue:

When a technically astute Christian artist discourses with the secular art world, he or she inevitably feels alienated--one voice in a wilderness of unresponsiveness. Christian artists experience a kind of schizophrenia. On the one hand, the art world appreciates their technical excellence, while finding itself ill-equipped to handle their concepts. On the other hand, the Christian community has often responded with distrust and hostility, tending to look at Christian artists as infiltrators of secular forms and hence of damning ideas. Thus the artists, trying to give form to their existence as Christians, are too often supported on neither side. They are stranded without a support group willing to appreciate both the technical and conceptual aspects of their work.¹

Three Options

To the end of effecting a renaissance of the arts in Christendom, several options present themselves.

1. We could form a society.
2. We could form a Synodical Board.
3. We could work from the parish level.

Let us consider each of these in turn.

A Society

First, we could form a society promoting such things as the Christian arts, and the Christian's involvement in artistic

¹ Jeff Roy, "A Cry in the Wilderness: Christians in the Visual Arts", Radix Magazine (Berkeley: Radix Magazine, Inc.), September/October 1980, Vol. 12, no. 2, p. 18.

careers. We have noted the excellent example of the Arts Centre Group, London, in encouraging these aims, particularly the latter.

However, the ACG, by my personal observation, has become a substitute Church for many of its members. One can understand this in light of the fact that many members of the ACG come out of the Evangelical churches strongly influenced by Calvinism and Fundamentalism, both of which take a strongly negative view of the arts, and discourage Christians from becoming involved in them. So many artistic people do not feel a part of things at their congregations, and turn to the ACG as a primary source of Christian contact. This weakens the body of Christ, as the ACG is not set up to preach the Gospel nor administer the sacraments.

The advantage of such a group is that it provides professionals with a forum for their ideas, an agora in which to learn of developments in other artistic fields, a fellowship in which to evaluate their field against the standard of Scripture, and receive the nurture and encouragement of fellow Christians in the same field. This type of fellowship is absolutely essential, and would do great good in this country in the same way as have associations of Christian businessmen, athletes, doctors, and the like.

A disadvantage is that this type of group tends toward elitism. A roomful of artists can produce enough hot air to fly the Hindenburg. The proper counterbalance for this is the

stable influence of the parish. It is there that any Christian, artists included, properly belongs. It is there he rubs shoulders with the banker and plumber in a real way, and is forced to communicate in the simplest, most concrete terms about his life and work. The failure of the ACG is that in being ecumenical it has not been parochial. It has failed to generate a home and a job for artists at the parish level. A related problem concerns the exact status of the faith of individual members of the Group. There is none. Everyone who presents himself for membership is assumed to be an orthodox, Bible-believing Christian. But there is no real and effective way in such a group of determining one's Christianity, as there is for the pastor in the parish. As a result there is a heterodox mixture of doctrinal orientation. Problems can and do result. Yet even for all that, the ACG and similar groups have made a valuable contribution to contemporary Christianity, and a decisive impact on the lives of many struggling Christian artists.

A Synodical Board

As a second alternative, we could propose the formation of a Synodical board for the arts. Such a board might include pastors who have had training in one of the artistic disciplines as well as theology. Over twenty years ago the Lutheran Society for Worship, Music and the Arts addressed the importance of this in their first conference.

All the commissions agreed that theological concepts must underlie all artistic endeavor...The relationship

of theology to worship, music and the arts is of primary significance. All artistic creativity is grounded on the creative action of God, and Christian art grows out of Christian faith. Faith is the motivation of the artist's work. It was felt that the artist has a lack of training in theology, and the theologian has a lack of training in the arts.²

Such a board might include chairmen of other boards: Architecture, Radio, Television, and Church Literature, for obvious reasons Higher Education because the fine arts are taught in our Synodical colleges; The CTCR because of the above mentioned relationship of theology to the arts; Parish Education because it is to be hoped that the arts and the artists will be nurtured at the parish level; Public Relations because every Christian artist is in constant dialog with a very un-Christian culture, and that culture dominates the world in which the Christian artist must work; Stewardship because good art costs money, but also because artistic gifts come from God and are to be developed by the Church to the glory of God and the building up of the Church.

Such a board might responsibly put the weight of its official position behind various projects, such as: commissioning art works for Synod; encouraging congregations to commission original works of art; developing programs by which congregations might educate themselves in the arts, develop the type of community in which the artist feels welcome, and also draw out the creative abilities of its own parishioners;

² Katharine Holum, editor, Lutheran Society for Worship, Music, and the Arts Bulletin, no. 1, c. 1959.

sponsoring periodic Synod-wide conferences on Christianity and the arts, and/or art festivals.

Such a board might also strive to maintain an awareness of the Biblical principles of creativity, of the history of Christianity and the arts, and of current trends in the arts, as they relate to Christianity, and also publish a periodical treating these issues.

Such a board might do a great deal of good, and it is to be hoped that one day it may be formed. Nevertheless, certain difficulties present themselves at the present time.

First of all, our type of Church polity is more congregational than anything else. Thus, unlike those Church bodies with an episcopal polity, we would probably experience resistance by initiating a program at the top and expecting all the parishes to fall in line.

We must also consider the possibility that such a board once established, might do more to stifle creativity than to nurture it. Artists think and work individually; committees think and work collectively. There is a tendency on the part of all collectively-minded committees to approve only the art which conforms to the dogma of the institution that appointed the committee. What is consequently produced is propaganda, albeit sometimes technically very good propaganda. Nevertheless, it is not art.

In the product-market terms we have been using, such a board might develop an ecclesiastical parallel to the secular situation described by Siegfried Reinhardt. The market was

controlled by a little New York art mafia, and thus controlled the product and producer. If they decreed, "Abstract Expressionism is in," all the Realist painters were faced with the choice of painting in the Abstract style, or finding another line of work.

However, at this point in the discussion we must note also the extent to which the market is governed by the consumers themselves. If everybody likes bad art, the serious artist is going to have tough sledding. We have already referred to Piepkorn's point number eight in factors influencing Christian art in America, in which he notes the lack of examples of good art in the Christian environment. He includes a description of a typical portrait of Christ:

The picture showed him as 'a pale and posturing person with immoderately long, silky hair...Who clutched a kind of diaphanous drapery gracefully about Him' with an expression of 'simpering vapidness,' a 'pietistic poseur--the very spit of every disgusting little 'teacher's pet.'³

It would seem that the solution to this problem would be to create an environment in which the Christian is surrounded by examples of good art. It is clear that this can only be done in the Church and in the home. Where the home is unaware, the Church or parish must take the initiative.

A Congregational Initiative

At the recent Great Commission Convocation, November

³ Piepkorn, op. cit., p. 221.

seventh through the ninth, 1980, in St. Louis, I had the opportunity to interview Rev. Garth Ludwig, pastor of Hope Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and a member of the Board of Parish Education. He expressed to me the same reservations given before about starting at the top with some kind of Christian arts initiative, by the creation of a Synodical board. His counsel lay along different lines, and leads into consideration of the third alternative before us: working from the parish level. Rev. Ludwig said:

Stimulus must be given at a grass roots level in which original artistic expression in Christian perspective is shown to be effective. Perhaps the best alternative is to showcase a congregation which has demonstrated the vitality of Christian art in both inreach and outreach modes of expression. Some dimension of these original artistic expressions could be paintings, watercolors, sculpture, poetry, and hymns. This artistic expression can really be said to be vital when it seeps down to the primary levels, and is not just the sole province of your avante garde. Once people see it working at the grass roots, other congregations will show an interest, and ultimately the Synod itself. The artist needs freedom. A Synodical board could squelch that. The number one problem is breaking down the stereotype of an artist being a person whose skills are not needed by God. We have to break through the tunnel vision. Change is threatening to the farmer who says, 'Who needs your guitar?'

Thus from several angles it would seem that the congregational initiative presents itself as the best alternative. We should note that some very effective programs in the Church today have begun in just this way. The first that comes to mind is Evangelism Explosion, which traces its origin to one pastor and one small church: Rev. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. By training

his members in lay evangelism, he built a large congregation. The Kennedy method was proven effective in other congregations, and a national program was established which has had a major impact on Churches in this country, including our own.

There are notable examples from the Lutheran side of the tracks. The Bethel Series began in one congregation and grew from there to widespread use. The same was true with the ministry of Don Abdon. He turned a dying congregation around by mobilizing laymen to use their God-given ministry gifts. Why should we not do something to help people use their equally God-given artistic gifts?

So we see that it seems most effective to start small and let things grown naturally. If these few examples are not sufficient, let us consider that the Reformation began with a young, obscure monk in an insignificant frontier town in Germany. And Christianity itself grew from a fellowship of twelve men, none of whom were outstanding, one of whom was an outright traitor.

In summing up, one important point needs to be mentioned, and that is the focus on the individual that all these things point to. The Synod does not exist to serve itself, but the congregation is the sum of its individuals, and the Synod is the sum of its congregations. The central purpose of Synod and congregation is that the individual is brought to faith and kept there. This bears importantly upon our consideration of the arts as a congregational and Synodical activity, for, as we have seen, artistic thinking and labor is a very

individual thing. Thus we find the Synod and congregation concerned with ministering to the total needs of the Christian individual. Out of a realization of those various needs, we mount our collective efforts. For a man's general spiritual needs most importantly, God has ordained the congregation where the word and sacrament are administered. But our Synodical handbook is full of institutions set up to meet more specific needs of other individuals as well. Our young need education; we provide them schools. Our retarded need care; we provide them homes. Seen in this light, we are now taking up a pastoral concern for the needs of individuals in our midst who share something special in common--artistic ability. The Synod can and should respond to the needs of these individuals, but their needs are going to be met by other individuals working in the parish setting.

My own experience has borne this out. I spent my vicarage at First Immanuel Lutheran Church in San Jose, California. While in the Bay Area I became involved in The Christian Artists' Index, a fellowship of Christians in the arts. I found that a significant number of the individuals involved were in or were from churches where the arts were discouraged, and would gravitate to a church where the arts were encouraged. Like anyone else, and perhaps even more acutely and sensitively, they felt the isolation so common in our society. And just as keenly they felt the need for a Christian community which needed them, where they felt a sense of belonging,

where they could yoke their gifts to the service of God's glory and the edification of their neighbor.

While at First Immanuel my wife, Jean, and I spear-headed what we called "Created to Create: An Arts Festival for Christians." It was held the weekend of Cantate Sunday, May second through the fourth, 1980, in the parish hall of the church. At least a dozen members of the congregation worked directly with us in putting the festival together. We had a lecture series, workshops, an art gallery, a coffee area, and concerts in the evenings. On Sunday, May fourth, there was a special service accenting music in worship, and a concert in the afternoon by the San Jose State University Chorus.

As I reflect on the festival, though, it seems to me that its greatest success was in the insights and blessings it brought certain individuals. A sculptor came down from Hayward. He had never met any other Christian artist. He spent the whole day talking shop with an artist from San Francisco. There were tears of gratitude in his eyes. A woman from Modesto showed up and set up a pottery wheel on the courtyard. Kids from age six to eighty-seven were trying their hand at throwing pots, and a lady from First Immanuel made the surprise discovery that she had a natural talent for that very difficult art. One of the workshops was on rock music, and it helped open lines of communication between two parents and their teenage son. Members we never would have guessed were artistic brought out some surprisingly good stuff for the gallery. I could talk for a long time.

As Rev. Ludwig said, once one congregation gets a good thing going, others will follow suit. At this point, though, a few factors should be noted that bear upon that first congregation's getting an arts initiative off the ground. Knowing that there is some latent creative potential in all men created in the image of God, we can then conclude that there will be some possibility for support of the arts in every congregation, even the smallest rural parish. However, to begin with we must consider a congregation whose location and composition could not necessitate a great deal of preliminary work. For example, it stands to reason that if we started with a small, rural congregation, we might very well have to spend a good deal of time educating the members on the validity of the arts as a human endeavor before actually proceeding to produce artwork out of the congregation. On the other hand, it would seem more likely that a large congregation located in a major city and composed of well-educated and well-to-do members would be more able and disposed to patronize the arts at the congregational level.

For the congregation interested in ministering to individuals in such a way, what concrete suggestions might be given?

I. Spiritual

- A. Pray for God's grace to become the kind of loving Christian community where sensitive people, both inside and outside the flock, will feel welcome.

- B. Let every man exhort his brother to outdo one another in tithing, thus bringing down the uncontainable blessing of God upon the flock.

II. Educational

- A. Study the Biblical basis for creativity.
- B. Review the history of the arts in relation to Christianity.

III. Practical

- A. Take a look around the church premises with an artistically sensitive eye, asking:
 - 1. Are there examples of good art that should be featured?
 - 2. Are there examples of bad art that should be removed?
 - 3. Are there needs which could be met by commissioning:
 - a. someone from the congregation?
 - b. someone from the community?
- B. Take a look through the church membership with a pastorally sensitive eye, asking:
 - 1. Are there real artists in our midst whose work should be commended?
 - 2. Are there creative people in our midst whose potential should be encouraged?
 - 3. How can we strengthen our artists in their contact with the world?
- C. Sponsor an arts festival. Include other congregations in the circuit.

We hope and pray that God the creator will do many creative things among His people in these last days. We as Christians have been in an artistic desert for too many years, but we pray that we might once again produce good work.

O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil....

Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy
glory unto their children. And let the beauty
of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish
Thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the
work of our hands establish Thou it.
(Psalm 90:14-17)

We pray that all such works of art, done in faith, might
be brought forth to the edification of God's people...

ET SOLI DEO GLORIA!

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