

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

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110048, India.

Second, Dr. Kitamori is also influenced by the dominant Buddhist concept of *Dukka* (suffering) and its role in solving human suffering and pain in order to reach *Nirvana*.

The key issue in the whole argument of contextual theology is whether the Biblical and historical doctrines of the Christian Church can be preserved without compromise in the process of contextualization. It is comparable to the ark of the covenant in the Old Testament. In Old Testament times, the ark was carried by ox-cart. Today in several Asian countries, it could be carried by rickshaw, horse, motorcycle or car. Yet the message of the ark must not be changed. Syncretistic theologians are trying to change the ark itself.

4. *Biblically-oriented Asian theology*: Theology in Asia has been taught by Western missionaries. The West has its own theological thoughts derived from its own cultural background, i.e. Calvinism, Arminianism, Death of God, etc. Yet in Asia we are facing different circumstances from the West. We must let the Bible control our theological reflection and work out its relevance for the living situations of Asia. Some of the main issues we are facing in Asia are Communism, poverty, suffering, war, idolatry, demon possession, bribery and cheating. Our theological emphasis must bear these problems in mind.

## CONCLUSION

Bearing in mind the differences between East and West, we **P.23** Asians desperately need to formulate Asian theologies which are relevant to Asians and yet based on Biblical doctrines. Syncretistic theologies which dilute the Gospel message are becoming more popular in seminaries throughout Asia.

There is a need to establish research centers where Asian theologians and missionaries can spend their time in research and in the production of materials that deal with situations prevalent in Asia today. Hopefully, our newly formed theological research centers in India, Hong Kong, and Korea will produce men able to tackle some of these issues in Asia. We need an Asian apologetic, not one transplanted from the West. Let us listen, evaluate, and be open-minded to different theological views in contextualization, and yet without compromise be faithful to the Gospel and proclaim it in love as the apostle Paul exhorts us:

Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love ([I Corinthians 16:13-14](#)).

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# The Christian Task in the Arts: Some Preliminary Considerations

by D. L. Roper

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DR. ROPER in Part I of his paper, *The Christian Task in the Arts*, reminds his readers that Christians are not exempt from the cultural crisis of our age. He suggests two requirements for the Christian who seeks to be faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ and fruitful in his service in the Christian calling of the arts. The first is 'a down-to-earth appreciation of the concrete conditions of life that surround and pervade our very being', and the second, 'an appreciation of the fullness of the healing and mercy given so freely and richly through God's gracious action in Jesus Christ'. This calling can be expanded to further requirements: compassionate Christian insight into the complex problems of our culture, depth of insight into the incredible riches of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, a general appreciation of the inner character of the artistic enterprise and the development and mastery of the special technical skills relating to the particular art form. Such an enterprise must be developed within the context of a Christian community that is sensitively appreciative of the previous points. In putting man's cultural calling into Christian perspective, he asks the question which has been posed since the dawn of civilisation: 'Who is man?' He agrees with Calvin's opening words of *The Institutes*: 'The true knowledge of ourselves is dependent on the true knowledge of God.' Dr. Roper then proceeds to work out the implications for our cultural understanding. Man's place in creation is as 'a co-worker with God in respect of the cultural task of having dominion over the earth'. The Word of God in creation symbolises God's self-revelation and his rule over the whole *cosmos* as well as in Scripture, which alone has the power to give the wisdom that makes us wise unto salvation. Man as the *Imago Dei* stands as a unitary being in the centre of creation. [p. 25](#) His fall affects the entire creation. Redemption in Jesus Christ, the Word of God, is the only basis for the renewal and reformation of all things ([Romans 8:20-21](#); [Colossians 1:20](#)). This must be worked out in the context of the life-embracing community of the people of God. He concludes this section:

'... if we would read the New Testament aright, the calling to the people of God expressed in [Romans 12:1-2](#) was far from being one that involved a withdrawal from secular cultural tasks to undertake "spiritual" tasks. It has implications far beyond the call for an individual believer to be renewed in his moral life. It was nothing less than a calling to the whole redeemed community to allow its new heart allegiance unto Christ the Lord to reshape and redirect the whole cultural task that man had been given by God. In a spirit of full heart commitment unto Christ that enabled them more clearly to perceive every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord, they were to respond in quiet obedience in all that they did. No cultural or social task was to be unaffected. Men were redeemed for the purpose of serving and glorifying Christ on earth by achieving their God-given task of cultivating and having dominion over the creation in a renewed obedience to the Word of God.

'This is our task today; and only as a community of believers acknowledging Christ as Lord in all we do may we break free of the spirits of the age that so easily and unwittingly ensnare us at every turn.'

Against this background he turns 'to a consideration of art, with a particular interest in the slant of Christian art'. Part II of the paper continues:

## **TOWARDS CHRISTIAN ART—SOME AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS**

### **I. QUESTIONS OF STRUCTURE AND DIRECTION**

What is Art? What place should it play in the overall task of **P. 26** cultural development? How should we discern, evaluate and criticise art? In what sense can we speak of Christian art?

It is such questions as these that press themselves upon us if, with special regard to art, we would seek to be faithful co-workers with God in the whole of our lives. To wrestle with them Christianly is by no means easy, and we would do well to remember that any answers we come up with are but tentative steps in our life of faith to formulate a Christian aesthetic stance.

Although the Bible rarely mentions or deals with the problems of art as such, we may begin to appreciate something of the fundamental issues involved from a consideration of the following example:

‘See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ’ ([Colossians 2:8](#)).

Some Christian traditions take this verse to mean that philosophy as a cultural enterprise is to be avoided, as intrinsically opposed to Christ. Other Christian traditions, judging from their life and practice, would appear to pay no heed to it whatever, incorporating all manner of philosophy into their ways of life. Moreover, the confusion that exists amongst Christians on this particular cultural activity would be typical of that which exists in art as well as most of man’s other cultural tasks within the creation. It is my contention that when consideration is given to the artistic task on the part of Christians, the basic confusion that exists arises from a failure to distinguish between structural problems and directional problems. Moreover, this usually arises from an inadequate appreciation of the Biblical view of man’s place in creation, and the influence of the Fall and redemption upon man’s cultural calling, resulting either in a pietistic world-flight from cultural activity or in a synthesist worldly-compromise with the principalities and powers that at present wreak havoc over the world order.

Was Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, warning the people of God throughout the ages from ever indulging in philosophy of any kind? This would be extremely unlikely, since Paul’s injunctions were invariably related specifically to the concrete conditions **p. 27** of the people to whom he was writing. It is more likely that Paul was warning the Christians at Colossae against the particular philosophy current at the time, i.e. gnosticism, because it was alien and opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We may learn from this example, therefore, that Scripture calls us to be discerning in our dealing with the cultural forms that surround us. How are we to exercise this discernment? Basic to a Christian answer to this question, I think, is the distinction between structure and direction.

Issues of STRUCTURE are those which set different features of God’s creation off from one another. In respect of man’s task of cultivating God’s creation, for example, they have to do with such matters as: What makes the State different from the Church? What is the State and what is its task in human society? What makes art different from science? What is the task of art in human life? What is philosophy and what is its place in human life? etc. We may, of course, ask whether or not certain cultural activities, such as organized crime and prostitution, have a legitimate place at all within man’s task of exercising dominion over creation. However, to grapple effectively with all these problems, it is of some importance to distinguish between the *structural* issues and the *directional* issues involved, for only in such a framework have we an integral appreciation of our diverse tasks in life. Moreover, once we recognise this is the basic distinction to be made in regard to cultural and social life, it becomes obvious that few structural activities *per se* are to be

excluded from the Christian life. The problem is rather that legitimate callings have been *wrongly* cultivated: i.e. the problem is rather of the *direction* in which men have shaped or cultivated the structures of God's creation.

Issues of DIRECTION relate to the question of *obedience* to the Word of God in the manner in which men respond to their task of cultivating God's creation. In this respect, it is helpful to think of it applying to two facets or dimensions of our existence—the first relating to the religious commitment of our hearts and the second to the creational norms which our concrete lives are to realize. From the former of these, man's cultivating activity gains its characteristic spirit or stamp, and as a consequence we speak of 'the spirit of rationalism', 'the spirit of Nazism', 'the spirit of radicalism', 'the spirit of the counter-culture', 'the spirit of the p. 28 Renaissance', or 'the spirit of the Reformation'. In this respect the Scriptures call us to a radical discerning of the spirits ([1 John 4:1–3](#)), and to be circumcised of heart ([Deuteronomy 10:16](#); [Jeremiah 4:4](#); [Romans 2:28–29](#)). From the latter of these arise the degree of obedience to the Word of God (in respect to such norms as faithfulness, honesty, justice, economy, coherence) in relation to the specific manner in which we cultivate our personal characters, our relationships with other people, our family life, our homes, our programme of education, our business life, our politics, the State, the Church, art, science, philosophy, theology, science, leisure, etc.

Thus, in the above example cited from Paul's epistle to the Colossians, we should ask ourselves the question: 'Was the author saying that philosophy, structurally, had no legitimate place in man's task of unfolding the creation, or was he saying that the particular philosophy (gnosticism in this case) was directionally wrong because it was not obedient to the Word of God in Christ?' The fact that the passage quoted does itself warn against philosophy, *according to human tradition and elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ*, is surely indicative that the latter of these alternatives is what is meant. It is my conviction that what we have discussed here in relation to philosophy applies equally to art, and it is to a consideration of this that we now turn.

## II. STRUCTURE: THE NATURE OF ART

What distinguishes an art object? When do we have art and when do we not? What justifies a statement like 'That's not even art!' as being more than a subjective expression of dislike? This issue has engaged the attention of many thinkers throughout the ages, and although we may learn from their efforts, we should not delude ourselves into thinking that their religious stance towards life does not affect their insight into this very difficult question. The approach taken here is basically that taken by C. Seerveld, in his book, *A Christian Critique of Art and Literature*, which is, to my mind, the most significant contribution made so far to a Christian view of aesthetics. P. 29

### 1. Some Blind Alleys

#### *(a) Beauty*

There exists a long tradition in the West that would say that the hallmark of art is beauty. In many ways this characterization of art is today a great embarrassment, since few would claim much modern art was beautiful. Is it not, nevertheless, still art? However, if art can exist without the hallmark of beauty, then the latter is not structurally a distinguishing feature of art.

The idea of beauty goes back at least to Plato, a thinker whose influence upon the development of Western culture is scarcely appreciated by modern man. Beauty, for Plato, is a matter of measure and proportion; a thing of beauty is one with a pleasing, fitting

harmony. As a Greek impressed with the balanced order of the *cosmos*, the pythagorean-trained Plato posited a 'capital B Beauty' somewhere beyond the heavens. This divinized Absolute Beauty had strong mathematical overtones of variety in unity and symmetry.

The Roman Cicero modified Plato's Beauty theology so that it was conceived of as an ideal pattern for thought. Every rational person was therefore considered able to recognise an apt configuration of parts as deserving the title 'beautiful'.

Egyptian-born Plotinus emphasized that Plato's mystique of Beauty was homesickness for the God with which it had once been One.

The influence of this tradition was taken into Christianity by Augustine who, under the spell of Cicero, Victorinus and Plotinus, developed a Platonic mathematical objectivism which denied that anything which could be, might be anything other than beautiful. Particularly in his early writings he claims such things as 'even evil and its punishment fit harmoniously into the just mosaic of God's good creation' (Confessions VII, 18–19).

Although Thomas Aquinas was more under the spell of Aristotle than of Plato, he nevertheless made room for the 'beauty theology' developed by Augustine, significantly limiting it to the sphere of 'nature' which was unaffected by 'grace'. The Renaissance revolted against the scholasticized synthesis so effectively accomplished by Aquinas, turning once more to the thought of Plato for much of its orientation. However, the secularization begun by p. 30 Aquinas continued, with 'beauty' thus loosed from many of its synthesized Christian overtones.

By the time modern British 'common sense' philosophy had divorced beauty from any Christian theological associations, it had become subjectivized to a harmonious human feeling that may be stimulated by certain objects we happen to call 'art'.

Most significant to this thumb-nail sketch of the chequered history of thought about beauty is the way it has moved from a divinized ideal transcending temporal experience to a subjectivized feeling beyond which it has no cosmic reality. Moreover, these changes in fashion regarding thought about beauty are related to the history of the executed art works themselves. However, to investigate that in any detail would go beyond my present purpose of simply emphasizing that although beauty has often been considered to be both the ideal and hallmark of art, it is an unsuitable structural criterion for characterizing art.

### *(b) Inspiration*

Comparable with the influence upon art of his thought on Beauty has been Plato's conception of inspiration in art.

'We seem to be pretty well agreed that the artist knows little or nothing about the subjects he represents and that his art has no serious value—and this applies to all tragic poetry, epic or dramatic.'<sup>1</sup>

'All the good epic poets utter all these fine words not from art but as inspired and possessed, and the good lyric poets likewise ... seeing then that it is not by art that they compose and utter so many fine things about the deeds of men—as you do about Homer—but by divine dispensation, each is able only to compose that to which the Muse has stirred him ... for not by art do they utter these things, but by divine influence.'<sup>2</sup>

In respect of art, Plato's writings are apt to be rather confusing. He sometimes says, especially in *The Republic*, that art is an intrinsically inferior activity of men—because it can only hope to give imitations of imitations and thereby be three steps removed from

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *The Republic*.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Ion*.



p. 31 the ultimate, ideal reality. In other places, such as in the above quote from *Ion*, he appears to recognize that all the good epic poets are indeed dealing with a more immediate representation of the universal reality. However, his complaint is that this is being achieved not through the knowledge and apprehension of the poets. They remain completely ignorant of the reality they are representing whilst the Muse inspires them. In this way Plato was responsible for the view of 'inspiration' in art, even though he himself disapproved of it. Later thinkers—especially those showing some influence of Neoplatonism—were to look with approval upon the inspiration of the artist. This is all the more significant, for it is not hard to visualize the way in which a Christian gnosticism would wish to claim this sort of inspiration for cultural activities in our day.

The view of the artist as a prophet divinely inspired has had a particularly strong influence through the 19th century Romantic Movement. 'God is the direct cause of all art,' said Friedrich von Schelling. Matthew Arnold expressed essentially the same view in a watered-down Anglo-Saxon version when he said, 'More and more, mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry our science will appear incomplete: and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry.'

In such a conception, art as 'inspired utterance' replaces the Word of God as the central revealer of the meaning and purpose of life. Moreover, taken in conjunction with the nihilism and despair that has been a central theme of contemporary art, we may realize that its nihilistic character is profoundly religious: the modern artist is literally the *prophet of no meaning and no purpose*. The religious connotations of the 'Pop' super-star are again clear.

Moreover, is it not true that much very ordinary and pedestrian art is still art? If we grant that this is so, then whatever is really involved with this matter of 'inspiration', like beauty, cannot be an essential structural feature of art.

## 2. Essential Features of Art

### (a) Symbolic Objectification

The first essential feature of a work of art is that it is an attempt p. 32 to objectify symbolically certain meaningful aspects of some feature of life in God's creation. The *cosmos* we live in is God's creation and as such is entirely meaningful. Moreover, we are aware of a number of ways in which its meaning functions symbolically. In nature we are aware of the symbolic meaning of light and darkness, of the 'menacing' of heavy clouds, of the power and 'judgment' of thunder, of the quiet aloneness of sparse empty spaces. In human life we are fully aware of the way symbolic gestures function to reveal characteristics of certain persons and certain walks of life. First of all, therefore, we should realize that symbolic meaning is a feature of the way God's created *cosmos* functions. In art, men attempt to objectify symbolically certain meaningful aspects of some feature of life by highlighting these from their integral experience of God's creation into some culturally fashioned form or style, thus producing art forms.

### (b) Aesthetic coherence

If the desired meaningful aspects of reality that have caught the artist's attention are to be faithfully represented in the artist's objectified symbol, then the latter must have an aesthetic coherence. By this I mean that the work of art must embody an internal symbolical consistency, whilst faithfully representing the unity and diversity of the meaningful aspects under consideration. To achieve this the artist has to select carefully those features of his total experience of God's creation so that when they are assembled

together, subject to an aesthetic coherence, the final result will indeed serve to highlight the meaningful aspects of life that have caught his attention.

### *(c) Imagination*

‘He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts’ ([Luke 1:51](#)).

Christians have very often been suspicious of the imagination, and very often for good reason. However, I wonder whether the answer of trying to repudiate or deny the validity of the imagination has been the right one. The more Biblical approach is first to discuss the structural questions that attempt to discover the God-given [p. 33](#) place of the imagination within our lives, and subsequently to realize the ways in which the various forms of idolatry may delude man in the vanities of his own imagination.

We should first of all be aware of the connotations which the very word ‘imagination’ has for us today. Beginning with Dada and Surrealism, modern art has been very strongly influenced by a bizarre gnostic-like mysticism that would place the imagination in an unreal world of dream and fantasy that supposedly lies deep within man’s subconscious, and which has little relation to the wholeness of God’s created *cosmos*. Although I think that the world of the imagination is one of the essential features of art, I certainly do not think that its inner character is intrinsically wrapped in such psychological conceptions.

God’s creation is rich in meaning. Unfortunately, we live in the background of a culture that has defied the scientific attitude of apprehending the meaning of the creation. Such knowledge is supposed to be ‘objective’ whilst any other pretensions to knowing are considered as ‘subjective’. This kind of antithesis between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ has to be rejected if we would think Christianly. It is the product of a humanistic view of life.

Our everyday experience of God’s creation is one of a rich, integral character that is all too easily forced into the mould of a scientific reductionism. This indeed we should repudiate. Not, however, by seeking some subjective, gnostic-like knowledge that wells up from ‘the depths of our unconscious’. Rather, we should understand that both the scientific and the imaginative artistic ways of knowing should be seen as having a validity within the variegated meaning of God’s created *cosmos*. Moreover, as ways of knowing, they are both anchored in the integral way in which we experience God’s creation day by day. The sciences have the task of prying into the various functional processes within God’s creation, yielding a knowledge and insight that is abstract, theoretical and partial, while the imaginative way of knowing abstracts elements from our integral experience for the purpose of giving insights into reality that are comprehensive and total. The implications of this view of the imagination is that although it is different from the scientific way of knowing, it nonetheless bears as genuine a relation to the integral fullness of God’s creation as does the scientific attitude of knowing. [p. 34](#)

## **III. DIRECTION: THE SLANT OF CHRISTIAN ART**

As Christians, we would do well to remember that no cultural activity should be seen as lying outside the circle of our God-given task of exercising dominion over the creation in obedience to the Word of God. To see art or science outside this circle and to cultivate them in such a spirit is idolatrous in the sense that they become things in themselves, cut off from God’s sovereign rule over his creation. However, this does not mean that Christian art should be identified with ‘sacred’ or ‘church’ art, nor does it mean that art coming from the pen or brush of an artist who is not a Christian cannot in a very real way be considered as reflecting something that gives valid insight into God’s creation, and so qualify in some measure for the adjective Christian. In evaluating art, primacy of attention should always be given to the realities symbolized in the work, and the manner of their



symbolization. Only to the degree to which the personal life of the artist enables us to appreciate these things further should they be allowed to influence the way their art is evaluated. Nor is evaluation of art ever merely a matter of personal taste. Personal preferences are certainly permissible, but in a world that is meaningfully structured by the Word of God in all its aspects, Christians of all people should be concerned to sustain the objectivity of aesthetic judgement.

Our tentative exploration into the development of a Christian aesthetic stance have so far been addressed to the structural questions. As such, I have suggested that a work of art is an object that has been culturally formed by man so that it embodies an aesthetically coherent symbolic objectification of an imaginative insight into certain meaningful aspects of some features of reality.

Our next task is to reflect upon those matters that have to do with the directional character of works of art: those issues which have to do both with discerning, evaluating and criticising art, and, hopefully, giving some insight into the slant of Christian art.

I would like to do this first by discussing some false ideas as to what Christian art might be thought to mean, and second by exploring what I consider to be the slant of its positive characteristics. [p. 35](#)

## **1. Some Blind Alleys**

### *(a) Art dealing with 'Christian' or 'Eible' subjects*

This is a common conception of what Christian art might be. There are, however, two basic objections I have against this view. First, what is meant by a 'Christian' subject as against one which is not so? To exclude the very real results of sin from Christian artistic reflection is not guided by Biblical practice. Rather, it is the result of a moralism that is imposed on the Bible. Moreover, the very way of formulating the problem in terms of subjects which are 'Christian' and those which are not is a denial that all of creation is God's and therefore fit to be a 'Christian' subject. Secondly, even when the word 'Christian' is applied to art on Biblical subjects, there are very many examples of works of art which do not symbolically objectify the meaning of these subjects in a Biblical way. Many paintings, many films, many musical works could be considered in this light. Schonberg's *Moses and Aaron*, and Rice and Webber's *Superstar* provide two immediate examples.

For these reasons, therefore, 'Christian' art cannot be defined merely from a consideration of the subject it chooses for its symbolic objectification.

As special categories we would consider here art which is to have a specifically evangelistic or church function. Simply because art is to have these functions, the completed art objects themselves will symbolically objectify the meaningful aspects of the subject-matter in a spirit which is faithful to the Word of God.

The nature of Christian art depends less upon the subject than upon the spirit, the wisdom and understanding of reality that is symbolically objectified in the treatment of the subject.

### *(b) Art undertaken by Christians*

Is 'Christian' an epithet to use of any work of art that is undertaken by someone who confesses the name of Christ? Christians, however full of faith they may be, can still make bad art. They may be sinful and weak, they may have little appreciation for the task that God intends art to play in life, they may have little technical ability. On the other hand, a person who does not confess the name of Christ may have a far greater appreciation of the God-given norms for artistic activity. Hence, a work of art is not good [p. 36](#) simply when we know the artist to be a Christian. It is good when we perceive it to be good.

(c) 'Great' art

Is 'Christian' art simply art that we somehow perceive to be 'great' or 'good'? To have apprehended the structural features of art in a way that we recognise to be good is certainly an important criterion for evaluating art. However, art is a human creation, embodying a spirit, an insight, a perspective, a wisdom in its execution. Great art may therefore embody a spirit which is hostile to God, thus misconstruing and misshaping the meaningful aspects of the whole of reality. Clearly, then, 'Christian' art cannot be equated with 'great' art.

In a sense, Christian art is nothing special. It is sound, healthy, good art. It is art which is in line both with its own God-given structural characteristics and also with reality in general. In this respect it is art with a certain slant.

## 2. Essential Qualities of Art

There are a number of different ways in which the slant of Christian art may be approached. C. Seerfeld in his *Christian Critique of Art and Literature* calls it the 'surd of joy and sin'. This is an excellent description of it in a minimum number of words. I will attempt to explore this general thought in three variations.

(a) *The light of joy and compassion that faces tribulation*

There would be little objection to the statements: 'In this life we have tribulation', 'in Christ we have joy', 'a mark of the Christian is his compassion'. However, what is crucial to the Christian view of life, and hence any Christian artistic witness, is the way such features are woven into a coherence. If the aspects of joy and compassion are not woven in relation to a realistic wholeness that is intensely aware of the scars of sin and tribulation even in the finest of human effort, then the result is a romantic sentimental art, not Christian art. It is very important for us to bear these features in mind, since Western art over the last 150 years has been marked by an inherent lack of a Christian coherence in this respect. Serious art has trodden the direction of heavy pessimism. More popular art [p. 37](#) has trodden the path of romantic sentimentality. The artistic efforts of the Christian community have very largely been caught up with the latter. However, an integrally Christian art cannot accept the bias towards shallow sentimentality that marks the mainstream of European culture. Nor can it accept the despairing realism that marks so much of the 20th century serious art. It should record, with humble Old Testament humanness, the just mercies of God upon our broken yet glorious world. This calls for a symbolic objectification that everywhere speaks of a light of joy and compassion that faces the realities of tribulation. Generally speaking, the art associated with the European Reformation of the 16-17th centuries is characterized by this spirit.

(b) *The strain between a rest in Christ and a fight with sin*

'I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world' ([John 16:33](#)).

The crucial issue in regard to the slant of a symbolic objectification purporting to be Christian is again not simply one of recognizing these features as two aspects of the Christian faith. Rather, it is the way they are interrelated and woven into a coherence. To portray the peace of Christ as something removed from the conflicts of life brings it variously within the orbits of 'classic', 'mystical pantheistic', and 'pietistic escapist' art. To portray something of the struggle of life in the absence of a restful contentment in Christ invariably brings it within the orbits of revolutionary, romantic, expressionistic or anarchistic art.

A Christian artistic witness should symbolically objectify the real life-situation in which a contented restfulness in Christ is engaged in mortal conflict with the sin that besets this world until the final judgment.

*(c) The Scandal of the Great Divorce*

‘Blake wrote on the marriage of Heaven and Hell. If I have written of their Divorce, this is not because I think myself a fit antagonist for so great a genius, nor even because I feel at all sure that I know what he meant. But in some sense or other the attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable ‘either-or’; that, granted skill *p. 38* and patience and (above all) time enough, some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found; that mere development or adjustment or refinement will somehow turn evil into good without our being called on for a final and total rejection of anything we should like to retain. This belief I take to be a disastrous error.’<sup>3</sup>

The Scriptures set forth a view of reality that is rooted in a Great Divorce. There is an eternal antithesis between Christ, and the Evil One, between truth and falsehood, between good and evil, between justice and injustice.

This antithesis should be apparent if our art is to have a Christian slant. Within the context of a fallen world, however, one does not witness to such an antithesis by avoiding certain ‘unsavoury’ subjects. Rather, as in the Scriptures, the antithesis should be demonstrated in the way such subjects are treated.

The Scriptures do not hide the hideous sins of David—described as a man after the Lord’s own heart. Nor do the Scriptures condone David’s acts. They are set irrevocably within the context of the Great Divorce referred to above. This example is typical. The Bible does not hesitate to deal with subjects like prostitution, drunkenness, adultery, sorcery and idolatry, simply because they are very real to the lives of fallen men. However, the way they are dealt with is the exact opposite of ‘Playboy’ or ‘Truth’. Christian art should steer clear of depicting virtue and vice in moralistic terms. It should take care to show both that even the best and godly men have foibles and weaknesses and even the worst men have touches of tenderness and nobility. Moreover, it should witness to the fact that the Great Drama of Life that forms the background to the lives of us all is one in which the Kingdoms of Christ and Satan wage mortal combat over the whole created order.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

In the Introduction, I commented that a revitalization of the arts in the power of the Gospel required: first, a compassionate insight into the complex problems of our culture; secondly, a depth *P. 39* of insight into the incredible riches of the grace of God in Jesus Christ relating to the *whole* of our lives; thirdly, a general appreciation of the inner character of the artistic task; fourthly, the development and mastery of the special technical skills relating to the particular arts; and fifthly, a sensitively appreciative Christian community that has an awareness of the state of our culture that is shaped by the radical terms of the Bible, and not by the shallow moralistic terms of conservative bourgeois society.

The above two studies have hardly attempted to deal with all these facets of the problem. They have simply aimed at giving some appreciation of the *calling* of Christian Art. In so doing, they have attempted to set general goals that we should be striving for if

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<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

we would be true to our Lord and Master in this sphere of our cultural task. If it is to be anything more than theory, we must set to work at practically implementing these goals, learning from each other as we seek to do so.

We need to become much more aware of and attuned to the depth of the problems of our age. Those are nowhere more clearly exposed than in the art forms which our age has produced. However, we should remember that we are brought up in an educational system that is preoccupied with techniques, with the result that it is all too easy to be spiritually blind to the meaning of the art forms that dot our contemporary culture. To rectify this we need many more contributions of the type given by H.R. Rookmaaker.<sup>4</sup>

We need to become proficient in the techniques of the particular art forms with which we are engaged. Without this proficiency it is impossible to develop styles which embody symbolical objectifications that bear faithful witness to Christ's fallen, yet gloriously redeemed, world. However, it is a task requiring specialist training and tuition, involving hours and years of practice and experimenting.

We should work at this task within the community of the Body of Christ, seeking for a revitalization of its life and witness. A more obedient lifestyle on the part of God's people can arise only as we reflect communally upon the fullness of our task in the light of the Scriptures. This applies as much to our artistic life as to any other [p. 40](#) aspect of our life. The hallmark of this communal activity should be a gentle mutual criticism of our efforts. The desire to build personal reputations and the like should have no place within the community of saints; nor should petty, back-biting criticism.

May the grace of God aid us in this and in all our tasks of service unto Christ our Saviour and King.

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# **The Panama Congress of 1916 and its Impact on Protestantism in Latin America**

*by* W. NELSON AND J.B.A. KESSLER

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## **THE REASON FOR THE PANAMA CONGRESS**

THE rejection by the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910 of Latin America as a legitimate field for Protestant missions<sup>1</sup> led several delegates who strongly disagreed

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<sup>4</sup> H.R. Rookmaaker, C. Seerveld, W.A. Dryness.

<sup>1</sup> Rouse & Neill, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement* (New York: Westminster, 1954), p. 357.