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# The Christian Stake in the Arts: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture

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## I THE SIGNS OF LIFE

The flamboyant and provocative German Jesuit, Friedhelm Mennekes, Pastor of St. Peters Church, located in the great contemporary art city of Cologne, emphatically states:

> Art doesn't need the church, it has a spirituality and aura all its own. But the church cannot exist without art because it is perhaps the most significant part of the world from which the church can receive the impulses necessary for its survival[1]

A more subdued, but equally impassioned voice is that of Keith Walker, Residentiary Canon at Chichester Cathedral in England, a long-standing promoter and patron of the arts, especially of the visual arts in the Anglican Church, who says,

> It will be for the Church to develop its mission in a cultural domain from which it has been for too long estranged. Part of that mission will be to receive wisdom from the artist and another part will be for the art establishment to relinquish some of its inhibitions and recover an ancient and glorious association. Most of all it will enable glory to be born into a world where glory is obscured.[2]

From the Academy, rather than the Church, come the words of the distinguished American art historian, the late Frederick Hartt, who writes in the introduction to his widely used history of western art text:

> The religious art of the past generally offers us the most persuasive access to religious ideas. So effective can be religious art that many agnostic scholars find themselves unconsciously dealing with religious images as reverently as if they were believers.[3]

Interestingly, Hartt finds the need to extend his comments about the links between art and religion, relating how frequently artists, mystified as to where their ideas come from, attribute a divine or creative power beyond themselves as their source. He also points out how God is often represented as an artist or an architect, 'tracing with a gigantic compass a system and an order upon the earth, which was previously "without form and void"'. And, conversely, he reminds us that at certain times some artists, such as Raphael and Michelangelo have been called 'divine' and recognized virtually as saints. (Incidentally, only one artist that I know of, that is, Fra Angelico, has ever been officially canonized by the Roman Catholic Church.)

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[1] Goodrow, Gérard, 'The "Rock Priest",' *Art News* 91/10 (December 1992), p. 44

[2] Walker, Keith, *Images or Idols?: The Place of Sacred Art in Churches Today* (Norwich: The Canterbury Press, 1996), p. 141.

[3] Hartt, Frederick, *Art: A History of Painting, Sculpture, Architecture* (4th Ed.) (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1989), pp. 27–28

Lastly, Hartt attests to the power of art to evoke experience and states that are akin to religious experience. A notable example of this happening is the record left by Dostoyevsky's wife who tells of the effect Holbein's Deposition in the Basel Kunstmuseum had on him.

> He stood for twenty minutes before the picture without moving. On his agitated face was the frightened expression I often noticed on it during the first moments of his epileptic fits. He had no fit at the time, but he could never forget the sensation he had experienced in the Basel museum in 1867: the figure of Christ taken from the cross, whose body already showed signs of decomposition, haunted him like a terrible nightmare. In his notes *to The Idiot* and in the novel itself he returns again and again to the theme.[4]

A multitude of issues arise from the quotations and comments made above. What are the necessary impulses for the survival of the church that Mennekes asserts art or the arts have something to do with? How does this relate to the broader concerns of faith, our construal and contextual understanding of culture, and engagement beyond the framework of the institutional church? Can the church truly overcome its indifference to the arts or its suspicion of artists sufficiently not only to believe that there are artists of all kinds (visual, musical, performing, literary) who have some wisdom to offer her, but to embrace them as well, as Walker would wish? Or can the church overcome the mistrust and pejorative image of an abusive power of the past that much of the art world holds about the church and the Christian faith. If it is true that, as Hartt states, the 'religious art of the past generally offers us the most persuasive access to religious ideas' why is it that the western church has been so reluctant to employ this powerful agent missionally in recent time? Why has the 'trench', as it is often called, between the church and the arts become deeper and wider?

Has the near total verbalization of the faith actually impaired the power of the church to speak? It is commonly held that we live at a time when the visual is paramount and a significant means of expressing truth while the verbal, with its great commitment to logic, is not being accorded the value which it has long had. This trend is disturbing for many Christian thinkers and perhaps this anxiety is nowhere more passionately expressed and articulately resisted than by Jacques Ellul in his book, *La Parole humiliée* (1981).

## II ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AND MISSIONAL STRATEGY

But is it necessary to be reactive? In her fascinating essay on 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', Patristic scholar, Sister Charles Murray, suggests the need to go back in order to go forward. In other words, we need to know more fully and adequately the sources and resources of the Christian tradition so that we can go forth with expanded sympathies and wider horizons into contemporary culture.

> [I]n the early church it was possible to think theologically without cutting oneself off from other ranges of thought and imagination which in our day no longer have contact with theology . . . there is indeed a way out of the modern impasse because it already exists in the tradition.[5]

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[4] Magarshack, David, *Introduction to and translation of 'The Idiot' by Fyodor Dostoyevsky* (London: Penguin Books, 1955), p. 7. Dostoyevsky's translation of this experience into his own literary art can be found in the novel, pt. 3, ch. 6, pp. 418–420.

[5] Murray, Sister Charles, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', in Rowan Williams, ed., *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 288.

Three important studies can give us a starting point to help us focus and ground our discussion as to why the arts are strategic for a rounded and nuanced understanding of culture and how they can open the way for effective mission. The first is the essay by Sister Charles Murray mentioned above; the second is Thomas Mathews' book, *The Clash of Gods* (1993), which is a skilful reinterpretation of early Christian art by a scholar who is both an art historian and a theologian. The third work, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture* (1985), is by theologian Margaret R. Miles. A rigorous exploration all of these studies shows that the interplay between theology and art is not something marginal in the history of Christianity as one might assume from looking at the contemporary theological curriculum and discourse, but key to the way the church has situated herself contextually and carried out her mission. Although all of the above deal primarily with visual art, the cases they make can be extended and applied to the other arts.

All three of these writers dispel the illusion that the study of doctrinal and theological texts and creeds is sufficient for an adequate understanding of Christian thought and history, and by extension, the history of mission. Art, indeed, can be viewed as a document of the proclamation and growth of the gospel in the world.

This is not to deny the importance of verbal texts or to claim that images are the sole key to cultural or historical understanding. Often there may be a complementarity between or even repetition in the two. Miles points out that the tension, or even contradiction, between texts and non-verbal forms can heighten our understanding of the communities they emerge from.[6] Clinging solely to texts, however, is reductive and unnecessarily limits appreciation and understanding for the wider piety and practice of the church and may deprive us of fresh ways of conceiving mission. Habitual educational conditioning leading to ingrained resistance to looking beyond verbal texts perpetuates a narrow view of what constitutes the conditions of the church's context. As Miles repeatedly points out, written texts are usually the product of the most unrepresentative members of the community of faith, a minority who have been literate and articulate; and, of that group, the overwhelming majority would be male.

The one-sided inclination toward texts in the study of theology overlooks the fact that the ancient church cared very much about the visual interpretation of faith and that in some sense she fed upon the sensibilities of artists to inform her in ways that depart from the conventions of written texts. Murray contends that, 'In 842 when the church proclaimed the Triumph of Orthodoxy it was talking about art as the visual interpretation of dogma.'[7]

Murray goes on to argue from a wealth of evidence 'that artistic expression of doctrines seems to have been the only unifying theological force in the early church.'[8] For example, theological disputants, such as Maximus the Confessor (c. 580–662) and his opponent, Theodosius bishop of Caesarea, could argue about doctrine, but when they concluded their disputation both of them kissed the Gospel Book and Holy Icons, the visible expressions of the ultimate source of truth. Theologians could differ over doctrinal positions, but they all practised the pieties induced by art. That art provided a unifying,

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[6] Miles, Margaret R, *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p. 12

[7] Murray, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', p. 288.

[8] Murray, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', p. 290.

rather than a divisive experience in the ancient church is a far cry from the worship wars of today that divide congregations over musical styles![9]

Contrary to the conventional but misinformed view that the early church, on the basis of the second commandment and her Jewish heritage, was opposed to visual imagery, scholars such as Murray, Mathews, Miles, Paul Corby Finney, and others have convincingly shown, on the basis of wide and searching reading of early Christian documents as well as archaeological and artistic evidence from early in the third century (catacombs and Dura-Europos), that this is not the case; rather, there were significant continuities between the early church and post-Constantinian period rather than an abrupt flourishing of art after the Peace of the Church (Edict of Milan, AD 313) and that this view does not run into any serious trouble until the Iconoclastic Controversy (c. 724–842).[10] However, here things become even more interesting, because the resolution of the contention was to make the veneration of the Holy Icons the very touchstone of Orthodoxy, the presiding notion of the early church.

An example of how refreshing and fruitful for our understanding a consideration of visual images as historical evidence together with written documents can be is Miles's discussion of the flourishing of Christian art in fourth-century Roman churches.[11] By starting with visual evidence that was accessible to the entire believing community and the pagan world surrounding it, instead of focusing primarily or exclusively on the great theological debates sustained by the ecclesiastically and politically few, Miles provides a wider context in which theological struggles took place and thus brings us closer, one suspects, to the lived experience of these early Christians and their missionally motivated enthusiasm to make known their faith by visual means through the building of churches across the entire Roman empire.

Miles cites Eusebius' emotionally charged, rather than architecturally descriptive, admiration of the cathedral at Tyre in Book X of his *Ecclesiastical History*: 'The cathedral is a marvel of beauty, utterly breathtaking.'[12] Through Eusebius' extravagant statement that 'the evidence of our eyes makes instruction through the ears unnecessary', one glimpses the powerful apologetic the visual could create and the attraction it could have for an increasingly diverse populations of converts.

On the face of it, it is truly astounding that between the third and sixth centuries the entire ancient pantheon of gods and goddesses and mythological heroes should be replaced by the central image of Jesus Christ and the saints, and that, furthermore, this would continue to constitute the core of the visual vocabulary of Europe until nearly the end of the seventeenth century. How did this extraordinary transformation of religious affiliation and culture take place?

Thomas Mathews' learned and masterful telling of this tale in his book *The Clash of Gods* should not be left for only art historians to read. Although subtitled 'A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art', which it certainly is, it is far more than that. It deserves to be read by theologians, historians of Christianity and religion, missiologists,

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[9] Murray, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', pp. 290–291.

[10] Murray, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development'; Mathews, Thomas F., *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Miles, *Image as Insight*; Dillenberger, John, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities* (New York, Crossroad, 1986); Finney, Paul Corby, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

[11] Miles, *Image as Insight*, pp. 41–62.

[12] Miles, *Image as Insight*, p. 49.

and anyone else who is concerned about understanding the contextualization and spread of the Christian faith and its impact on culture.

One can give only a thumbnail sketch here of Mathews' work. Probably this is best done in two parts: first by stating what he refutes and second by indicating what he contends.

Mathews finds seriously flawed the received interpretation of the imagery of early Christian art as an adaptation of imperial formulas and attributes. The art historians who in the 1930s proposed this interpretation were wrong. They could only imagine from their assumptions that Christ could acquire the lofty dignity that was his due by his image having been assimilated into the person and role of the Roman emperor. Of the thousands of representations of Christ in early Christian art, Mathews can find only two examples of what might be taken for his wearing imperial garments. Early Christians, Mathews contends, were not so impressed with the emperor as to clothe their new God in his likeness, which was actually likely to make him into an object of mockery (cf. Mt 27:28; Mk 15:20).

One can add that this older, mistaken interpretation has been so widespread that one can read it even in the writings of someone like Lesslie Newbigin. When he looks at Christian art, he sees only 'in successive portraits of Jesus the self-portrait of the age—the Byzantine picture of Jesus as the supreme Emperor, the Pantocrator.'[13] Remarks like this also point up how little the whole history of the arts in the church has been understood and appropriated for cultural analysis and mission by missiologists.

Through careful observation of a vast array of visual data, ranging from ancient tableware to the catacombs and glittering mosaics, wide knowledge of patristic documents, and considerable familiarity with contemporary biblical scholarship, Mathews works his way to an interpretation of early Christian art that has much to instruct us about the strategy and contextualization of the early gospel message. Far from assimilating the image of Christ to the emperor's person the early Christians took on almost systematically the whole pantheon of gods, showing facet by facet through visual attribute and argument, that Christ was the fulfilment of all that the ancient world aspired to through its panoply of deities.

> Once Christ had taken the throne of Jupiter, the father of the gods, Jupiter had not so much as a stool on which to sit. His statues were melted down, and he never again appeared on the coins of the realm. Similarly, once Christ took the mild, caring look of Asclepius and appeared everywhere working the miracles that the healing god had claimed, the shrines of Asclepius were abandoned. Taking the youthful beauty of a Dionysius or an Apollo, Christ charmed their coteries into his own shrines and churches. At the same time, chameleon-like he assumed a multiplicity of powerful roles unimagined for the gods of antiquity. For all their reverence toward the philosophers, the Greeks had never invented a philosopher-god; the miracle-working Christ effectively supplanted the magicians of antiquity. Emblazoned in countless church apses, he was the omega, the end of the journey, the processional goal of all Christian life and worship. Simultaneously Child and Old Man, he was Lord of all eternity. The imagery that was formed for the new God drew upon a variety of potent sources—the gods, the philosophers, the magicians of antiquity. Its dependence on the Gospel, however, was curiously oblique. Scripture had left no account of the physical appearance of Christ, and in any event its claims for Christ far exceeded all visual symbols. How was the artist to deal with Christ's own self-portrait: 'Before Abraham was, I am', (Jn 8:59) or 'He who has seen me has seen the Father' (Jn 14:9), or 'I am the alpha and the omega' (Rev 1:8)? But, rising to the challenge, painters, sculptors, and mosaic workers invented without inhibition. The narratives of the Gospel

[13] Newbigin, Lesslie, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 141.

> they rewrote with freedom to forge images of memorable impact. By representing as many facets of his person as possible they tried to encompass somehow the totality of the unimaginable mystery.[14]

Sister Charles Murray sustains the view that artistic idiom continued to be a missional force in the church's engagement with her culture and her understanding of her own doctrine.

> Apart from the scriptures, which are judged to contain the historical facts, history shows that the artistic idiom has remained the most stable vehicle for the transmission of orthodoxy since its inception. History, in this area, has been a medium of growth and not a source of embarrassment; and art has prevented . . . abstract principles concerning Christ from supplanting his person. It has facilitated the transposition of doctrine from static and objective categories to those of a more dynamic character, and it has made easy the transfer of orthodoxy from one area and milieu and from one age to another in the continuity of the community.[15]

The verbal expression of dogma is geared to precision and thus by necessity is restrictive. As Murray points out:

> [O]rthodoxy appears in this idiom as essentially a matter of constraint. [However] Art . . . is allusive, and therefore very free and flexible. . . . it can convey the truth inclusively, and so is much more suited to the expression of orthodoxy as truth rather than orthodoxy as *formula*. . . . Because the faith was recognized to be more than the literal, and art caters for the more than literal, the church, by adopting its use, was in this respect recognizing the cognitive role of the imagination in knowing God.[16]

Murray is not content to leave her observations in the realm of detached research. She invites the church to embrace the artistic medium once again for the sake of its own health and survival. If art has been effective in the past, does it not have the power to be so again?

> If one believes, with the Cappadocians, that the role of religious imagery is essentially to communicate and teach, to remind and provoke thought and emotion, then art is left . . . the necessary degree of autonomy it requires to continue as a religious vehicle. It will be thus left open to the techniques, methods and mentalities of the time and place in which the church is situated. The imagination will again be engaged by the best effective means and the role of the artist will become crucial as the one who translates the faith into a visual representation. On the principle of ancient theology, therefore, the role of the artist is crucial to the church, his [or her] talent and creativity are of great significance . . . and except for some very general restraints he [or she] is free to illustrate the scripture as he [or she] sees fit.[17]

A positive appreciation of artistic and musical idioms as they have befriended the church historically deepens and widens possibilities and horizons for contemporary missional understanding and engagement. But, as a first step, can we be persuaded that we need to be emancipated from our peculiarly enculturated enchantment with the exclusivity of verbal texts in order to renew our thinking? Do we unwittingly promote the

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[14] Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, pp. 179–180.

[15] Murray, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', p. 302.

[16] Murray, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', p. 292.

[17] Murray, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', p. 304.

displacement of God by maintaining one kind of discourse whose implied anthropology is that human beings are creatures merely of thought and not of feelings and will?

Loosening ourselves from clinging solely to verbal texts does not mean rejecting reason for one single second or, of course, dismissing the Holy Scriptures. But it does mean interrogating the adequacy of abstract verbal discourse and techniques to do justice by way of explanation or representation to either the Christian faith or the human condition and to consider seriously whether other modes of meaning may be more compelling and satisfying to the mind and heart of human beings.

The arts have enabled the community of faith to communicate, reflect on, and indwell the salvation story and they continue to enable us to do that.

## III THE NEGLECT OF THE ARTS IN CONTEMPORARY CHURCHES

Between the historical practice and understanding of the arts in and by the church sketched above and the contemporary practice and understanding we encounter a huge gap and discrepancy. The rarity of courses dealing with the arts in theological education, their absence from any central place in theological curriculum, and the slight treatment that they are accorded in theological and missiological literature (in contrast to the whole range of the social sciences and, to a lesser degree, the challenges of modern science) tend to preclude any clear conception of the arts' strategic importance for the mission and mandate of the church being transmitted to those who are being educated for ministry (lay and clergy) in and through her to the world. It is as though we tied one of our hands behind our back. Or perhaps it is more like turning our back on a somewhat inscrutable, but loyal and creative helpful friend. Some of that turning could very well be because we have been seduced into the embrace of technology, which as yet we have no firm knowledge of, as being a true companion for the journey.

In 1879 an artistically sensitive and idealistic young man of 26 with a passion to serve God and his fellow human beings who was in training for mission finally got fed up with the lack of boldness and creativity in his educational experience. This is what he said:

> I must tell you that with evangelists it is the same as with artists. There is an old academic school, often detestable, tyrannical, the accumulation of horrors, men who wear a cuirass, a steel armour, of prejudices and conventions; when these people are in charge of affairs, they dispose of positions and by a system of red tape they try to keep their protégés in their places and exclude the other man.[18]

Not long afterwards this young man's mission board recognized that he had served sacrificially, but they considered that he was unsuited for mission work. Frankly, they felt he did not speak well enough. Their official statement of his dismissal runs like this:

> Undoubtedly it would be unreasonable to demand extraordinary talents. But it is evident that the absence of certain qualities may render the exercise of an evangelist's principal function wholly impossible. Unfortunately this is the case with Mr. van Gogh. Therefore, the probationary period—some months—having expired, it has been necessary to abandon the idea of retaining him any longer.[19]

Although this came as a blow, this did not prevent Vincent Van Gogh from remaining where he had been working with the poor in the industrial region of the Borinage for a

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[18] Edwards, Cliff, *Van Gogh and God: A Creative Spiritual Quest* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1989), pp. 35–36.

[19] Edwards, *Van Gogh and God*, p. 36.

time and then wandering for nearly a year as he struggled to find his own personal calling as well as a way out of the morass of reductive materialistic thinking. The story of his life has been far too isolated and romanticized. He was not alone.

We cannot go into the whole story here of the considerable number of Van Gogh's contemporaries who also intensely felt the serious spiritual malaise of the times as well as the inadequacies of institutional Christianity to help them and who went on to become the pioneers of what we now call 'modern art'. One way of conceiving the whole phenomenon of 'modern art', especially abstraction, is to see it as essentially a spiritual quest. Since the mid-1970s there has been an ever-expanding art critical and art historical literature on this.[20]

They had a great hunger to unify not only their understanding, but their actual experience of nature, art, science, and religion which had become nearly hopelessly unravelled from each other. This was no mere intellectual problem or game for them, but an agonizing situation with high existential stakes. The insanity of a Nietzsche or Van Gogh (incidentally, both sons of the manse) can be looked at in some ways as a 'pure' response to the situation. We, on the other hand, in our progressively schooled detachment have probably become habituated and inured to this fragmented condition. What amounted to the spiritual dismemberment of a culture and its people was experienced by many, particularly some writers and artists, on the personal level, with pain and perplexity, anguish and affliction.

He was not alone in his suffering. Although temperamentally poles apart, Van Gogh and his friend, Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), were united spiritually in their apprehension of the times and that caused them to share an affinity of affliction. Both of them were quite biblically literate. A response to this fusion of spirit is manifest in Gauguin's *Cup in the Form of a Head* made early in 1889.

No photographic reproduction can convey the startling experience of viewing this work firsthand. Out of olive green, grey, and red glazed stoneware suggesting familial ceramic relationship in form and technique to a traditional toby mug, Peruvian pot, and Japanese Takatori vessel, Gauguin's self-portrait as a severed head dripping with blood, eyes closed and ear-less emerges. This macabre image, fired at a very high temperature literally and figuratively, fuses life, myth, and history into an unforgettable emblem of a ravaged human being.

In a little over a month after finding Van Gogh lying unconscious and covered with blood in his room in Arles on Christmas Eve in 1888, Gauguin created this work. We can only imagine that it was from horror and pity mingled with grief that he turned to the primal medium of clay, the dust of the earth, to make this piece with its moving residual memory that 'we have this treasure in earthen vessels' (2 Cor 4:7). It inaugurates a period of special preoccupation with death and life and a focus on his own self-portrait that frequently becomes associated with Christ in Gauguin's creativity. (e.g., *Self-Portrait with Yellow Christ*, 1889).

In a letter to Vincent he wrote:

> There is a Road to Calvary that all we artists must lead and it is this, perhaps that keeps us going. It is that which keeps us alive and we die when there is nothing more to feed it.[21]

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[20] Fuller, Peter, *Images of God: The Consolations of Lost Illusions* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985); Fuller, Peter, *Theoria: Art, and the Absence of Grace* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988); Tuchman, Maurice, ed., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985.* (New York: Abbeville Press 1986).

[21] Gasque, Laurel. 1990 'The Religious Sensibility of Paul Gauguin'. *Radix*. 16–19 (1990), p. 18.

By the late 1890s it becomes clear that Gauguin detested the church. He actually tried to donate his painting *Jacob and the Angel* [1888] (National Gallery, Edinburgh) to the church at Pont-Aven and then to another church at nearby Nizon. (His offer was flatly rejected in both cases and aroused considerable suspicion.) He abhorred the bourgeois morality of the clergy, which he felt harmed people and had little to do with genuine Christianity. His vehemence toward the church is savagely expressed in an unpublished document entitled 'L'Esprit Moderne et Le Catholicisme' (1896–1897). The text of this document confirms Gauguin's biblical literacy. It shows him to be very positive toward Christ, but exegetically confused by his own life and the challenges of the methods of modern science and thought.

After the eighteenth century artists did not stop being theologically interpretative or implicitly providing documents of the history of Christianity. What stopped, however, was the mutually, if not perfect, respectful and constructive relationship between the arts and the church. One is tempted to ask, whether, wittingly or unwittingly, the co-opting of incipient modernity by theologians that came to be translated into a *wissenschaftlich* and utilitarian conception of theological education had something to do with this.

Eventually antagonism between the arts and learning itself arose. While it is an overstatement to say that the arts ceased to be a part of learning, they could barely stand on an equal academic footing with theoretical philosophical speculation and applied scientific knowledge by the time J.S. Bach died in 1750. After that, even a lofty intellect like Goethe (1749–1832), could not be taken seriously when he spoke 'outside his field', because he was presumed to be importing unreliable methods, viz., artistic approaches, into science. (One thinks of the *Farbenlehre*, in particular.)

The conflict between J. S. Bach (1685–1750) and the early pioneer of modern biblical criticism, Johann August Ernesti (1707–1781), who became the rector of Thomasschule where Bach taught, illustrates the problem. The problem here is not so much between the church and art, for Bach was committed to both; but, rather, between the arts or an artistic frame of mind and the type of rationalism that was to become the dominant mode of academic thinking, shaping future ministers of the church, and which, in turn, led to the estrangement between the church and the arts.

Although the disagreement between Bach and Ernesti began about the relatively trivial issue of who had authority to hire and fire student prefects, underlying it were much more important issues of knowing, interpretation, and pedagogy. Bach intensely felt that the young rector's misguided ideas about education, not to mention his lack of musical judgement, were undermining what we would call the mission statement of the school which was 'to guide the students through the euphony of music to the contemplation of the divine'.[22]

It seems the school had been structured to integrate the scholastic/ theological and musical with about one-fifth of the time devoted to theology and one-fifth to music. Ernesti, who was later appointed to the faculty of theology at Leipzig, was a hyper-academic committed to pure scholarship and the single unequivocal meaning of texts. It has been said that his book *Institutio Interpretis* (1761) was 'one of the first respectable efforts to reduce the principles of interpretation to a science'.[23] He was not inclined to the art of music at all. In fact, he thought it was frivolous and a waste of time and sought to

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[22] Minear, Paul S, 'J. S. Bach and J. A. Ernesti: A Case Study in Exegetical and Theological Conflict' in John Deschner *et al*;. eds. *Our Common History as Christians: Essays in Honor of Albert C. Outler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 131–155, at p. 133.

[23] Minear, 'J. S. Bach and J. A. Ernesti', p. 136.

reduce its place in the curriculum so that more time could be devoted to 'academic' subjects.[24]

The contrast between the cantor's and the rector's method of interpretation of texts represents two distinctive ways of looking at Scripture. Ernesti idealized looking at texts, especially biblical texts, with cool detachment in relation to other ancient texts. Bach, however, believed in a warm personal engagement of texts (biblical as well as secular), using every possible musical means he was capable of to exegete the multivalent meaning of the single text in a way that moved the hearer completely. Bach was not attempting to over-ride the rational intellect—his *Musical Offering* dedicated to the quintessential Enlightenment monarch, Fredrick the Great, and *The Art of the Fugue* show him to be a master of mathematical clarity. What Bach does through the art of music is deliver the text to the core of the hearer's being so that it can be experienced.

As David Lyle Jeffrey helps us to see:

> Scripture contains, then, beside its evident vocabulary, two syntaxes of disclosure. One is historical, *tempus*, by which we understand the sequence of statement and event. The other is in the imagination (*ymagionem*) creating or perceiving a spiritual *duratio* by which we gather in the reflections of memory on the one hand and the projections of intention and dream on the other, turning them together toward interpretation and meaning. It is in the realm of this second 'syntax' that we apprehend the form of Scripture, which also becomes the form of its present conversation in our experience in the here and now.[25]

In Ernesti, we see an opting exclusively for the former 'syntax of disclosure' in its absorption with history. In Bach we see preoccupation with the latter in its appropriation of imagination to apprehend the text both across and beyond time.

Today, we in the church are heirs of both Bach and Ernesti. But lamentably their legacies to us are still in conflict with each other in theological education, only perpetuating further the alienation between learning and the arts and, hence, between the church and the arts.

In our seminaries and faculties of theology how often do we find a course such as 'The Ministry of Vincent van Gogh' as was taught by the late Henri Nouwen at Yale Divinity School several times? Why should the theology and exegesis of J. S. Bach not be incorporated into courses on biblical studies or theology? Would it do any harm? Might it not even improve critical skills by seeing things from a different perspective, even in what we might call a different light? Could the creation of such courses or the integration of the arts into the existing theological curriculum not help revitalize our engagement with western culture and help situate the ambiguous place that mission itself has in the current theological curriculum?[26] Over-specialization is destroying the function of teaching in education. We need more people who are confident employing a solid interdisciplinary approach and who care about the whole life of the church, not only research.

There are courses given here and there and at least a dozen programmes in the arts in theological institutions across North America, but this is less than ten percent of the

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[24] David, Hans T. and Arthur Mendel, eds., *The Bach Reader* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), pp. 137–149; Minear, 'J. S. Bach and J. A. Ernesti'; Pelikan, Jaroslav, *Bach Among the Theologians*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 29–41.

[25] Jeffrey, David Lyle, *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 191.

[26] Kirk, J. Andrew, *The Mission of Theology and Theology as Mission* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997).

Association of Theological Schools-accredited bodies. Keith Walker has investigated Anglican theological colleges in Britain and found that there are very few courses or even interest by administrators and lecturers in giving clergy instruction in integrating the arts into their vocation, although it often involves them in being custodians of architectural masterpieces. The situation among Roman Catholics is much the same in the UK.[27] On the Continent programmes or institutes exist here and there. An important one is the Institut für Kirchenbau und kirchliche Kunst der Gegenwart at Marburg University, directed by Horst Schwebel, who also has an appointment as Professor of Applied Theology.[28]

Encouragingly, scattered signs of hope such as the new 'Theology Through the Arts' project initiated by Jeremy Begbie at the University of Cambridge or the creation of a newly endowed chair for the history of art at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, are on the horizon. However, if the arts represent some of the most compelling expressions of the Christian faith and a potent ally for mission, as has been argued in this paper, why is it so little being done?

The standard response is : (a) the curriculum is full and bulging already; there is no room to add additional courses; and (b) we do not have enough money. (The experience of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley contradicts objection (b); after the MDiv, the theology and the arts programme generates the greatest amount of tuition revenue, as I learned from a recent conversation with John Dillenberger. Not only do such programmes attract students, they also attract donors who might otherwise not support theological education.) Naturally few chief administrators want themselves or their colleagues to appear to be cultural Philistines. Still, one suspects that at the core of those who hold authority in our institutions for what is considered serious scholarship and of strategic importance intellectually, the arts have about as much significance and esteem in their eyes as they had in Ernesti's!

When one stands back and looks from a missional perspective two questions immediately crop up: (1) Who is talking about the issues of art and faith in the theological context? (2) What is the place of mission in this discussion?

As to the first question, interestingly, the relatively small group concerned about the role of the arts in theological education represents a broad spectrum of theological opinion, at least in North America. And this suggests that we have here a legitimate and critical concern for the church and not just an issue stemming narrowly from one theological perspective or position.[29]

The second question regarding mission seems hardly alive! A lot of the discussion revolves around local congregational life and the raising of the awareness in local congregations about the importance of the artistic dimension in worship and church buildings, but little of it seems involved directly with ministry or proclamation near or far. This, of course, is not to say that indirectly cultural engagement with a wider community and society at large is not implied. It is only to say that it is difficult to discern any direct signs or explicit statements of how or even if the arts have relevance for a missional engagement beyond the church itself.

In a survey of arguments for the arts in theological education and how they relate to the nature and purpose of theological education, Barbara Wheeler, the president of Auburn Theological Seminary, delineates four ways the case for the arts has been made.

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[27] Walker, *Images or Idols?* pp. 99–101.

[28] Schwebel, Horst and Andreas Mertin, eds., *Bilder und ihre Macht: Zum Verhältnis von Kunst und christlicher Religion* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1989).

[29] *Theological Education*, 1994 'Sacred Imagination: The Art and Theological Education', XXXI/1, (Autumn).

The arguments run like this: (1) the arts are useful and they improve the way theological educators do their work; (2) the arts are important because they are the principal way some people and groups have expressed their religious and theological ideas; (3) the arts are important because they are a pervasive part of religious practice; (4) the arts are a medium for doing theology. As Wheeler goes on to show, all of these arguments connect and align themselves with positions taken recently for reforming and improving theological education in general.[30]

None of the arguments mentioned above is radical. Wheeler points out that while a lot of careful reflection has been going there has not been a bold proposal as yet. She herself goes on to raise a bold question:

> Is it possible that art, or education in the arts, might in some way provide a new shaping metaphor for what theological education should be? … I cannot even begin to imagine what a full-blown proposal with a notion of art at the center (in place of science and techne, the notions that currently dominate thinking about theological education) might look like. But I do have the sense that … there remains something more provocative and daring to be said about how the arts might infuse theological education with the power and coherence that so many of us are now convinced it has lost.[31]

Could any of us imagine the chief executive officer of our institution seriously considering that the reigning paradigm undergirding it might be in need of radical readjustment and that the arts might help it serve better the purposes for its existence? To truly open up this discussion it is not enough for a small group year after year to talk with each other and to a handful of theological administrators. Nor is it sufficient to give the most powerful arguments in the world for the integration of the arts into the theological curriculum, when there is a fundamental disease and insecurity about the arts in the first place! Leaders of our institutions must first of all be convinced of their necessity.

Frankly, the arts are threatening. After three centuries of valorizing certainty and control and the reductive literalism this has often led to, the ambiguity (not to be confused with vagueness as often happens) of the arts with their suggestive and metaphorical quality is hard to get used to and can be deeply disturbing. The arts play with our expectations when we want predictability for our work. They seem impractical in a pragmatic world. In short, because we are not convinced of their fundamental importance and necessity for our theory or practice, they remain orphans of the academy and the church and institutionalized scepticism and doubt about them abound.

David Lodge, in his novel, *Nice Work*, gives us an amusing glimpse of this when Morris Zapp, the irrepressible cigar-puffing, world-class, tenured English professor at Euphoric State University, is asked by a nervous young lecturer who the other candidate is for a position she is considering interviewing for at his illustrious institution. 'Who's the other candidate?' asks Robyn Penrose. Zapp answers, 'Don't worry about her. She's not a serious scholar. Just a writer.'[32]

It is the contention of this paper that until our educational institutions give clear evidence of recognizing that they are built, not just on the accomplishments of technical scholarship, but on the achievements of original literature and art that scholarship so

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[30] Wheeler, Barbara G., 'Arguments and Allies: The Yale Consultations and Recent Writings about Theological Education', *Theological Education*, XXXI/1 (Autumn, 1994), pp. 29–35.

[31] Wheeler, 'Arguments and Allies', p. 35.

[32] Lodge, David, *Nice Work* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 358.

often parasitically lives off of, will we be able to open the way for the arts to aid us by highly sophisticated means to interpret accurately our culture and to be authentic and apt instruments for ministry and mission through the freedom we allow them to have.

The arts involve risk. But, perhaps it is just the risk we need to take to do something beneficial. If in the academy the obsession with certainty and control have hindered and marginalized the arts, it has been no less the case in the church. Clinging to certainty and control have often strangled and constricted an understanding of goodness itself and confounded it with mere caution or safety. Even as Aslan in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, is not merely 'good', but also 'dangerous', so too, are the arts. But if Aslan [Christ] is worth taking a risk on, the arts just might be so as well.

Earlier we quoted Sister Charles Murray as saying:

> Because the faith was recognized to be more than the literal, and art caters for the more than literal, the church, by adopting its use, was in this respect recognizing the cognitive role of the imagination in knowing God.[33]

It may just be that at the point of epistemological quandary in which we find ourselves today the arts have a special role to play in helping us out of our impasse. A sign that this may be true is the growing and enhanced awareness of the role that imagination plays in religious understanding and knowledge.[34]

## IV WHY THE ARTS ARE IMPORTANT FOR MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The arts, which have been very important for the expansion, vitality, and worship of the church historically, have come to be neglected for a number of reasons that we have tried to point out. We have also targeted theological education as strategically important in recovering and expanding the role the arts play in the ministry and mission of the church.

Because 'the arts' are an abstraction and not easily subject to a simple definition or application, they sometimes seem to evaporate before we have grasped some firm sense of their function and import. Actual encounter with art itself is always concrete and particular: 'Gretchen am Spinnrad', 'If I Had a Rocket Launcher', 'Jesus de Montréal', 'Prologue to the Gospel of John', 'Guernica', 'Centre Pompidou', 'The Wife of Bath's Tale'. Just talking about 'the arts' can never convey their uniqueness or their flavour, for example, of being popular, folk, or so-called high art or their necessity for our humanity. Their particularity may very well be the main reason that we usually find the arts pleasurable.

Pleasure, however, to the serious minded can often seem suspect and more akin to a luxury than a necessity of life. And, all too frequently, this is the stigma that is attached to 'the arts'. We must remember that people made art in concentration camps; some have called this spiritual resistance.[35] Or, that songs have been profound means of striving for and expressing peace and social justice.

Thus in summary let us review some of the reasons for the Christian stake in the arts before we turn to some programmatic suggestions for enlivening mission through them.

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[33] Murray, 'Artistic Idiom and Doctrinal Development', p. 292

[34] McIntyre, John, *Faith Theology and Imagination* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1987); Bryant, David J., *Faith and the Play of Imagination* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989); Green, Garrett, *Imaging God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

[35] *Spiritual Resistance: Art from Concentration Camps 1940–1945* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981).

Not a few churches are dead or dying. The arts are a sign of life and bring 'the living dead' to life, a huge well of creativity. Without the arts, the church is likely to make little impact on the surrounding culture. The bulk of this paper has been an attempt to show that the impact on the shaping of western culture that the church has made has come in great measure through the arts. This is not something we should relegate to the past. The arts still are essential for fully-orbed missional engagement today.

**First** of all, we need to be reminded that the Bible is a work of art, in its constitutive parts, and as a whole.[36] The practices of scientific analysis have led frequently to viewing it as a compendium of disparate documents. Viewed aesthetically the Bible can be seen as an organic and compelling whole. Its inexhaustibility as a source of meaning is sustained by its artistic structures and the imaginativeness of its disclosure; 'its form is more comprehensive than any given time and space can limit.'[37]

This is affirmed in our day when in the process of translating the gospels a classicist like E.V. Rieu can become a believer.

> Were we to devote to their comprehension [the scriptures] a little of the selfless enthusiasm that is expended on the riddle of our physical surroundings, we should cease to say that Christianity is coming to an end—we might even feel that it had just begun.[38]

It is also affirmed when we learn that the one thing that the majority of Americans who engage in voluntarism or philanthropy have in common is that most of them have heard the story of The Good Samaritan.[39] (The artistic allusiveness of the Bible elicits participation and action.

**Second**, It is very hard to hide the arts. They are almost by nature public and thus are much less susceptible to being ghettoised. A recent conference of Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA) in Montreal taking up the theme, 'The City, Art, and Faith', received extensive secular media coverage from all segments of the press. The thoughts of one commentator are worth sharing:

> I haven't thought about Christian art till a recent avalanche of signs made me. … [including] a press release announcing next week's Christians in the Visual Arts (CIVA) conference. I knew I was being directed to something. (And while I'm more familiar with Barthian signs than biblical ones, I can divine intervention when I see it.) Quick summation of my take on contemporary Christian art: Old ladies with blue hair fashioning paeans to the Holy Trinity with popsicle sticks. Maybe, if the hand of God slips in, there might be a little mural work. In the midst of my musing, the little voice that points out my glaring hypocrisies spoke up: 'Listen. You like art that reflects the concerns of the artist's life—like politics or identity issues, right? Why is it inconceivable that work reflecting the concerns of a Christian life could be as significant any other art?' True enough. It's significant how I am so quick to dismiss anything with the halo of Christianity around it. The Christian faith is one of the few targets that even the most (small-L) liberal types have no qualms taking aim at. And

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[36] Veith, Gene Edward, Jr., *State of the Arts: From Bazalel to Mapplethorpe* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991); Walker, Keith, *Images or Idols?*; Jeffrey, David Lyle, *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

[37] Jeffrey, *People of the Book*, p. 191.

[38] Walker, *Images or Idols?* p. 11.

[39] Wuthnow, Robert, *Acts of Compassion: Caring for Others and Helping Ourselves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) p. 19.

> for Christian artists the alienation can be two-fold, as some people within the church view artists as bizarre bohemians.[40]

This is an example of a real missional engagement with the surrounding culture the arts can have by nature of their public accessibility if they are released beyond an ecclesiastical ghetto and provided they exhibit excellence and authenticity. In this instance, it is fascinating to see a person who considers herself secular implicitly taking up the cause of 'oppressed artists' in the church. But perhaps the apostrophes should not be taken off oppressed artists. Do we, in fact, oppress those who give us the greatest access to speaking forth with the fullness of life?

**Third**, the arts have value as unique vehicles for expressing and communicating spiritual meaning and content within the church. They help congregations to become more winsome and attractive communities, which look beyond themselves to the concerns and needs in the surrounding culture. Whether expressly valued or not, the arts are everywhere in the church: architecture, music, literature, the choreography of liturgy. The arts articulate the faith for the inarticulate and speak to the need we all have for coherence between what we think and what we feel. Spiritually, liturgically, pedagogically, and evangelistically the arts serve the church in inestimable ways.

**Fourth**, the arts engender ecumenicity. The arts are probably one of the best ecumenical stories of the twentieth century. As noted above, the advocates for the arts in theological education do not represent one or two sectors of the church, but come from the full spectrum of liberal to conservative theology. An organization such as Christians in the Visual Arts in its membership of 1300 runs the whole denominational gamut from Orthodox, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant to almost every free church tradition imaginable (CIVA 1997 *Membership Directory*). The unanimity that this diversity expresses is a powerful witness to the fact of the content of the faith being more than propositional statement of truth.

## V SOME PROGRAMMATIC SUGGESTIONS

The following programmatic suggestions deal broadly with four areas: theological education, local congregations, Christian organizations, and public education and policy.

The arts are slowly finding a place in theological education. Outstanding programmes are found at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. Both institutions also have exhibition spaces that enhance significantly their presence in their wider cultural communities. But there are also other places where the arts are having a growing influence such as at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena and Regent College in Vancouver. (Both Fuller and Regent have arts festivals. Regent College's Lookout Art Gallery, established over a decade ago, is a regular part of the Vancouver art scene.) An increasing number of doctoral dissertations have been written in the area of theology and the arts (88 between January 1982 and December 1987, 111 between January 1988 and December 1992, 138 between January 1993 and March 1997 according to *Dissertations Abstracts*), although not all are being done in schools of theology or departments of religious studies.

The best programmes integrate the arts into the theological curriculum rather than simply adding them on as extras or as illustrations. The practice of Wesley Theological Seminary, due to the pioneering effort of artist/theologian, Catherine Kapikian, is exemplary in this regard.

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[40] Childerhose, Buffy, 1997. 'Culture Swab', column, *HOUR*. 5/23 (June 5–11, 1997), p 56.

Arts in the curriculum need not be expensive or elaborate to begin with. They may, in fact, turn out to be sources of new funding. Students should be taught about the role of art in mission, art as a document of the history of Christianity, art in worship, art in world religions, art in popular culture and cultural interpretation, and the role of art in communication.

The first art that all clergy and lay leaders should be introduced to is music. Although music makes up a considerable part of every worship service, rarely do clergy come prepared to the ministry with even a course in the history of hymnody, although they probably most frequently become the persons who choose what is sung. It is almost like not giving them a course in homiletics when much of what they do is preach! All should be rooted in an understanding of the history of music in the Christian church, especially hymnody, as much as in the history of the church and its theology and clergy should be encouraged to use the same critical faculties that they use in studying these subjects and the Scriptures when they choose music for a worship service. In all genres of music from classical hymnody to contemporary song, discernment for excellence should be encouraged. Church musicians, on the other hand, should be encouraged to become biblically and theologically literate. No matter how soothing musical sentimentality may feel for the moment, it will do no long term good for mission.

Next should come the visual arts. They are generally the most resisted of the arts, especially by protestant Christians. Yet, nearly all churches build buildings in which to meet and from which to serve, and these buildings bear their own witness, for good and ill. Students also need to be able to develop visual literacy so as to be able both to interpret and to persuade our contemporary society.

Next should be the performing arts. Lastly, literature, which is text-based as is 99 percent of seminary teaching in general, should be introduced into the curriculum. When powerfully evangelistic figures like G.K. Chesterton or C.S. Lewis are lionized let us make sure students realize they are not just towering intellects, but also very gifted artists, whose work might possibly not even be acknowledged or as effective if they were not artists!

The opportunity for those studying theology to have hands-on experience of trying to create art or find practical strategies for using the arts and encouraging others to use them in ministry should not be discouraged. An artist-in-residence programme could provide collegial diversity and stimulus to more traditional faculty and practical instruction for students wanting hands-on artistic experience. Also, the arts and the literature and publications relating to theology and the arts could serve from time to time as the topic for faculty development seminars and retreats.

Both educational institutions and local congregations have the possibilities of hosting arts festivals, exhibitions, concerts, performances, and conferences that both extend themselves and serve the wider community as well as inviting the public into the church precincts in an intriguing non-defensive way. Although it is a difficult and often touchy business, frequently involving a great deal of bureaucracy and church politics, there is also the matter of patronizing the arts, actually commissioning works—musical, visual, performance. Many artists of considerable stature would be most pleased to have a church commission. Sadly, the church does not have a good record of commissioning work from even her most talented sons and daughters in this past century. More often initiative comes from visionary individuals rather than congregational will.[41] Yet commissioning a

[41] Walker, *Images or Idols?*; Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities*; Cook, John W. 1994. 'A Willem de Kooning Triptych', *Theological Education*, XXXI/1, (Autumn).

work of art for a church, is one of the most genuine and challenging ways of connecting with and trying to engage those in our cultural context.

However, before grandiose projects are undertaken, an illuminating first step might be for a congregation to compile an artistic profile of its community by identifying artists, musicians, performers, and those who are developing or would like to develop artistic ability. It might be quite surprising to see how much giftedness there is in our midst if we look for it! These people need to be included on building, worship, and mission committees and they also need special encouragement to think both biblically and theologically, not only artistically, about what they do. An atmosphere of openness and mutual trust needs to be encouraged. Artists must also sense that ministers and interested lay persons welcome what they have to offer. Churches can also have 'artists-in-residence' programmes or support an artist-as-missionary to work and be a presence in the secular art scene.

A multitude of Christian arts organizations, some small and some fairly large, exist. They range from theatre companies and dance groups to organizations for writers, performers, musicians, composers, visual artists, and crafts people. The single best source in identifying these organizations is *The International Directory of Christian Arts Organizations* published by Christians in the Arts Networking (CAN) (1994). The most recent edition of the CAN directory lists over 600 organizations in 25 countries categorized according to 12 artistic disciplines. The directory also includes an educational section listing degrees and programmes being offered in the arts, mostly but not exclusively, by institutions belonging to the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities. This is an excellent resource for churches and educational institutions.

If 'art is the John the Baptist of the heart, preparing its affections for Christ', as Jacques Maritain once remarked, it may well mean that the church needs to be an advocate for the arts in the arena of public education and policy, joining voices outside to make common cause in the way it has for civil and human rights and now, increasingly, is in the area of environmental concerns. What would a generation be like that had an adequate schooling in the arts as well as science and technology? Would it have enlarged sympathetic capacities because feeling as well as thinking was being educated? Would it possibly be more flexible and open to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ?

The arts have a capacity to create and subvert culture, and sometimes, through their power and fascination, there is danger of substituting them for religion. Christians must once again become practised in them for without the arts the church is likely to make little impact on the surrounding society or culture. Hence, there is an urgent need for a renewal of the arts in the Church today.

The last word here will go the artist and educator, the late great, Robertson Davies. In his novel, *The Lyre of Orpheus*, the character, Geraint Powell, commonly recognized as being based in major measure on Davies' good friend, the renowned theatrical producer/director, Tyrone Guthrie, gives a defence of art, especially music, to the ultra-conservative pietistic parents of a greatly gifted daughter who oppose her committing herself to being a composer. Here is what Geraint says to them and to us:

> I grew up a Calvinistic Methodist … look at me, deep into the world of art, and theatre and music, and the fatherhood and splendour of God is present to me every hour of my life, and infuses everything I do. Does God speak only with a single tongue? … does His mighty love not reach out to those who have not yet come to the full belief, to the life of total faith? May he not speak even in the theatre, in the opera house, to those who have fled from Him into a world they think frivolous and abandoned to pleasure? Oh, my friends, you are blessed in knowing the fullness of God's revealed Word. You have not encountered, as I have, the 'God who knows how to speak to the fallen and the reprobate through the

language of art; you have not met with the Cunning of God by which he reaches out to His children who shut their ears to His true voice. Our God is stern with those like yourselves whom He has marked from birth as His own, but He is gentle and subtle with those who have strayed into worldly paths. He speaks with many voices, and one of the most winning is the voice of music.[42]

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# Book Reviews

## WHAT IS MISSION? THEOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

by J. Andrew Kirk
London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999, Pb 304 pages
ISBN 0-232-52326-6
*Reviewed by John Roxborogh*
*School of Ministry, Knox College, Dunedin*

Andrew Kirk has produced what deserves to become a standard introductory missiological text. He writes with deceptively simple clarity given the depth of thought behind what he is saying. His perspective is rooted in the Evangelical tradition at the same time as it draws on other Christian traditions and seeks to be fair to those he differs from. *What is Mission*? is a courteous apologetic, but it stands as an evangelistic book in its own right and should meet a need among students generally.

Acknowledgement is given to the massive contribution of David Bosch to mission studies, and the book is partly justified in terms of the gaps Bosch left for others to fill, but this is much more that a companion to Bosch's *Transforming Mission* (Orbis, 1991). The foundational section of *What is Mission*? is important in laying out areas of consensus in mission studies, and in providing a refreshing summary of the life and teaching of Jesus in relation to the things that Jesus' followers could be expected to go on doing. The chapter 'Announcing the Good News' is a coherent statement on evangelism which leads into discussion of cultures, justice, other religions, peace issues, the environment, and questions of partnership in mission.

[42] Davies, Robertson, 'The Lyre of Orpheus' in *The Cornish Trilogy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 1000–1001.