An Examination Of Art In The American Evangelical Church For The Purpose Of Discipleship And Evangelism

A Thesis Project Submitted to The Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

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Christianity, in previous eras, has been the foundation of the art community. But, it has surrendered that role over the past three centuries and with it a significant potion of its influence on culture. In addition the church is not effectively reaching an entire demographic of people, those who would define themselves as creatives and artists, because it has distanced itself from the arts. This paper will research the previous methods employed by the church and the current limitations of art within the American Evangelical church through applied academic research as well as interviews with church leaders and artists. The results of this study provide philosophies and methods by which a church can increase its influence within the community, disciple artists and creatives, and effectively engage both the creative demographic within secular culture with the gospel.
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

To my wife, Rachel, for teaching me to love the fine arts (except Monet whom I will never accept), her unending support, and skills as an editor

To Ray Streets Jr., Bill Keagey, and Leif Horrell who helped this unruly creative find his place in the family of God

To all those artistic friends who have spent countless hours dreaming with me about how to better disciple and evangelize our fellow creatives

To my father, Robert Dugan, who first introduced me to the Savior and gave me the passion for worshiping God through the arts
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### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DMIN</td>
<td>Doctor of Ministry</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDM</td>
<td>Electronic Dance Music</td>
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CHAPTER 1

Statement of the Problem

There is something missing in the church, or more aptly said, someone. A few years ago a young man walked into a contemporary church service, openly looking for a place to belong. He was a prodigy of sorts. By the time he was in his early twenties he had been signed to a record label and toured the country making music only to start a new profession as a graphic designer and videographer, gaining national recognition. He politely asked everyone he could find how to get involved. He was simply looking for a way to return to God the talents bestowed on him. After a few months of effort, he left. He couldn’t find anyone to connect with or a place to serve. The best ideas this progressive contemporary church offered were the chance to sign up for a random small group or to serve as a greeter. They told him that they didn’t have a use for his skills. Instead of finding a community that welcomed him, he was greeted by a church that had no idea what to do with a true creative or the art he was offering. Instead of finding a home in the church, the young man went to the only place that accepted him: the secular art community.

The theme of this story is a common one. The church is full of bankers, laborers, athletes, doctors, and a litany of other professionals, but there are a staggeringly limited number of creatives when compared to other occupational or social demographics. With the exception of a few small subsets encouraged by the church, such as worship musicians or portrait photographers, the church’s population is in short supply of artists. Where are the painters, the poets, the playwrights, and the sculptors? Where are the game designers, visual effects gurus, EDM artists, animators, movie and television stars, or
tattoo artists? The church is fully represented by a number of professions, but when it comes to those directly shaping the modern cultural landscape with beauty and art there is a profound absence. The American Evangelical church as a whole has no plan to evangelize this demographic. Many of these churches don’t even know where to begin.

It is important to note that most Christians are unaware of this problem. Churches, specifically those in the United States, often portray an image of openness towards the arts, but with close examination the opposite is found to be true. The arts displayed and accepted within the church are highly limited. Paintings are limited to a select number of styles, such as neo-gothic art or utopian landscapes in the style of Thomas Kinkade. Each church restricts music to an average catalog of fifty songs.\(^1\) The church does not engage with new or fresh art, but limits itself to a safe derivative rehashing of the arts they are comfortable with, often forgoing quality for the sake of conformity. The result of this is two-fold: First this system pushes creatives away from the church by making their skills and appreciations unwelcome. Secondly, by limiting how people can express themselves the church is restricting the worship and spiritual development both of creatives and the general congregation. David Siedell explains this by saying, “It is not merely that we do not appreciate the beauty of the arts, but that we do not appreciate the beauty of Christianity itself.”\(^2\) The church has separated itself from the arts in such a way that it often does not even realize that the divide exists.

Something must be done to correct this problem. The church’s relationship with the arts is unhealthy and there is an entire people group that is being missed through

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traditional evangelistic methods. In addition, by separating from the arts the church has lost its greatest tool for influencing the perception of culture towards the gospel. The problem this researcher seeks to answer is two fold: How can the church identify, evangelize, and disciple the creative artistic community, and how can the church regain its influence in mainstream culture? This is not suggesting that the church adapt itself to culture, but rather it return to a more historical approach of producing art of such quality that the world will be forced to recognize and notice its value, thereby lending observed validity to the truth being proclaimed both through the art and the direct message of the church. In short, this thesis serves to answer how the gospel can be best served through the incorporation of the arts as both an evangelical tool, and a method of discipleship.

Definitions

Throughout this thesis, there will be several terms used which need to be defined. First and foremost is the term “creatives.” This seemingly colloquial usage of the term refers to anyone who defines him or herself as an artistic, imaginative, and inventive personality, and has a profession or skill set which allows them to express these attribute through the creation of original works of art. It is very similar to broad definition of the term artist, which is culturally understood as ‘anyone who makes art.’ These terms are often used interchangeably. Since there is no universally accepted definition of what art is beyond a created work, identifying as an artist or “creative” has much to do with the individual’s intellectual disposition towards abstract or non-linear thought and his or her desire to express ideas through a secondary medium.
“The Church” is a term that is intentionally vague in this thesis. Due to the large historical distance required to address the topic at hand, there is need for a term that connotes the idea of all of Christianity in a general sense. For this thesis, “The Church” will be used to this end unless otherwise specified.

Finally, the term “The Arts” will be used numerous times through the thesis. Although this term generally conjures images of painting or other such traditional expressions, it is important to note that this term covers all creative endeavors, including but not limited to literature, painting, theatrical performances, music, dancing, cinema, photography, etc.; any medium by which an idea can be expressed in a creative manner will be included in the definition for the purposes of this paper.

**Limitations**

Studying the arts is like studying the universe; every new piece of information reveals how much more there is to learn. It would be impossible to cover the full history between the church and the various fields of art, or to layout individual evangelism strategies for engaging every artistic discipline. Instead this thesis focuses on three things:

1. Understanding the historical relationship between art and the church as it relates to the church’s influence on culture. – The thesis looks at several specific instances when the church engaged culture via the arts then examines the methods and successes of each instance. It then inspects the influence of the church in culture where it has distanced itself from the arts, assessing the methods and successes of the individual situations.
2. Researching modern methods of employing the arts within the church for the purpose of evangelism, discipleship, and worship. – The thesis examines churches and ministries that are currently using art in their programs. It draws specific attention to the methods employed that differ from conventional systems, the outcome of such efforts, and the overall affect of expanding the role of art in the local church body. This section includes both the insights of published works as well as personal research conducted by the author involving surveys and interviews. This will be further explained in the later half of this chapter.

3. Compiling the information presented into practical methodology – The thesis provides several methods by which churches can improve their worship, discipleship, and evangelism processes through the inclusion and encouragement of the arts.

One additional limitation lies within sheer number of artistic disciples that exist. This thesis is not able to specifically address each type of art and its usefulness to the church. Instead, this thesis will discuss the philosophy and theology surrounding the use of the arts in the church, and will focus primarily on fine arts (painting, sculpting, etc…) and music, as these categories of art are perhaps the most prevalent throughout church history. However the principles discussed in this thesis can be applied to all forms of art, including those not directly addressed.
Theoretical Basis

History and the Arts

The lack of creatives in the church is the result of a larger issue. The Christian community at large has turned its back on the arts. For hundreds of years the church was one of the largest producers of art in the world. From sculptures to paintings to illuminated manuscripts, the church often set the trends of the art community. During this time, every copy of the bible was an artistic masterpiece. Every church building was designed to be a work of art in and of itself, with each detail crafted to express complex theological values through aesthetic dexterity. From the Judaic tabernacle and temple, the cathedrals of Europe, to the countless masterpieces now housed in museums around the world, the followers of Yahweh held a great appreciation for artistic accomplishments. Artists had a place in the church both socially and practically. As a result those painters, sculptors, and literary giants infiltrated their cultures with their worldview. Today, times have changed. Church buildings are quickly and blandly constructed, featuring virtually no artistic value, let alone theological underscoring. What little art the church has produced is generally regarded as derivative and/or second-rate, so much so that the term “Church Art” has become a common pejorative. Is it any wonder that so few artists find a home in the church?

The issue of engaging culture through art is not a new problem. Dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there has been a small, yet vocal, population within the church fighting to reunite faith and the arts. These voices understand the connection between belief and aesthetics. They know how art can express the worship of

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one’s heart while stirring others to find new meaning in common place truths; how art can empower the church to influence culture in a way that no other avenue ever has or ever will. Thanks to these vocal proponents of the arts, many church leaders have begun to see the value of incorporating art within the church. This author endeavors to further this understanding and provide methods by which church leaders can specifically encourage and develop artists, helping the church to develop a healthy view of evangelism and discipleship enriched by aesthetic expressions of beauty and worship.

Psychology and the Arts

Creatives come with their own unique discipleship challenges. They think differently than most other social categories. They don’t respond well to many types of authority and generally manage their lives in their own unique, seemingly chaotic ways. Bob Burns, who is an expert in helping believers develop healthy spiritual systems, noted that when it comes to creatives an evangelist or discipler needs “to change his entire coaching approach concerning spiritual rituals in order to fit the rhythms of these people.”

For most pastors and church staff members, creatives present an often-difficult challenge when it comes to discipleship because standard methods rarely work. Instead the pastor or mentor must adapt his or her approach to accommodate the needs of the creative in order to make significant progress. Understanding the connection between psychology and those defined as creatives brings a great deal of insight into the methods required to evangelize and influence this social demographic.

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5 This quote is discussing one individual, but the point is being made about the entire approach to working with creatives, which is why the quote is being used in this universal sense.
Theology and the Arts

Anytime a topic is addressed within the church it touches on theological issues. In examining the role of art in the church, certain theological issues intersect. First is the nature of God. Specifically, how does the attitude and disposition of God as shown in the Old Testament relate to the characteristics of God highlighted in the New Testament? Did God change his nature? Did he change his mind or feelings? Or does God demonstrate the same character throughout scripture? Francis Chan argues that “God never had an identity crisis,” but rather he is the same today as he was in the Old Testament. What changed was the offer of salvation through the death of Christ. If this is the case, and God is the same God, then the methods for worship employed by the Israelites, which are not superseded by New Testament directives, require consideration for modern application.

The second theological issue is related to the creation of mankind and what the Bible meant when it said created in the image of God in Genesis chapter 1. What exactly does this mean? Is it referring to one’s eternal nature, character, intellect, something else or all of the above? Most creatives argue that “whatever else the image of God includes, it certainly includes creativity.” The validity of art as an expression of the soul in worship to God partially hinges on the idea that it was God who endowed mankind with creativity to begin with.

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Professional Fields within the Arts

There are creatives who have found their faith in Jesus Christ and are actively trying to engage culture with the gospel through their crafts. Christian creatives face a number of challenges in that their faith and love of art intersect with their professional secular fields. These fields include everything from public classrooms to Hollywood production studios. This study will examine several ways that Christian creatives are using the arts as evangelical tools within their chosen careers, independent of the church proper.

Statement of Methodology

This thesis will examine the relationship between the church, the arts, and those who define themselves as creatives. It will explore how the church can actively engage creative professionals, both within the church and in culture, so that congregations can both welcome creatives and provide avenues of engagement and discipleship. By rediscovering the arts the church can evangelize the arts community, provide a new avenue of resources for worship and discipleship within the church, and regain an influence in culture. The thesis will be presented in the following manner:

Chapter One Summary

In Chapter One of this thesis the problem will be identified and introduced so the reader has all of the pertinent information required to fully engage with the subsequent chapters. This includes defining the problem, as it currently exists in the church as well as defining exactly which portions of the total problem this thesis will address. In order to
understand the how this topic will be addressed, the theoretical basis surrounding the issue will be addressed.

In order to find a solution to the problem, an extensive study of scripture will be conducted to examine any biblical issues, commands, or concerns regarding the topic of art in the church. Since this is an issue directly affecting the church, it is of the utmost important to research scripture to see exactly what limitations or encouragements, if any, are placed on the topic. A selection of passages will be presented to give the reader a comprehensive biblical foundation for the topic.

Finally, a study of published materials related to the problem will be conducted. This study will include any work addressing topics within the scope of the problem and its theoretical basis. Chapter one will conclude with several short essays examining important books relevant to understanding the problem and any proposed solutions.

Chapter Two Summary

Chapter two examines the history of art within the church, specifically focusing on examples of creativity that were used for discipleship and evangelism. This chapter will begin by examining passages from scripture, which addresses the nature of man in regard to creative endeavors, and how the people of Israel used art in their worship of God. This chapter will then examine the use of art in the early church all the way through the Middle Ages, exploring the role of art in the historical church. This examination provides insight into why the historical church used art so extensively and the effectiveness of these creative endeavors.
Chapter Three Summary

Using the research of chapters one and two, the researcher examines the current state of the American Evangelical church’s approach to the creative community. These findings will be held against the light of scripture to see if current methods fall within the biblical parameters for art and evangelism. Then the researcher will use the information gathered to construct a series of interviews aimed at inspecting the current incorporation of art in the church, the type of opportunities for creatives in the church, and methods by which pastors have found success in reaching the artistic community with the gospel. Through the interviews the researcher hope to gain a realistically comprehensive understanding of current trends within the church as they relate to evangelizing those categorized as creatives in order to find way to improve on these methods and develop systems and ideas that can be incorporated by local churches.

Chapter Four Summary

Using the results of chapter three, a new methodology will be developed by which a local church can better engage the artistic community with the gospel by way of new philosophical and practical outreach methods. This will involve a three tiered system, beginning with incorporation of arts into the church environment, followed by developing discipleship and educational systems within the church designed to foster appreciation for and creation of the arts by the church body. Finally, several methods will be designed by which the church can use the arts to engage creatives in the local art community with the intent of evangelism and cultural influence.
This final chapter will explore areas of further study, and the researcher will present his final conclusions regarding the original problem and the proposed solutions.

**Review of Literature**

Published Works

Anthony Aumann’s *The Relationship Between Aesthetic Value and Cognitive Value* is a very interesting discussion about the relationship between art and knowledge/truth. In this article, he examines how art and literature cannot only serve as a method of communication for knowledge, but aesthetics also affect the way knowledge is perceived and valued. He focuses mostly on literature, believing that the quality of a work can affect the observer’s philosophical understanding just as much as the truth conveyed by its conclusion.\(^8\) It is his conclusion that aesthetics define the way that knowledge takes root in the observer’s mind making art essential to quality cognitive value.

*Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* by Frank Brown examines why Christian art is so popular within the Christian culture while being consistently of less quality than secular art. This art is not only accepted but is often viewed as preferable within the church, while other forms of art of higher caliber are often viewed with derision. Brown study’s why Christian “taste” for art is skewed, and explores how Christian culture can be taught to expand beyond their limited scope, demand a higher quality of work, and accept more modern forms of art.

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Constantine Campbell’s *Outreach and the Artist: Sharing the Gospel with the Arts* examines how the arts are a largely neglected area of focus in regards to evangelism. Her book is designed to encourage those with artistic talents within the church to use their gifts and understanding of the creative culture to share the gospel. She breaks down sharing the gospel into three categories, “Evangelism with, through, and to the arts.”\(^9\)

This thesis focuses on the first and latter of the three approaches she identifies. Campbell’s work brings a very valuable insight into the topic, particularly in showing how the church can take the gospel to the art community effectively.

*Seeing: When Art and Faith Intersect* by Douglas Campbell is not a traditional style book, but rather a collection of essay on different issues and topic concerning Christians who are engaged in the arts community. As an artist himself, Campbell uses these essays to examine the challenges and advantages to incorporating art within the Church’s evangelical spectrum.

There is an underlying problem that many within the church have yet to deal with. Through all the sermon’s and bible studies, many Christian have yet to truly understand and embrace whom God is. Francis Chan’s *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God* is an effort to go beyond the traditions and practices of American Christianity to find a deeper, personal, and exuberant connection to the love of God. Chan states, “God never had an identity crisis”\(^10\). The God of the Old Testament did not change his stripes and become the loving, caring God highlighted in the New Testament; nor did he lose his demand of perfection or his hatred of sin. Through understanding the full character of

\(^9\) Constantine, R Campbell. *Outreach and the Artist: Sharing the Gospel with the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013) 2.

God, Christians can see the depths of his love of them. For the purposes of this thesis, examining the full character of God also reveals his consistency, specifically in how he prefers to be worshiped.

In a similar manner, Chan’s book *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of The Holy Spirit*, encourages Christians to gain a deeper understanding of the Holy Spirit. Many churches have a profound love of God, but give little credit to the workings of the Holy Spirit. This book looks at the role the Holy Spirit plays in the lives of the congregation and evangelism. For the purposes of this thesis, his examination of the Holy Spirit in the arts is of particular interest. He draws a distinction between using art as a marketing tool, and using it as a conduit for the Holy Spirit. While examining the Holy Spirit’s overall influence on the church, Chan touches on the dangers of using art as a method of attraction, as an attempt to be cool, in opposition to intentional actions taken to facilitate the workings of God.

One of the most insightful authors regarding the use of art for marketing and branding is Phil Cooke. His book *Branding Faith: Why Some Churches and Nonprofits Impact Culture and Others Don't*, is designed to show churches and non-profits the value in creative media in art for the purposes of reaching their target audience with their message. As a Hollywood professional and a trained theologian, Cooke offers a unique perspective on the value of aesthetics when trying to impact culture with the gospel.

Instead of criticizing culture, why not change it? Andrew Crouch’s book *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, examines how the church has engaged in “Culture Wars” with little to no effect, suggesting that it is time for a change in methodology. Instead of standing on the sidelines of culture screaming how things should
be different, it is time for the church to get involved. Crouch believes that church has stepped away from its true calling as the shapers of culture by neglecting creativity and art. Crouch examines how culture works, what shapes it, and how the church can become influencers in culture bringing the light of the gospel into the world. Crouch examines how during the times when New Testament scripture was written, the gospel was redefining culture in a huge way. In the Old Testament, the scriptures are the foundation for an entire people group. The message of God is meant to transform culture, and it does so through creativity.

Is art a form of idolatry? Does it have a place in the church? How did faith become focused primarily on intellectual pursuits and become separated from expressions of art? William Dyrness’ book *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue (Engaging Culture)* explores the role art should play in the church and how different aspects of Christianity have addressed this topic. By exploring the history of art in the church, Dyrness examines the process by which faith and art have arrived at their current estranged relationship within mainstream Christianity. Aesthetics were once foundational elements within the faith used to shape culture, turning every aspect of Israelite culture into a functional expression of reverence and worship to God. It is Dyrness’ hope that they can once again return to that role.

Makoto Fujimura is a world-class artist trying to show the church the value of art and its inseparable connection to faith. *Refractions: a Journey of Faith, Art, and Culture*, shows how the arts are able to connect to the human heart in a way simple words cannot. There are many books talking about how art can be used to draw people to God, but this book focuses on art as an expression of one’s own faith. “Art cannot be divorced from
faith” as it expresses beauty in a way nothing else can. Fujimura explains, “God desires to refract his perfect light via the broken, prismatic shards of our lives. Art and creativity will end up being delivered back to the creators hands in that pure light.”

It provides a glimpse of hope that “echoes the creativity of the Creator.” “This book is a journey through faith and culture as it relates to art, through the eyes of a Christian actively involved in the art community.

In many period of Christian history, art was a primary element of worship. Everything from one’s dress to the design of the church buildings were intentionally developed as artistic expressions of adoration. Rosa Giorgi’s *The History of the Church in Art* explores the long history of art in the church, its greatest accomplishments, and the lessons learned from these endeavors. This book provides excellent insight into how Christianity once embraced art in such a way that it influenced culture in a near global sense.

Lewis Hyde’s *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World* takes a very interesting approach to the topic of art. Instead of viewing art as a resource or commodity, Hyde argues that art should be viewed as a gift. Art appeals to something innate within humanity, something placed in person at their creation. It was given as a gift to mankind and when this gift inspire another work of art, that work then becomes a gift to others. Art as an expression of this gift is able to move and affect people is a way nothing else can, because it connects to the gift placed in others. Hyde’s exploration of how art interacts with the very essence of mankind reveals not only the value of art but it

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12 Ibid., 70
13 Ibid., 69.
shows the value of its application within the church. If creativity and art are elements of humanity’s most primal design, then embracing this gift from God allows the church to present the gospel in a way that interacts with a person on a foundational level. Hyde’s book brings an excellent insight the topics addressed in this thesis, showing art to be an elemental aspect of God’s design for humanity.

Many books dealing with art in the church focus on the theoretical or overarching aspects of aesthetics as a means of worship or cultural engagement. James McElroy and James Scott’s book *Creative Church Handbook: Releasing the Power of the Arts in Your Congregation* takes a far more practical approach. They outline how to engage and manage artistic endeavors within a congregation. Although this books take a more traditional approach to art in the church, it is still a valuable resource for certain aspects of church art, such as worship services and incorporating art into other aspects of the Sunday service. Although these aspects of art in the church are not the focus of this thesis, this book does provide insight into managing creative systems within the church and encourage church staff members to embrace artistic activities.

Emotional development plays as much of a role in biblical discipleship as intellectual study. Sadly this is an area that is often overlooked within most discipleship programs. Peter Scazzero’s *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that actually Changes Lives* focuses on the value of emotional development, from the new believer to those in leadership positions. Scazzero notes, “The sad reality is that too many people in our churches are fixated at a stage of spiritual immaturity that current models of discipleship have not addressed.”14 This book’s efforts to address the topic of

emotional dissonance within the church will help inform the efforts this thesis to engage
the church aesthetically, providing an avenue for emotional growth, expression, and
development.

*Art And The Bible* by Francis Schaeffer examines the role creativity played
throughout the history of the Bible. The focus of the study is to validate and encourage a
return of art within the church, particularly for the purpose of complete spiritual
development. As Schaffer states, “If Christianity is really true, then it involves the whole
man, including his intellect and his creativeness.”

Modern Christianity focuses
primarily on the intellect of the individual leaving the entire category of aesthetics and
creativity neglected, which leave the modern disciple with an area of their spirituality
virtually unexplored. This resource will serve to underscore the value of aesthetics within
this thesis’ approach to evangelism and discipleship.

Todd Smith is the chair of studio and digital arts at Liberty University. He is a
world-class sculptor, as well as an accomplished digital artist. His book *A Creative
Church: The Arts and a Century of Renewal* examines the numerous methods the church
has employed over the centuries to incorporate arts in the church from a variety of
different denominations. It addresses the success of different movements and answers
questions regarding the role that art should play in the church. This book helps to explore
the history between the church and aesthetics, which will help to broaden ideas presented
in this thesis by providing historical context.

The desire to return art, creativity, and aesthetics to the church is not a new
concept. For over a century church leaders from both protestant and catholic traditions

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15 Schaeffer, *Art And The Bible*, 16.
have been trying to bring about a revival of art within the church. One outspoken member of the catholic clergy was Father Marie-Alain Couturier. Joanna Weber explores the writing and influences of Father Couturier in her article *The Sacred in Art*. Even in the early 1900s, Couturier observed that the waning influence of the church in culture was intrinsically connected to the church’s acceptance and engagement with the church’s artistic integrity.\(^\text{16}\) As the church became less engaged in the arts, or to be more specific encamped in the forms of art deemed acceptable, the church went from shaping culture to becoming separated from it. This act removed the church from culture’s sphere of influence. Ever since, the church’s aesthetic appreciations have devolved into what Couturier calls, *kitsch art*, defined as “watered-down sentimentality, devoid of any truth… [It] represents an inauthentic life, [aesthetically] as well as morally.”\(^\text{17}\) This article brilliantly sums up the work of Father Couturier and also provides guidance as to how the church can regain its influence within culture through reengagement with the arts.

Biblical References

*Genesis 1:26; 2:7* – Mankind stands unique in creation in that he is the only being that God formed directly. All other created beings and objects were spoken into existence, but man was intentionally crafted, then given life through the breathe of God himself. God made everything in the universe through and expression of his will, but mankind was crafted and brought to life as a unique creation, which directly expresses the characteristics of God himself. Being created in the image of the creator imbues mankind with the ability, desire, and calling to be creative themselves.

\(^{16}\) Webber. Sacred in Art, 248.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 245.
Exodus 25:10-22 – When God led the Israelites, he created a symbol for them to follow, a place where God would come down and meet with man. The Ark of the Covenant was fashioned according to God’s directions and was a masterpiece of aesthetic craftsmanship. The quality of materials and art had to be of the highest standard because it represented God’s power to the people.

Exodus 26:15-37 – Artistic detail was not just reserved for the holiest of holies, but was expected in every single aspect of any object associated with God. This passage outlines the meticulous detail by which many lesser components were designed for the tabernacle. Every element was a work of art, which brought focus and attention to God himself.

Exodus 35:30–35 - Creativity and craftsmanship were and are important to God. When building His tabernacle, God was so concerned with the topic that he guided the Spirit to give his selected craftsmen the wisdom and ability to make works of art worthy of his name. Art was essential to the construction of the temple, and it was directed by the Holy Spirit.

2 Chronicles 3:1-17 – The temple was more than just a building; it was a work of art. This passage lists the details of the temple construction, which included some of the most expensive and beautiful construction possible in that day and age. A significant amount of time, energy, skill, and money was involved; all of which was done as an act of worship designed to evoke worship in others.

Acts 19:23-26 – Art can be used in a negative way. Some people use their talents in a way that distracts people from God. They make idols or other art, which become
gods unto themselves. Art should not be worshiped as a man-made god as “a god made with hands is no god at all.”

I Samuel 16:15-23 - When Saul struggled with “evil spirits,” it was only through music that he found relief. Music played from the hands of someone serving God can directly affect one’s spiritual circumstances. Music, an expression of art, is used by God to affect one’s spirit.

I Kings 7:13-15 – Artists were used from outside of God’s kingdom in addition to those in Israel. Hiram was a bronze worker from Tyre, who was not Jewish, but was said to be filled with wisdom and understanding when it came to his craft. He created much of the bronze work in the temple despite being an outsider.

Matthew 13:31 – Jesus could have just answered the question plainly, but instead he chose to do so creatively. Using metaphor and imagery, Jesus explains the kingdom of heaven. Like all art, it allows the reader/observer to invest his or her imagination, experiences, and feelings into the topic. Instead of a simple answer, Jesus painted a picture drawing a deeper connection for the crowd.

Acts 17:22-24 – Paul enters a secular venue and preaches the gospel, but in order to explain it in a way they will understand he uses one of their own idols to transition into the topic. By using the art of the people, even art that is used as an idol, Paul is able to show the unbeliever the truth of God. There is no art, even art dedicated to another God, which is unredeemable or unusable.

I Corinthians 8:1-6 – Something that is seen as secular, or a worldly idol, is not something Christianity should be afraid of. There is only one God and the secular cannot defile the holy. All things were created by God, therefore nothing is unholy in itself, but
rather is used in an unholy way. The sinful act does not define the object, just as secular ideas cannot corrupt an aspect of art.

Ephesians 5:18b-19 – Paul commands those in the church to be filled with the spirit, expressed through hymns, psalms, and songs. They are told to both sing and create melodies to the Lord. This passage shows how art through music can be an expression of the spirit as worship to God.

Colossians 3:16-17 – Again Paul encourages the use of singing and music as an act of worship. He then adds that everything one does should be done in the name of Jesus as an act of praise. This shows that praise and worship goes beyond songs, scripture, and the corporate gathering of the church into every aspect of one’s life. The creative expression of praise and worship is not limited to this setting or format.

Hebrews 3:1-11: Everything built or created by man that is honorable, reflects the true creator. In this, all art is an extension of the original artist, God. By creating art, mankind brings the glory and attention back to God.
CHAPTER 2

Art in Church History

Considering the goal of this thesis is to develop new or reimaged methods of discipleship and evangelism through the use of art, it may seem strange to begin this study with a strong emphasis on history. A fairly common attitude found in the church suggests that the old ways are obsolete or irrelevant in light of modern church culture, perhaps with the notable exceptions of the 100-300 years directly after the death of Christ. Of the approximately 4,000 churches planted yearly in the United States, less than 8% are planted incorporating a traditional style of worship. Since the 1980s, churches have been leaving the more traditional model of church for newer contemporary models of ministry such as the modular style church, presentation or performance style church (for instance, those resembling late night TV entertainment featuring quality staging, engaging and calculated content, and worship presented in an entertaining fashion), or a modified house church approach that puts a modern spin on the church model described in the book of Acts. This thesis does not claim or imply that any of these styles of church are inappropriate or without their own merit, but it does raise the question, is there a way to study the lessons of the past in order to better serve the efforts of today? After all, it is through the study of church history that one can better understand theology. In the same way, history can bring insight into evangelism and discipleship methodology that has long since been forgotten.


In order to fully explore this topic, some foundational principles must be defined so that the intent and meaning of this study are not misunderstood. First, there needs to be a clear dismissal of the premise that an action taken by the church in the past defines that action as either ethical or theologically accurate. It must be understood that no system, regardless of intent or effort, is flawless. This means that each topic must be examined with the understanding that there will be inherent shortcomings. Mixed with the cultural context of the day, direct application to the modern church may not be advisable or even possible. Because of this, it must be stated that the goal of studying the previous generations is not to duplicate their methods outright, but to gain an understanding of the attitudes, concepts, and values that fueled their use of art and provided successful applications of discipleship and evangelism.

In examining the past, particularly in areas where the Bible does not provide explicit guidance or boundaries, it can be tempting to either accept or dismiss historical action based on present day perspectives. This is often referred to as vertical transference\(^20\) and must be avoided when one examines any moment in history. To counter this problem, each topic from church history should be examined in the following way: 1) understanding the cultural context of the period, 2) examining the biblical and theological issues as outlined in scripture and understood in that period, as well as 3) examining the topic without applying modern church definitions or traditions as a means of determining value. It is nearly impossible to create a work of art without the passions or values of the artist showing through as clearly as the subject of the art itself. A creation is indelibly marked by the character of its creator, as such an examination of art

throughout the history of the church will also shed light on the values of the church
during that time. It may be tempting to judge or discredit the artistic philosophies of the
historical church simply because they do not conform to the philosophies of modernity,
or to try and define such values in light of how modern artists would have been
motivated, but every effort must be taken to avoid such conclusions. The modern mindset
brings with it the baggage of tradition, often leading to complicated or convoluted ideals
based strongly on incidence of failure or abuse rather than degree of success as a whole.
Every effort must be taken to approach any topic of history, and specifically the topic of
art in the church, with an open mind looking at how those coming from different
denominational traditions and dogmas chose to address a specific topic or subject. It is
only through this willingness to withhold one’s preconceptions that true study and
education can take place. As such the information provided in this chapter will be
presented, as much as possible, without comparison to the modern church’s perspective
except to acknowledge when a similar struggle in faced by the church in both time
periods.

Church history is full of unique and spirit-led efforts to further the gospel.
Understanding these efforts, specifically in their use of aesthetic mediums, can provide a
general outline by which the Christian of today can begin to expand his or her evangelical
and discipleship efforts. By studying how the church incorporated art throughout its
history the modern reader can examine their current application of art. He or she can find
ways to incorporate values and ideas reflective of those who forged the foundations of
faith and spread the good news of Christ throughout the world with a vigor that has yet to
be repeated since the times when there were less limitations, when discipleship and
evangelism were the very foundation of the church, and every element of life was seen as a tool to communicate the gospel without the confines imposed by habit or tradition.

**Art in Scripture**

Had Jesus, or any of the apostles, provided a clear set of rules, guidelines, or specific examples regarding art and the church, explaining the use of art in evangelism and discipleship would be quite simple. Unfortunately, they did not. This was, at least in part, due to the nature of the church during the time period. The church was in its infancy and most of the important issues were foundational and doctrinal. There may not have been the time or need to address topics that would only begin to arise in the subsequent centuries once the church has time to grow and develop, much in the same way children are first taught to walk before delving into art classes or being taught to analyze literature. Whatever the reason was, there is a conspicuous lack of direction regarding the employment of art in the church. However, if limiting creative endeavors was necessary it is reasonable to assume that God, in his omniscience, would have foreseen the problem and included instructions in the biblical text accordingly. With this understanding, this author would argue the lack of clear instructions and boundaries regarding the use of art should be taken as evidence in itself that creativity was meant to be free of restriction, within the bounds of the moral and theological guidance provided for the other areas of the church. When considering the role of art in the Old Testament, one finds a clear need for creativity, particularly through the act of artistic creation. In one his books, Colin Harbinson examines the role of creativity in humanity as an extension of the Imago Dei (image of God), which was placed in man during creation:

> He is the creative imagination and personality behind all things; creativity is an essential part of his divine nature. God intended creation to be both functional and beautiful
(Genesis 2:9). Into this world he placed the man and woman created in his image. They had the ability to think, feel and create. The cultural mandate affirms that God intended for human beings to develop and steward his world. We were commissioned to be culture formers (Genesis 1:28, 2:15).  

Creation is a part of mankind’s design and is a direct reflection of the creator. As one scholar in the 1500s noted, “I am sure that anyone who considers the question carefully will come to the same conclusions I have reached… namely, that the origin of the arts we are discussing was nature itself and that the first image or model was the beautiful fabric of the world and that the Master who taught us was that divine light infused in us by special grace, which has made us not only superior to the animal creation, but even, if one may so say, like God himself.”  

It is the ability to create, the power to reflect the divine light of the creator that separates man from the remainder of creation. If creativity is a part of the godly characteristic embedded within mankind during creation, then creation as an action is an expected, even mandated act of obedience to one’s design. Therefore the lack of limitation specified in scripture serves to show the only boundaries necessary are those defined to govern all behavior, such as the ethical, moral, and theological teachings found throughout the Bible. Art is an expression of the soul, not only an act of the hands.

Since the modern evangelical will hold to the idea that scripture is the only litmus test by which theology and doctrine can be tried, it is reasonable then to conclude that art that does not violate the boundaries set by scripture is acceptable as an expression of worship or tool for evangelism and discipleship. Further evidence for this is can be found in the examples of art within scripture dating as far back as the time of Moses.

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22 Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artist, 1558*
Then Moses said to the sons of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship; to make designs for working in gold and in silver and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings and in the carving of wood, so as to perform in every inventive work.

The wing of the other cherub, of five cubits, touched the wall of the house; and its other wing of five cubits was attached to the wing of the first cherub. The wings of these cherubim extended twenty cubits, and they stood on their feet facing the main room. He made the veil of violet, purple, crimson and fine linen, and he worked cherubim on it.

A list of aesthetic items used in worship as directed by God: The Ark of the Covenant, The Table of Showbread, golden lamp stands, the bronze altar, the garments of the priests, the altar of incense, and the largest artistically crafted item of the Bible – the temple of Solomon (as it is known today). According to Exodus 38, the tabernacle included over a ton of gold, four tons of silver, and more then two and a half tons of bronze. I Chronicles 29 states that Solomon’s temple contained at least three thousand tons of gold and upwards of thirty-seven tons of silver.

In Jewish culture, there were countless examples of art used to bring glory to God. Stone carvings were commonplace, and it was standard practice to make any edifice that served God as beautiful as possible. There are numerous examples of stone carvings at synagogues, and other Jewish places from Old Testament times that have been rediscovered through archeology.

It is important to understand that “None of the animal and plant figures or colors decorating the temple had any religious or magical significance.” These various visual

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23 Ex 35:30–33 (NASB)
24 2 Ch 3:12–14 (NASB)
designs were means to help facilitate worship by creating an environment which served to remind the viewer of the immensity and glory of God. Nothing in the temple was meant to serve as an idol or distraction, instead the artistic value of the building was designed to show worship to God and inspire others to do the same. In addition, the extravagance of the temple spoke to the culture of the day. Rulers and kings often displayed symbols of wealth as a testament to themselves, and the temple dwarfed them all standing as a testament to God almighty. In this act the Jewish people declared to the world that their God is above all others in a language that was understood by the culture of the day.

The Bible shows a principle that is often overlooked. “Art and worship are inseparable in the Christian view of life”26 In modern days there is often an objection to the church dedicating resources to artistic endeavors that could be used for other purposes, such as helping the poor. However, examining the words of Jesus in John 12:1-8 brings light to the importance of honoring God with gifts of value. This of course is not a license for the church to be wasteful, but it does communicate the value of quality works and gift when given in the service of the Lord, and negates the argument that the church should avoid spending resources in acts of worship. In conjunction with the passages from the Old Testament, as well as those passages listed in chapter one, a reasonable argument can be made for the value and validity of Art in the modern church environment. It is good for Christians to express themselves through creative avenues and quality craftsmanship in the service of God and the Bible supports such undertakings.

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Art in the Early Church to the Middle Ages

EARLY CHRISTIAN PERIOD (100-476 AD)

There are those that argue the truest version of the church was the church during the times of the apostles and the early church fathers. This view holds that the church during this time was the least corrupted and the closest example of the designs prescribed by Christ through his direct teaching, both through scripture and through the verbal instruction given outside of the biblical record. Many modern authors hold to some variation of this view, such as Neil Cole or Alan Hirsch, and believe the best methods are those executed by the church during its foundational period. Whether the actions of the early church model a complete set of the necessary approaches or simply the starting point for a wide array of methodology is beyond the scope of this thesis, but regardless of one’s view on this point, it can be agreed that there is wisdom in studying how the early church handled challenges in their day which parallel topics in modern culture. To that end, this section will provide examples of both the usage and philosophy of art in the early church in regards to worship, discipleship, and evangelism.

Creeds and Songs

The present-day American reader may find it difficult to truly appreciate the severity of conditions surrounding the early church. At its beginning the church was a splinter group, usually treated with contempt by outsiders. Persecution of Christians became commonplace and as time moved forward many regions outlawed Christianity entirely. The house church model began as a practical solution but quickly became a necessity due to the ever-growing need for secrecy. The art of the early Christians reflected their efforts to remain hidden from the rest of culture and avoid drawing
unwanted attention to themselves, as will be discussed in the following sections. These difficult times also inspired the church to create art that strengthened the faith and resolve of their members. Such items became so powerfully attached to the identity of the church that their effects can still be felt nearly two millennia later through elements still in use today. Perhaps the most powerful of these are the songs and creeds of the early church.

Just like the songs of the modern church, the early church found inspiration for their musical expressions through the scriptures, especially the Psalms and other works of Hebrew poetry. The growing persecution furthered the need for music without instruments, so the early church embraced songs of poetry performed a cappella, corporate reading, or other spoken word presentations. Due to the passage of time, the particular melodies employed by the early church are no longer available to the modern researcher, but evidence would suggest they used common melodic styles, either of the Jewish tradition or the local culture, and were more chant based than full melodic compositions. The lack of information regarding the tonality of the songs also indicate the minimal importance placed on the structure of the music itself in comparison to the text heavy content for which there are numerous samples that survive the passage of time. Clement of Alexandria is quoted as teaching against the extravagance of musical indulgence over the theological content of songs used for worship: “But we must abominate extravagant music, which enervates men’s souls, and leads to changefulness—now mournful, and then licentious and voluptuous, and then frenzied and frantic”  

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One of, if not the earliest example of Christian song comes from Ignatius of Antioch circa 35 AD:

Very flesh, yet Spirit too;  
Uncreated, and yet born;  
God-and-Man in One agreed  
Very-Life-in-Death indeed,  
Fruit of God and Mary’s seed;  
At once impassable and torn  
By pain and suffering here below:  
Jesus Christ, whom as our Lord we know.  

Many other examples of songs from this period demonstrate a similar expression of style: Simple and brief, easily remembered, and full of theological content. The early church, at least in the records that have survived, wasted little energy on songs without depth of meaning. This isn’t to say that they did not have songs of joy or exuberance that simple proclaimed the greatness of God without a thorough theological examination, but their style was to proclaim only that which brought to focus of adoration directly to God or the power of God exercised in the world. Ambrose wrote this simple lyric in the middle of the 4th century to exemplify a joyful song about the glory of God:

*O splendor of God’s glory bright, O Thou that bringest light from light;  
O Light of light, light’s living spring, O day, all days illumining.*

It is important to note that the exact usage of songs in the church changed throughout the centuries. There is evidence, primarily in the reactionary statements of church leaders, to suggest that some churches used more culturally derived musical forms and instrumentation than others. In an effort the keep a distinction between the music of Christians and the music of pagans, the church made a conscious effort to distance

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themselves from musical expressions that were used in pagan religious ceremonies or lifestyles. Stapert describes these pagan rituals as follows:

But most of them featured ecstatic, even frenzied and orgiastic, rites. Ecstatic rituals were not uncommon in Greek and Roman societies, going back centuries before the Christian era. The rituals associated with the worship of Dionysus or his Roman equivalent, Bacchus, are the classic examples of this type. Drunken revelry, wild music, frenzied dancing, and flagellation and mutilation were their hallmarks.  

Just as worship music is a topic of debate today, the early church often struggled to define the boundaries for “Christian music” in terms of melody or musical style, but there are a few points in which most figures of the day agreed constituted the essence of Christian music – text driven, theologically active, and spiritually-focused presentation. This last point is worth explanation. Many authors have addressed this topic and too often use terminology, which in today’s vernacular contain a literary slant towards their person perspective, such as modest or temperate. In order to avoid any improper inferences, it is perhaps best to avoid defining the idea by a singular term, but rather use an explanation from one of the church leaders of the era. Basil warned against being “brought down to the passions of the flesh by the pleasure of song.”  

The early church considered a song valuable only if it directed the spirit to God and did not cause the attention of the soul through lyric, melody, or affiliation to focus on earthly passions. This concept translated into the church’s use of art as well, but that will be discussed later as this chapter progresses.

When constructed within these boundaries, the early church made great use of music as an art form. Songs served as a primary element of worship, both corporately and

31 Ibid., 86.
individually, but they were inextricably linked to discipleship. There was a near
requirement for church music to contain such depth of theology as to educate the singer
with nearly every line and lyric. From the life of Christ, to the divine nature of his birth,
to the power of God through creation, there were nearly no foundational areas of
theology that were not expressed in song, and subsequently church members were unable
to avoid being given a deepened knowledge of God.

Creeds are often grouped with songs due to their similar structure and
implementation within the church, but they served a distinct purpose. Creed were more
than an exercise in worship, they were a collection of foundation truths. “The creed…
was the faith confessed by those converted to the apostolic preaching, a faith confessed
especially as part of the baptismal ceremony.”† Unlike songs, which could vary and
contain a wide variety of content, creeds were fixed statements of faith that were rarely
altered. They were declarations of the foundations of the faith, both in what should be
believed and what beliefs were considered heresy. The church used these creeds
primarily in two ways. First, this was to avoid the incursion of false teachings into the
church. Paul warns in I Timothy 4 that false doctrine can easily seduce a person, even the
believer. Creeds provided a unifying summation of the faith, which can be easily
remembered, creating a defense for false doctrines. Secondly, these creeds became a sort
of rally cry for the believer. Through this unified expression, each new member found a
kind of brotherhood with those who also proclaimed the creed.

† Everett Ferguson. Church History, Volume One: From Christ to Pre-Reformation: The
Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context: I (Zondervan,
Perhaps the most memorable of these creeds, and considered to be the earliest of the creeds used throughout the church at large, is the Apostles Creed from the second century:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

In as much as creeds served a practical purpose, they were in themselves an expression of art. They were crafted to be memorable, easily recited, and to create an emotional and intellectual attachment to message.

Symbols Representing Hidden Meanings

Visual imagery did not join the artist inventory of the early church until the beginning of the 200s AD, or at least this is the earliest example currently known. There are a number of reasons speculated for the absence of visual art prior to the 3rd century, including an aversion to pagan culture, which used visual art frequently, adherence to certain Jewish traditions that limited what sort of art could be produced, or a desire of the

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33 In this context and time period, the term catholic means "universal," reference to the idea that all Christians are a part of a singular church in Christ. This creed is not referring to the Catholic Church as the term is used today.
early Christians to distance themselves from material possessions. None of these ideas can be expressly substantiated, which leads many researchers to conclude the reason to be much more practical: the economic and social circumstances of the early Christians made the production of art problematic. As the church developed beyond its infantile stage, visual art developed with it, beginning with the creation and use of symbols.

To be a Christian in the days of the early church was not only dangerous, but also illegal. These symbols were designed in part to be a secret language used by believers to communicate complex ideas without drawing attention to themselves. Numerous examples exist of the development and use of symbols within church culture, several of which are still in use today. Many of these symbols were representative of a story from scripture, while others served as a substitute for a more obvious sign. The following are a few of the primary symbols used during the early church period: The palm was an emblem of victory, the dove represented the Holy Spirit, and the anchor was a symbol of hope. Christians would disguise the cross as the mast of Jonah’s ship; the Ankh, which was the Egyptian looped cross; or a capital T shape that communicated the image of the cross while appearing to be a letter. The Chi Rho (an amalgam of the two Greek letters) was used to stand as a monogram for Christ (this image became popular after Constantine and was often used by him). One of the most common symbols was the ΙΧΘΥΣ (ick-thoos), which was an anagram of the Greek words for Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior,
and represented the Christian soul swimming in the waters of baptism, to be caught and saved by the Fisher of Souls.\textsuperscript{35}

It is not know which group of believers began using which symbol first, but the implementation of these images most likely “began in small objects of everyday use which everyone had to have, such as seal rings and household lamps.”\textsuperscript{36} Over time they began to appear in more common location such as tombs or secret meeting areas, then eventually displayed prominently in basilicas. Clement of Alexander noted that although these symbols were common in every day use, there were some limitations. Ferguson paraphrases Clements discussion as, “…images appropriate for Christians to employ on their seal rings: dove, fish, ship, lyre, anchor, fisherman. Not to be used were images of idols, implements of war like sword or bow, and drinking cups (since Christians were temperate).”\textsuperscript{37}

Symbols became a foundational expression of art during this period, and served a variety of functions. Images like the anchor were often used to discretely signify meeting areas during times of persecution and knowledge of the symbols could be used to identify someone as a friend or fellow believer. The symbols such as the ΙΧΘΥΣ were also used as discipleship tools, teaching foundational principles of the faith. Although the use was simplistic, it is difficult to ignore the success of such practices considering how these symbols are still used for instruction today.

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\textsuperscript{36} Ferguson, \textit{Church History}, Locations 3207-3208.
\textsuperscript{37} Ferguson, \textit{Church History}, Locations 3208-3210.
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Catacomb Paintings and the Incorporation of Pagan Art Styles

House churches afforded a small amount of anonymity for the early believer, but it could still draw unwanted attention. As persecution intensified, many believers were forced to find more secluded areas to hold gathering with fellow Christians. In addition, this increase in persecution created a growing number of martyrs who needed to be buried with respect without drawing unwanted attention to their fellow believers. The areas in and around Rome, Christians adopted the practice of burying their dead in catacombs, partially because of the belief that the body would rise again one day. The early church did not use cremation, a common practice in Roman culture, so the catacombs were a natural choice.\textsuperscript{38} Due to the unique geography of the region, the volcanic ground surrounding Rome could be excavated into long underground tunnels in which the dead would be buried without taking up usable ground space like a cemetery. By the end of this practice there were over 60 catacombs surrounding Rome with hundreds of miles of tunnels laid out like an ant colony of connecting passageways. Since local laws required the dead to be buried outside of the city, catacombs provided a space where Christians could meet in relative seclusion. It is here that some of the earliest Christian art was produced and still survives to this day.

In addition to Christians, both the Jewish and pagan religions of Rome used catacombs to bury their dead. Many of the tombs were decorated with carvings and drawings to signify the religious beliefs of the occupant or to garner favor in the afterlife. As Christians began using catacombs to bury their dead and meet in secret, they integrated the artistic styles of the catacombs for their purposes. Pagan art during this period was filled with images of Roman gods or other mythical creatures. Christians, in

\textsuperscript{38} Ferguson, \textit{Church History}, location 3014-3030.
an effort to avoid detection adopted these images for their own needs. Instead of depicting biblical characters in traditionally understood scenes from scripture, as they would do in the centuries to follow, Christian art in the catacombs was comprised mostly of pagan images used in a subversively Christian way. During the 3rd century, images of pagan gods were used to depict ideas and concepts from biblical sources. To the outside observer these images would not draw much attention, but to the believers who found sanctuary in the tunnels their drawing screamed the virtues of scripture. Although looking like the work of pagan artists, these images stood in direct opposition to the pagan mindset. Depictions ranged from ideas taught by Christ to wisdom of the Old Testament to images depicting the deceased raising their arms in a symbolic gesture that affirmed their faith. Although these images were not often used to tell a story, like art of later years, they clearly presented a biblical worldview using pagan tropes. “… in spite of the simplification of the forms, and the economy of the brushwork, the […] message would have been clear to Jews and Christians alike.” 39 40

Sarcophagi Art

At the beginning of the 4th century Rome was given a new ruler, Constantine the Great. This new emperor changed the position of the Christian church within the empire from a hated, hunted group to a legalized and respected religion. Constantine was the first emperor to claim conversion to Christianity and as such he took a very active role in protecting and furthering Christianity. There are scholars who debate the value of such a change as it brought with it a number of problems, but that issue steps beyond the scope

39 Stokstad, Medieval Art, 17.
40 Examples of catacomb art can be seen in Appendix A, Section 1: Art of the Early Church
of this thesis and will not be addressed here except to say that it granted the church a newfound freedom of religion that it had previously lacked. This in turn generated a number of changes in the church’s use of art. Until this point it was used almost solely for worship and education, as this was the only safe avenue for its use, but by the middle of the 4th century Christian art had taken the first steps to evolve the use of art to include evangelism.

The tradition of catacomb art, and the use of catacombs for services, continued especially after the legalization of Christianity in 313 AD, but such art was adapted to reflect the freedom they now enjoyed. One of these changes was the use of more ornate expressions of art during burials. Sarcophagi had been in use in Greece for nearly a millennium prior to this period and they had found their use in Roman society beginning in the 2nd century, but Christianity saw such burial devices as an opportunity for artistic expression and began introducing them into their own religious practices. Nearly 10,000 sarcophagi have been found throughout the Roman Empire, with more than double that number in fragments.41 It may seem overly ornate to the modern reader, but sarcophagi had grown into an extremely popular fad for the wealthy to leave a physical representation of their status upon their death. Sarcophagi were essentially stone coffins, either laid on their backs or propped upright, allowing for a large percentage of the surface area to be exposed to view. In Roman culture these were highly decorated with pagan images, but the Christians of the day took this opportunity to display their own art depicting passages, ideas, or virtues from scripture. Each sarcophagus was unique and

reflected the artistic views of either its occupant or those of the sculptor, but there were several trends that appeared with relative frequency.

As stated previous, services of worship or teaching often occurred near these burial sites, the art often reflected the needs of these services. A common use was to display a series of “scenes” using what is know as Typology. “In Christian art and thought Typology refers to the foreshadowing of persona and events in the New Testament by events in the Old Testament.” For instance, there could be a series of ten scenes, five on the first line and five on the second directly below the first. The scenes of the first line could depict moments from the Old Testament that foreshadowed events that were to come, while the second line could illustrate the corresponding event from what is now known as the New Testament. By using Typology, early Christians employed art to serve as a last testament of worship by the deceased, and a tool of discipleship for those who would come to worship, meditate, and study in such somber places.

In addition, many of the Christian sarcophagi were placed in areas not solely populated by Christian decedents. In many instances the art displayed on the sarcophagi included pictorial representations of the passion story. Since viewing the result of death can bring the mind to place of contemplation, the early church used this opportunity to place the seeds of the gospel in the eye of the viewer and turned the image of death into a beautiful expression of the gospel message for the purpose of evangelism. Although late Roman art was abstract and expressionistic, in the hands of the Christian it was used to convey truth in a way the culture could understand. Plotinus described the usefulness of

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this art as “an appropriate receptacle… seeming like a mirror to catch the image of [the Soul].”

The value of this art may seem less than profound to the reader, as flamboyant grave decorations are often viewed as a wasteful extravagance in today’s culture, but the value of this art, both in practice and philosophy should not be overlooked. Early church Christians used catacomb and sarcophagus art as a redemptive act. The culture in which they lived valued such things and commonly used this style of art for the glorification of man or pagan gods. Instead, the church of this period used this art, art that was commonly viewed and reflected upon, to bring the attention of the viewer to Christ, the Bible, moral teachings, and the message of salvation. They had found an open door by which truth could be expressed and ran through it with a passion. In addition, this act demonstrates a philosophy of the early church, which has since been abandoned, at least in large part by the church of today. Although today’s church will often attempt to redeem a secular art form (this will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 3), it usually does so by stripping any secular ideas from the image and white washing it with blatant Christian imagery, phrases, or themes. In contrast, the early church made two concessions that are foreign to the modern view of Christian art: First, even after the legalization of Christianity, they did not distance themselves from pagan imagery. Although Christian art in the 4th century did use biblical figure and stories in their art, instead of the images of Roman gods or myths found during the days of persecution, they did not stop using pagan art altogether. Christian art would often incorporate images used in pagan culture. They saw no issue with mixing pagan images into a Christian scene in a way that did not detract from the

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message being communicated. To the church of that era, there was not a need to provide a clean-cut, literal, or direct expression of art. Abstract or impressionistic art was welcomed, and they had no issue with leaving the viewer asking questions which the art itself did not answer. For them art was never intended to provide a complete insulated thought, it was meant to open the heart of the viewer to spiritual things, beginning the quest for truth.

Secondly, the church of this time did not take offense to non-Christian art being displayed in a Christian atmosphere. Perhaps the best example of this is the sarcophagus of Constantine’s daughter, Constantina. Later given the title of Saint by the Roman Catholic Church, Constantina was a practicing Christian who was married to a pagan. When she died she was placed in a grandly decorated sarcophagus like her father was, but instead of the primarily Christian theme presented on Constantine’s sarcophagus, Constantina’s included several scenes of pagan imagery, presumably for the benefit of her husband and his family. Later periods of the church would see this as heresy, and there were probably those who did then as well, but the overall view was that Christian art did not need to stand in isolation. Instead the message it contained was sufficient to stand amidst opposing views. Images of Constantine’s sarcophagus, as well as his daughter’s, can be found in Appendix A, Section 2.

*Additional Uses of Art in The Early Church*

Persecution of the church was not universal throughout the church’s infancy, particularly outside of the primary Roman sphere. In many areas the church was simply disliked, while in others it was allowed to exist without any formal opposition. In these regions, art developed differently. In Syria for example, house churches have been
discovered of such size that they included a baptistery and full artistic scenes surrounding the primary meeting areas. “These included a Good Shepherd and Adam and Eve (added later) immediately behind the font, and on side walls, the woman at the well of Samaria, Jesus healing the paralytic, Jesus and Peter walking on the water, and a procession of women to the tomb of Jesus.”

The amount of Christian art from the early church period is so numerous and vast that it cannot be fully covered in this thesis, but the items discussed above represent the philosophy of art which the early church employed. Beginning with simple symbols and secret paintings, the church continued to grow its artistic fervor into massive beautiful works, all of which were designed to further worship, discipleship and evangelism. The success of these endeavors is evidenced by the sheer number of works, and the influence they had on the development of the church. Art inspired faith and faith inspired art. As history progressed into what is now known as the middle ages, the church continued to expand its use of art, further valuing aesthetic efforts as legitimate and practical tools for the furtherance of the Gospel.

CHURCH ART IN THE MIDDLE AGES (476 – circa 1450 AD)

As the governmental structure of the then known world changed, the church was forced to adapt. With the fall of Rome in 476 AD, a new government came to power, new cultures became prominent, and the methods of the church during this period reflect these transformations. The art developed in the church during this period shows an increasing acceptance by culture and eventually becomes a primary influencer of culture itself.

It must be understood that the period defined as the Middle Ages contains within itself several smaller periods, each with their own unique perspective on theology and art.

44 Ferguson, 3239-3241.
It would be impossible to provide a full explanation of art’s history in such a brief examination. Not only were there changes in leadership that rewrote the nature of society, but also there were multiple regions of the world in which the church thrived, each with their own distinct culture and views on art. Since this study is investigating the use of art in the church from the perspective of discipleship and evangelism, is necessary to omit many of the historical and cultural details surrounding different events and focus on the philosophy and application of art as it pertains to these goals. Consider this statement as the author’s apology to those fellow historians who will read this paper and cringe at the brevity and simplicity through which these topics must be presented.

_Basilicas_

In the time of and after Constantine’s reign the church found a great deal of evangelistic success. Because of the growing number of members, there was a need for larger venues in which to hold meetings of worship and spiritual education. As church members gathered resources to purchase land and buildings, the early Christians had to decide what their new church buildings should look like. Should it resemble the now destroyed temple of Jerusalem or the synagogues used by the Jews? Could they borrow design elements from the various pagan temples or should this meeting area not resemble a religious facility at all? Partially in an effort to avoid similarities to other religions, and partially because of the popularity of this style at the time, the church decided to adopt and adapt the basilica design for the design of their new church. Basilicas were originally simple buildings primarily used for governmental business, rectangular in shape with an apse or semi circle at one end where the prominent figure would sit. Christians used these
public buildings as inspirations, partially due to Constantine’s influence, while mixing in design elements from the tombs where early Christians met.\(^{45}\)

In many basilicas, certain Christian design elements were incorporated. Because of the desire to connect with the cross imagery, the first basilicas were constructed with an intersecting rectangular shape, making the building itself form the shape of a cross and placing the apse as the location of Christ’s head. This increased the importance of this location in both the eyes of the congregation and of the clergy. In conjunction with the cultural idea that the apse was reserved for those in power, the imagery became very clear that the words spoken from this spot were of the highest importance, intentionally venerating the reading of scripture.

The inside of the Christian basilica was often decorated with Christian art; the apse usually depicted a heavenly theme, and geometric decorative art was frequently used throughout the main hall of the building. Although these buildings can seem relatively simple next to the later constructions of the gothic period, during the time of their creation Christian basilicas were artistic monuments to God. They were not overly ornate, but the design elements used were to show reverence to God.

It was in the era between 330-1453 in the Byzantine Empire that Christianity furthered its use of imagery surrounding “light.” Light was used to show the Oneness of divine reason, or the power of the spirit, and it helped guide the worshipper toward meditation on the spiritual realm. Byzantine art stayed away from depictions of three-dimensional imagery, removing shadows and darkness and placing figures on ethereal backgrounds of gold in an attempt to depict the heavenly realm rather than the tangible world. The resulting style developed and spread west to become what the modern-day

reader would identify as medieval art. The intentional break away from three-dimensional representations was intended also to avoid accusations of idolatry, especially following the period of iconoclasm (explained later in this chapter). It brought the viewer’s attention away from the work itself to focus on the giver of light. To further this idea of heavenly influence, domes were soon added to the design of the basilicas, as seen in the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, and were used to bring light into the rest of the space. This drew one’s attention upward to the dome or, the heavenly realm, showing the idea that it was God who supplied the ultimate authority. As one writer describes it, when seeing the light driven design of the basilica, “the viewer intuitively grasped the reflections of beauty and perfect goodness emanating from the One through the Universal Soul.”

It is important to note that art in basilicas was not limited to only that which depicted a Christian theme. Especially in the early days of the their development, basilicas sometimes included pagan symbols and other cultural images. For example, Constantine’s tomb stood as part of a complex dedicated to the apostles, while his daughter’s (Constantina) tomb contained numerous pagan images with no Christian purpose, such as nymphs, cupids, libation vessels, and other images that could be interpreted as either Christian or pagan. The church of this time did not limit art to only that which served an outright theological purpose, but believed that the breathtaking beauty of their art and architecture, both decorative and representative, could be used as a tool for discipleship, an aid for worship, and a focal point for meditation.

Although some elements of this period were used in negative ways, which will be discussed later in the chapter, the ideas of heavenly-focused art and of using light to emphasize divine direction heavily influenced subsequent Christian art, providing the

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46 Sotkstad, 59.
foundation for much of the church’s current views. The creative use of symbolism evident in the art and architecture of this era affected millions of believers and over a millennium and a half of the art that followed.

**Mosaics**

One of the most iconic and enduring forms of Christian art can be found in mosaics. Mosaic art is not exclusive to Christianity, but it is a form that the church especially embraced during the Middle Ages. The idea of taking thousands of small objects, such as colored tiles or stones, and arranging them to compose an artistic image, spoke to both the creative and philosophical alike. As such, the church found many different uses for this art form.

Churches incorporated mosaics into their wall, floors, ceilings, and domes, depending on what geographical region to which the church belonged. Like catacomb frescoes and early church art, mosaics depicted scenes from the Bible, events from the life of Christ or the Apostles, or themes representing the Christian way of life. Other examples are purely decorative and serve to bring beauty to an environment. Unlike earlier church art, however, the Byzantines utilized a less realistic approach which spread to Western Europe. As a general rule, they did not use shadows or fully developed landscapes, choosing to focus on the individuals portrayed in the story accompanied by either minimal, or no contextual imagery at all. As one noted historian describes, “they willfully inverted the natural order of the material world as they exclude the material world from pictorial representation.”

Moving forward, this less dimensional nature fits in nicely with the artistic standards of the early middle age church. This sometimes

47 Stockstad, 71
awkward perspective was used across all of their art, with the exception of the face. Faces in art of this period had a higher level of detail, often reflecting the standards of the Roman culture, and allowing for character distinction. However, this detail was not so defined as to be considered realistic.

Mosaics became a tool for evangelism and discipleship from their introduction into the church. They were used to create an environment that would draw in believers and non-believers alike with their artistic value, for instruction, and to share the story of gospel in a medium that was popular and understood during the period. The effectiveness of mosaic art is evident in the duration of usage. Mosaics have remained, to one extent or another, a part of both Christian and cultural art since the Middle Ages, with new works being commission and produced into the modern period.

*Manuscripts and Illuminations*

It is worth informing the reader of a simple admission: Manuscripts are the art form that brought this study to the author’s attention. It was through the beauty of this art that medieval artistic efforts revealed their true value to the author as a tool for discipleship and evangelism. It will be difficult to communicate the depth of such a discovery found in a visual stimulus through the limited means of a verbal presentation, but perhaps the examination of the topic can provide at least some insight into the revelation found when art and scripture are melded into a singular context. Discipleship is the effort to reshape knowledge, be it of God, scripture, life, etc., from a state of stagnant, lifeless, clinical information into life-changing wisdom, by way of the Spirit, for the nourishment and development of the soul. For this task art is uniquely suited, as it can
bypass the defenses of the mind and connect with the very essence of man, allowing truth to be transmitted without the use of words. When then paired with the power of scripture, it becomes a nearly unstoppable force to influence the hearts of men, providing yet another tool for the efforts of evangelism.

The term ‘manuscript’ can be confusing due to the modern-day interpretation of the word. It originally referred to a handwritten work that was bound in book form. Later the term evolved to draw a distinction between a handwritten book and a mechanically printed one, finally arriving at today’s definition, an author’s work that has yet to be published. Within in the context of this thesis, it must be understood that a manuscript is a book that was written or copied by hand. A book, also known as a codex, refers to a collection of pages bound together. The two terms, codex and manuscript, are used interchangeably. Bibles of the Middle Ages could be described by either term. For the sake of clarity, manuscript will be the preferred term of this thesis.

It was during the Middle Ages that the respect for the word of God grew to such a state that copies of the text were seen, to some degree, as divine. This was not an act of idolatry, but rather a well developed reverence for the words of God, not dissimilar to today’s culture in which Christians hold the Bible in a higher regard than all other books. During this time all books were hand copied, each taking considerable time to reproduce. With the growth of the church there was an increasing need to for more copies of scripture to be accessible to priests and bishops, and there were simply not enough scribes with enough time to accomplish the work. To address this problem, the church created one of the first production lines for copying books, known as a scriptorium. Although there were many systems whereby a monk or scribe would copy a book by
hand, in scriptoriums they often employed a method by which a man would stand at a lectern of sorts and read through scripture, slowly and with necessary comments for grammar, and the scribes would copy down what he said. To the modern reader this seems a painfully slow process, but in the early second millennium, it was brilliantly fast, while still allowing for perfect (or near perfect in many cases) copies of scripture to be produced. Since the word of God was held above all others, it was of the highest importance that no mistakes were made. The scribes believed their work to be a holy calling, that they were not only preserving the historical record of Christianity through its holy book, but they were meditative and prayerful over the words they wrote.

In addition to the adherence to grammatical and verbal accuracy, the scribes also believed the presentation of God’s word should reflect the honor and authority carried by the text itself. To this end medieval Bibles were produced in a way to reflect the divine creator. The layouts themselves served as a reminder that the text was inspired by God, and therefore holy. It is easy to identify Bibles of the Middle Ages because they almost always include a two-column layout with large margins, especially at the bottom of the page. The spacing of the text represented the golden mean, also referred to as the golden ratio or divine proportion, which is a mathematical equation thought by many to represent perfection and reflected in countless ways in nature. The layout of medieval manuscripts shows the text in this perfect, sacred place according to the golden ratio and, by inverse, leaves the margins free for the owner of the Bible to fill with notes or other information that would not be seen as divine. ⁴⁸

The scribes were also intentional to leave space for another kind of artist to work. After the text was copied and verified by the scribes, the pages were enhanced with

⁴⁸ To see an example of this, see Appendix B.
drawings, scrollwork, and stylized lettering. Manuscripts with such adornment were called decorated manuscripts. Many copies were embellished even further. Gold leaf was gilded onto parts of the text and the artwork. This not only made the paper visibly valuable, but also caused light to reflect off the gilded text, furthering the idea of light as a representation of God’s power, truth, perfection, heaven, etc… Manuscripts that contained gold gilding were referred to as illuminated manuscripts.

The creation of any manuscript was a tedious task, but making an illuminated manuscript was a massive undertaking of such scope rarely seen today. To begin with, there was a significant expense in copying any text. Even with the fastest methods available, a monk would only produce two or three complete works a year. These were often sections of what today’s reader would consider the Bible, such as the works of the prophets, the gospels, the letters of Paul, etc… producing a full collection of biblical texts could take several years. To make matters worse, the materials used to create them were not easily purchased and were made by hand, often by the scribe or his assistants. Paper did not arrive in Europe until the 12th century; until then most manuscripts were written in vellum, which was produced by working calfskin for several days. All of the inks used were made from local items and ground by hand. After the manuscript was produced, it had to be decorated by an illuminator, and then bound together. In short, making a manuscript became the focus of one’s life, consuming all of one’s energy. The illuminations and decorations that adorned the pages of the manuscripts were not designed simply to impress the viewer as a work of art. Each artistic rendering was intentional and designed to inspire a sense of spiritual openness in the viewer. “The
illuminations are not illustrations. They are spiritual meditations on a text.” It was the wish of the illuminator that their art would be used by the spirit to connect the words of the text with the soul of the reader in a profound way. In 1999 Saint John’s Abbey commissioned Donald Jackson, one of the world’s best calligraphers, to create a modern illuminated manuscript following the traditions and intents of the medieval artists. The finished product took several years to complete, but it stands as a true testament to the art form and the power of art interlaced with scripture. He describes the use of illuminations and decorations in manuscripts as an effort of the words of scripture working in ones heart to produce and image that, when viewed by another, can stir the same thought in theirs.

“In a musical term it is almost like you’re trying to create a visual harmonic, a kind of universal chord that you strike and people go ‘ahhh’ and you’re reaching into something within people that they didn’t even know was there until they see this thing…They take in their breath [not because of the artistic value]… but because there is something there that they already knew.”

One final note as to the creation of these manuscripts is in regard to the language itself. Due to the controversy surrounding the publication of scripture in later days it is often easy to overlook that the use of Latin as the primary language of manuscripts was originally an effort to better share the gospel with others. When manuscripts were first being produced, it became important to the church to create books that could be read by as many people as possible, and that would survive the test of time. Because of this it was decided to produce copies of the Bible solely in Latin, as it was considered to be the universal language at the time. As Mark Dimunciation, Chief of the Rare Books and

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Special Collections Division for the Library of Congress explains, “the more universal it is, the more likely it is to survive. Hence, using Latin instead of the vernacular kept books alive. … As Latin was more universally known, it allowed a book to be more widely distributed and read.”51 It was not until several hundred years later, when Latin was nearly extinct and no one but the clergy could read it, that the church’s commitment to Latin became problematic. However it must be remembered that in the beginning, the church embraced Latin as the best language for evangelism.

The primary goals of the illuminated and decorated manuscripts could be stated with three words: ‘Worship,’ ‘Discipleship,’ and ‘Evangelism.’ The consuming nature of their production shows a true act of worship, the efforts taken to connect the reader with the word of God shows their passion for discipleship, and the entire development of manuscript production was primarily to get copies of God’s word into places were it did not already exist. The church used every means at their disposal to accomplish these goals through the use of incredible artists, dedicated monks, and a substantial amount of finances.

Architecture and Cathedrals

Architecture became a dominant area for the church’s artistic expression since the introduction of basilicas, but with the resurgence of the Roman Empire it became a source of great passion. With the rise of Charlemagne, the culture of Europe changed and there was a return to the classical Roman ideas. “Romanesque builders defined the function and spaces of the church with simple geometric shapes as they emphasized the symbolic content of the buildings. Towers, standing like city gates as symbols of

authority and temporal power, dramatized both castles and church facades, while sculptured portals of the church emphasized the sanctity and the importance [of] the House of the Lord.”

The return to classical standards also brought out a new set of criteria for the artists of the church. In the years that followed, the church reacted to the misuses of art that occurred throughout the iconoclast period. Sculptures, painters, and other artists began making their work intentionally educational. It was no longer enough to simply depict a scene or a person; art needed to be functional, in the sense that it demonstrated a specific theology or principle, as well as beautiful. Architects especially embraced the new idea of form and function and they designed every element purposefully to direct one’s view upward to God. Symmetry and balance were held in high regard and were used to create an environment with an almost heavenly feel. By the end of the first millennium, church architecture was moving away from the Byzantine dome in favor of building up, changing the very landscape of cities and reaching to the sky. Height came to be used as an obvious visual expression of the power of the divine.

In the 12th century, during the rise of the gothic period, architecture takes a giant leap forward. The world during this time was changing. The era of countryside monasteries was being replaced with huge cathedrals in the heart of a city, serving as the center of Christian thought. Christianity was mainstream; it was the force at the center of the continent influencing society of every level, from the workings of small towns to the decisions of entire government. At the same time, the church was also producing art of its own. It is true that the church’s art reflected different trends from the various cultures it

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53 See page 59 for an explanation of the Iconoclast period. These new guidelines were a reaction to this problem.
was exposed to, but it was during the gothic period that the church began to take strides to create art that could only be found in Christianity. Cathedrals are perhaps the best example of Christian art unbound.

Church architecture had been on the rise for some time, but it was the gothic period that pioneered the concept of design completely immersed in theological purpose. Virtually every detail of the cathedral architecture was open for reinvention, and with the advent of new building techniques a number of artist visions became possible. Cathedrals were built higher, more open, and with cutting edge techniques such as the gothic ribbed vaults which allowed for taller, more stable construction with thinner supports. Sculptors carved beautiful images, often with extreme realism, directly into the columns of the church making them permanent elements of the foundation. Each of these elements were implemented in such a way as to symbolize a theme from scripture or a characteristic of God, so that an onlooker could find themselves faced with a representation of holiness everywhere they turned. Society during this time was highly illiterate, so the images within the church were often used to tell key stories of scripture so that anyone could learn the gospel message. Even Napoleon Bonaparte felt the divine power of gothic architecture. He said, “[b]eneath the vaults of Chartres…the atheist would feel uneasy.”\(^{54}\)

Perhaps the greatest innovation of the time was the use of the light through specifically placed larger windows and stained glass. In previous iterations of the church light played an important role, but it was during the time of the cathedrals that this imagery came to life. Stained glass had become available and the church used it wisely. The glass itself depicted images and stories from scripture, and was often placed so that

one could follow the stories around the room to gain a fuller understanding of the
imagery. The color of the glass itself brought a number of new methods by which deeper
concepts could be expressed through art. Shadow and perspective could be manipulated,
and the variation of color, especially when compared to other buildings of the period,
made the church environment feel like the surface of another world, a better world. The
architecture of the gothic period allowed for larger windows positioned at all sides of the
sanctuary, the marvelous uninterrupted light, known as lux nova or New Light, became a
key element in their art. The feeling that one would get when entering the artistically
designed environment of the church was unlike any other in its day. The use of light and
stained glass produced “this gradual effect; first, a dim, religious light of rich colors as
you enter, then it brightens as you approach the center, still more glorious colors fall
around the choir, until finally in the sanctuary, the most brilliant hues of all stream from
the vaulting.” Abbot Suger, the supervisor of the Saint Denis cathedral in France
described being in the cathedral as if one was entering into “some strange region of the
universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of
heaven.” He viewed it as a waypoint on one’s path to heaven.

Realism became a more common element of church art, removing the restrictions
of the earlier Roman culture. Artists were free to create for the sake of beauty and
wonder, for the sake of glorifying God through abstract concepts, just as freely as they
were to depict Moses parting the Red Sea. The Gothic period embraced art and stepped
away from many of the fears surrounding the use of art. Of course there were still

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55 Katherine Morse. “A Day in the Cathedral City of Chartres.” (The Sewanee Review
56 Helen Garder et. al., Garder’s Art Through The Ages: The Western Perspective
boundaries and expectation on art within the church, but there was less focus placed on functionalty. There was still a desire to avoid idolatry, but they no longer feared realism or art without an educational purpose. Instead they focused their art on God, his apostles, and other characters from scripture, as well more ethereal ideas such as light, darkness, and love, hoping to bring others to Christ by creating environments of unassailable beauty. It was in this period that the church became known for its artistic quality. Grand paintings, ornate stone work, impressive pinnacles, and a countless other flourishes adorned cathedrals. Historically, some might look upon these embellishments as extravagant or wasteful, but in the time period, they were understood as more than decoration or signs of wealth; these works of art were carefully and painstakingly crafted to bring the viewer to a place of worship. The considerable amount of money and resources that were dedicated to this practice were viewed as a worthwhile expense. The Catholic Church defends the need for art, and the reason for incurring such an expense, in The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

2502 Sacred art is true and beautiful when its form corresponds to its particular vocation: evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God – the surpassing invisible beauty of truth and love visible in Christ, who “reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature,” in whom “the whole fullness of the deity dwells bodily.” … Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer, and to the love of God, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier. 57

The age of the cathedral came in the latter part of the middle ages, but it represented the pinnacle of art’s use in the church. It is certain that not every work created was done with good intentions, nor that every resource spent was done solely for the glory of God, but the shortcomings of some do not negate the effectiveness of the overall use of art. There has never been a period in which more effort was taken to bring

the attention of the masses to God through visual means than in the gothic period. From the first glimmer of light to the shape of every stone, the cathedral was designed to bring the viewer to an encounter with God, and in that it succeeded.

**The Misuse of Art in Church History**

In order to examine this topic properly it is necessary to acknowledge and study a reoccurring theme in church history: that which is influential is often used in inappropriate ways. Church history is filled with excellent, well-meaning, and effective ideas that went awry though errors in implementation or the intentional abuse of corrupt leadership. The misuse of a method, idea, or approach should not be equated with the validity of the original act. Instead these moments of failure should be studied in order to avoid similar shortcomings in the future, while acknowledging the value and benefits of the primary idea when used for its intended purpose.

For example, the use of images in the early church was allowed to branch into idolatry in some geographical areas. One instance of this was the Iconoclastic Movement. The Byzantine Orthodox Church of the first millennium A.D. began using icons, or visual imagery, as a way of teaching the gospel. In the following centuries these icons shifted from being tools of worship to the recipients of worship. “By the end of the seventh century, icons permeated nearly every aspect of Byzantine life.”\(^{58}\) Images were hung in the churches and venerated as holy items. Coins were pressed with religious icons on both sides and were carried around as elements of the faith. The Greek Church’s love of art slowly shifted from an act of worship to an act of idolatry. The Greek Church disagreed with this accusation, saying that their use of icons was representative not

idolatry, as Basil explained with his retort, “The honor rendered to the image passes to the prototype.”\footnote{stokstaid, \textit{Medieval Art}, 72.} The Roman church found this argument to be absurd. This became such a point of conflict for the global church that it caused a massive divide between the two regions, furthering the tensions that already existed. The Roman Church created new positions and doctrine surrounding the use of images in the church as a reaction to this, and many of those traditions have lingered until today. Unfortunately, the rules they created were not specific to art itself, but as a chastisement of the Greek Church. Like a child throwing a tantrum, the Roman Church took offense to any art they were not currently employing, and declared many things off limits, which had no bearing on idolatry. It would take the church hundreds of years to overcome some of these choices and free artists to create as God leads, and once they did Christian artists created some of the most inspired works the world has ever known.

One of the greatest challenges art faces is becoming a tool of vanity. A trend developed among the wealthy of the Middle Ages to commission great works of art on behalf of the church. This in itself was not bad, but these benefactors would also commission art in which they were prominently depicted in order to display their supposed piety to anyone who viewed it. It must be acknowledged that acts like this were common, especially when dealing with rulers who provided large support to the church, and made sense to the culture of the era, at least more so than it would today. But it cannot be overlooked that art was used as an expression of haughtiness for the wealth and the church allowed it to maintain their support. One of the most famous examples of this is located in the Hagia Sophia. Above the southwest entrance is a mosaic depicting Constantine and Justinian I. The former is bringing a model of the city to the Virgin
Mary, who is seated on a throne holding the baby Jesus. The latter is presenting her with a model of the church.

In an example of art influencing theology, the design of the basilicas brought about a large shift in theology and laid the foundation for the reformation years later. Roman basilicas featured an apse where the ruler, judge, or person in authority would sit, and this design was incorporated into the church. The apse became symbolic of the Holy of Holies in the temple, and only the clergy were permitted to enter. Although this design intended to show reverence to the authority of the priest or bishop, it also divided the clergy from the laity. The common people met below and the church leaders stood in the apse’s raised inset. Although the theological shift was not created because of this design element, it was propagated by the image it created. Even during the reformation period, the idea of a raised or sacred platform in a church did not entirely leave the Christian community. Many modern protestants still hold to the sanctity of the altar or pulpit, all of which roots back to the separation provided in the design of the Middle Age basilica.

There were also times when art was used to embody a false theology. As early as the 4th century, images began appearing showing Mary, Jesus’ Mother, to be the mother of the church. This was due in part to a growing theological position of St. Ambrose and others to exemplify Mary. Images depicting such scenes appear in the catacombs. For hundreds of years to follow, the exact role of Mary in theology would be debated, and each new decision would result in new art. By the gothic period, entire structures were erected honoring the holy nature of Mary including Notre Dame in Paris and Santa Maria Assunta (Church of the Assumption) in Siena. It was only during the reformation that these views were seriously challenged, but until then most of the church artists believed
what they were taught regarding Mary, and turned this belief into beautiful works of art. Perhaps the greatest threat to the use of art in the church is through previous expressions of bad theology. But is this really the fault of art? No. It is evidence to the power of art to shape culture. Very few people can name the exact moment in history when the theology of Mary came to be, and very few outside of the Catholic faith can even fully define it, but the works of art created as a result of this theology are known throughout the world and stand as a testament to God, even to those who do not agree with the theology that inspired its creation.

The instances shown here do provide insight into how art should be used in the church. Like any other tools employed by Christians to share the gospel, art can be used inappropriately. In every instance from church history where a tool of evangelism or discipleship is misused, it is because the church itself lost focus either in theology or morality. The causes vary from greed to corrupted theology, but regardless of the cause the problem is not with the tool itself rather with the heart of those who use it. One must remain conscious of this distinction and avoid allowing the failures of the past to cause a reactionary desire to associate the tool used with the sinful act of man. Creativity, and by extension art, is perhaps the greatest tool for evangelism available, which history has shown. In order to reach culture with the gospel in the most effect manner possible, one must use all the tools available, not just those which man has yet to use irresponsibly. Instead, one should examine the previous failure within the church and use them as a guide to better implement the use of art in such a way that it is equally influential, yet properly directed towards the glory of God.
One of the best examples of this mentality can be found in the reaction of the church to the events above. As the corruption of the church and misuse of art grew, it became the fuel on which a new era of the church was founded in which theology became paramount and the use of art was redeemed.

**How Art Began a Reformation**

Perhaps the most influential shift in paradigm regarding the use of art in the church happened out of a desire for theological virtue. By the middle of the second millennium AD the church had become a global power having their hands in every level of civil leadership. The separation between the masses and the gospel was at an all time high, even going so far as to require mediation from the church to acquire forgiveness of sins. Since power is almost always tied to financial gain, the church was actively exploiting the desires of men to know God by burdening them with monetary obligations, culminating with the practice of indulgences. As a reaction to this corruption many within the church began to rebel and “Christendom turn against the enemy within.”

The book of Romans has caused a great number of debates on a variety of topics due to its extremely detailed and vivacious examination of humanity, Jesus, creation, and the will of God. It’s only fitting that this book of extraordinary spiritual depth became the fuel for righteous rebellion. After studying this book in detail, a relatively unknown professor at the University of Wittenberg found the church’s theology in conflict with scripture, particularly over the issues of indulgences, the accumulation of wealth by the

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clergy, and the supposed need any intercessor other than Christ to affect the remission of sins. In fairness, Luther did not set out to begin a reformation; he only wanted to begin a discourse on the topic. However, thanks to recent developments in the world of art, his 95 theses became a turning point in human history.

Perhaps the greatest invention of the millennium was Johannes Gutenberg’s moveable type printing press. Prior to this invention in the mid 1400s, there were very few ways of mass-producing text beyond handwriting each copy. But by 1517 in German, the printing press was still an underdeveloped tool. In general, only major cities were able to employ the press successfully, due to the lack of developed trade infrastructure for book sales. However, this tool for literary art was used to duplicate and disseminate Luther’s objections throughout the country causing a massive controversy.

He quickly realized the potential of the printing press and took direct action to capitalize on it. Luther was in no way the first person to question the theology of the church and his success is not found primarily in his theological discourse. What set Luther apart and defined his success was his attention to the quality and value of art in the form of the printed word. He did this in three distinct ways, which laid the foundation for a new chapter of art within the church: an acknowledgement of skill, intentional brevity of speech, and the value of visual appeal.

During the Medieval period, like today, quality was a sign of value. Luther understood this better than most. To that end he went to great pains to identify every step necessary to produce and present his works with the highest quality. During the aftermath of the 95 Theses, people flocked to hear the teachings of Luther. He was not only presenting new teachings – controversy has always been a good attention-getting devise –
but he also changed his dialog to better connect with his audiences. In a day and age of elaborate and exhaustively long speeches given in Latin, Luther began presenting his discourses in German, the language of the people, and was decisively brief in his presentation. His natural style of concise teaching began an entirely new style of teaching: “Luther in effect invented a new form of theological writing, short clear, and direct, speaking … to the wider Christian people.”

In the years that followed, Luther capitalized on both his fame and his access to the most cutting edge art of his day. Luther became directly involved in the production of his books, demanding such quality out of the print process that the small hamlet of Wittenberg quickly became a formidable force in publication. In the years preceding Luther’s 95 theses, Wittenberg produced approximately eight books a year. In the years following, the little town produced, on average, ninety-one books a year, totaling over three million copies in less than 30 years. The books produced were works of theology, copies of scripture in the native language, and books of prayers.

Luther gave detailed instructions to the printer when it came to publishing his personal works. Every detail was important to him after seeing his work reproduced by expert printers in other German cities. His use of fonts, the beauty of margins, and the woodcut initial at the head of the text created an enticing presentation of Luther work, which was, by comparison, extremely bland in its original production. Luther worked hard to replace poor quality presses, bring in a variety of resources, and produced works that met or exceeded the artistic standards of the day. They also found ways to make production affordable through the use of quarto folding, allowing one piece of paper to be

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61 Ibid., 5.
62 Ibid., 23.
63 Ibid., 143
folded into a pamphlet. It is from this time period that title pages featuring the author’s name developed.

“They had a mindset of intentionality that we cannot fathom with our modern minds… Their structures were designed to push a soul towards God by connecting art with logic, beauty with wisdom.”⁶⁴ Luther saw no distinction between art and his efforts to educate the public. His teachings and the beauty of print were presented as one unified effort.

This process of art became foundational in the greatest spiritual revolution since the birth of Christ and it is reasonable to say it would not have happened had Luther and his friends not openly embraced this new art. Discipleship became significantly easier during this period as the popularity of Luther and the availability of his works were easily accessible and the talk of the town. Everyone was discussing this reformation, and many were willing diving into scripture, only recently made available to them in their own language, hoping to find the truth about God. In the same way, those disenfranchised with the Catholic Church found a new home in the logical beauty provided by the reformation. Luther, through his published works, was even generating converts without ever meeting face to face.

Luther’s love of print art in the reformation could not counter the distaste he and the rest of the reformers had for the practices of the Catholic Church. Print was one of the few art forms that remained prominent in the protestant church. For the reformers, they viewed the Catholic Church as "The Court of Rome, that forge of all craft and trickery"⁶⁵ and their Papal theology as “patches sewed together, taken out of every kind of...

⁶⁴ Rachel Dugan, interview by author, Lynchburg, August 08, 2017.
superstitions, not only heathen and Jewish, but likewise such as have been recently contrived by Satan, that he might more easily, and with greater plausibility, impose on the world." Needless to say, as a result of the reformation the protestant church often garnered a dislike for anything that felt like an act of the Catholic Church. Art, specifically in painting and sculpture, was seen as a wasteful effort of extravagance and protestant churches produced very little art.

For many reformers, art was also impractical due to danger associated with the protestant faith in many parts of the world. Anabaptists for example had an average life expectancy of sixteen months from the time of conversion, and spent much of their time in hiding. Producing art became secondary to survival. As time moved on, the denominations that came from this group (many modern day evangelicals) have held to a lower use of art.

The result of this was a community of artists without work. The Catholic Church had kept artists employed for hundreds of years, but with the reformation at hand they had less and less money to spend. Just like in today’s school systems, when the money ran out, art was the first thing to go. Since the Protestants were not hiring, many of these artists turned to private commissions. Some were wealthy Christians who believed in the power and beauty of art, but for the most part the artists found new avenues of work in the secular world. There were many great ideas and movements to come out of the reformation period, but perhaps the most harmful was the inadvertent action of handing the reigns of the art community over to the secular world. As art developed as a secular

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67 Ergun Caner, “Church History: CHHI 301” Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, Fall 2005.
expression, churches began turning their back on art entirely. Just as in the days of the Iconoclast Movement, the church reacted by unofficially (or in many cases officially) banning the use of sculptures and paintings that did not conform to a specific set of ideas, clearly reflecting the basic theology of the protestant faith. During the 1700 and 1800s, Christian paintings and sculptures were produced sparingly, with intentional separation from the artistic styles of the day.

**Review of Art in Church History**

This topics covered in this chapter are in no way exhaustive. The true breadth of Art’s role in church history has filled thousands if not millions of pages and branches into entire fields not discussed in this study. In almost every artistic field employed by the church there was a practical application for the purposes of discipleship and evangelism, but examining them all would require a dedicated work beyond the scope of this thesis. As this chapter comes to a close, it is necessary to acknowledge the brevity employed to simplify 1700 years of church history into less than thirty pages of information. For anyone wishing to fully examine this topic independent of this thesis, further study is most certainly needed, just as the content of this chapter is only a glimpse into the depth of study conducted by the author.

The examples of art given in the preceding pages are not meant to illustrate a full catalog of church-based art, but rather to exemplify the principles and application of art throughout the ages in relation to the church’s efforts of discipleship and evangelism. For many modern church leaders it is often assumed art in church history was at best an act of worship and worst a vain self-aggrandizing expression of pride. Historical bias, often a result of moral and theological failures in the church, has left the modern church with an
underdeveloped appreciation of the effectiveness of art as an evangelical tool or method of discipleship. The truth of history is that art was a primary tool for theological education during the early days of the church, and eventually became one of the church’s greatest draws in the eyes of the nonbeliever. The church used art to become a cultural icon. In a time of hardship and political upheaval the church stood as a beacon of light using art to connect the vision of a better spiritual life with the hearts of suffering men and women. The art of the church became a refuge for the soul and a window into the heavenly realms.

Thankfully, art has not disappeared entirely from the Church. Although used more sparingly and with greater restriction, art still plays a role in the modern church and has the potential for even great use. The next chapter will examine the modern church’s use of art, and the artistic rebirth beginning to infiltrate the Christian society. Specifically, it will examine how acts of creativity are being used to share the gospel with those previously resistant to the evangelistic efforts of the church, and the ability of art to deepen the spiritual understanding of the present day believer.
CHAPTER 3

Art in the Modern Era

If the active role of art described in the previous chapter seems unfamiliar or even foreign when compared to the modern American church, then the incongruity has made itself clear. Where it once held a role in the forefront of church culture, the different avenues of art have become relegated to a supplemental role in the modern church. Until recently this was considered by many to be a positive action drawing further separation between Christianity and the world itself. Others have considered the shift an advancement by which the church has moved theology from the abstract ideals demonstrated in artistic representation to the purported clarity of lecture style communication. However there has also been a persistent voice from within the Christian community crying out for creativity and the voice grows louder with every passing decade.

In order to address how art can be appropriately and successfully grafted back into the modern church, it is important that one understand the current state of art within both modern American Christianity and secular culture. This chapter will examine the areas in which various arts have reemerged within different denominations and geographical locations in order to provide insight into the effectiveness of art as a discipleship and evangelism tool in the modern area. It is also worth bringing the reader’s attention back to the geographical confines of the United States. Most of the history of Christian art took place in Europe or the Middle East, but the primary goal of this thesis is regarding the potential use of art in the American Evangelical church. This chapter will begin by briefly examining the influence of art in American culture and then discuss how
experts within the Christian community are making strides to expand the role of art in today’s church, specifically in regard to evangelism and discipleship.

The Rise of Industry: the Reshaping of Art and Culture

From the reformation till the 20th century, the Christian culture in North America was heavily influenced by “the American protestant church’s long history of limiting the use of the arts in congregational life…”68 With the noted exception of music, the American Christian culture found little use for art as an expression of worship when compared to the rest of the world. This was partially due to the protestant reformation mindset, which will be examined a little later in this chapter, but also in part to the view of American culture itself. Society began to devalue aesthetics. Instead, it began to value prosperity, ease of access and production, and acquiring the essentials of life required to survive in this new land. America was an unexplored gold mine of opportunity, both literally and figuratively, but it was also a harsh undeveloped wilderness. While the reformation was occurring in Europe, those reformers who found themselves at odds with the state, or state sponsored church, sought refuge in the newly discovered land across the Atlantic. Life in the colonies was difficult to say the least. Weather, sickness, famines, hostile natives, and obstacles of frontier life created a culture that was extremely practical. Art was considered by most to be a luxury and was only truly accessible by the wealthy. Through all of this, the American culture struggled to find its artistic footing.

There was also a renewed interest in the sciences, both in Europe and America, which began to influence the mindset of culture. Great strides were made in nearly every field of

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academic study. Knowledge that was once considered unobtainable now appeared to be within the reach of human understanding. As a result, there were those who viewed this increase of intellectual discovery as evidence that mankind had reached a new sociological level in which faith was no longer necessary. Questions such as the details of creation, the heavens, and subsequently the meaning and value of life, questions which were once answerable only through religion, were now considered ascertainable through study and the proper application of science. Philosophers of the day such as George Berkeley, Thomas Reid, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant joined scientist philosophers such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Charles Darwin in the idea that accepted religious views were the dogma of an uneducated mind trying to make sense of the universe. Freud captioned this idea by saying, “Religion is an attempt to get control over the sensory world, in which we are placed, by means of the wish-world, which we have developed inside us as a result of biological and psychological necessities.”69 These philosophers did not agree among themselves as to the essence of man or the other questions previously answered by the church, but they found common ground in their assertion that man was now able to reason well enough to discover the answers independently of faith. As these ideas infiltrated culture, the use of art in the secular world was dramatically affected.

By the end of the 19th century, most of the local wars were over, survival became easier in many regions, and the machines of industry had come to life. The country now had time to be introspective; as society struggled to find its new identity as a unified culture, art began to flourish again. However, this time art was explored without the

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intentional influence of religion, and fact that became evident quickly. As the 1800s came to a close a new era of art had begun, one saturated in an anti-religious mindset. Beginning in the 20th century, the accompanying strides of industry, technology, science and politics became the primary influencer of art and gave shape to the modern era. At the same time, the church became frustrated with the growing assault against faith. In some instances, the church fought back against the claims of the secular world, but after a while it chose to separate itself from culture. For much of the 1900s the church developed its own subculture in which the opinion and styles of secular world were rejected on principle and only that which was expressly Christian was appropriate for a believer’s attention. The two cultures, the secular and the Christian, existed in the same country but each tried to distance itself from the other’s influence. The result was a secular culture that embraced art without the guidance and wisdom of the Christian community, and a Christian community that rejected most artistic advancement in favor of the arts they were comfortable with.

Art in Modern Day Culture

Today’s American culture stands in stark contrast to that of the previous centuries. Art is at the center of nearly every aspect of modern life. From the design of computers, to the music played on the radio, streaming services, and in every retail space, to the thousands of images each person is bombarded with every day via social media, advertising, television, etc., art has become foundational. Not only is it prevalent in culture, but also art is perhaps the most effective tool in shaping the perspective of society. With the rise of marketing firms in the 1950s and 60s, visual art has become the cornerstone of commerce, identity, and associations. A 2010 study from the University of
Wisconsin concluded that brand identity is so prevalent in culture that the worldviews of children as young as three years of age are being actively shaped by brand advertisement. In previous centuries Children were primarily influenced by their immediate family, but today the art of cinema, via television and movies, begins indoctrinating children with societal views before they complete their first year of life. Art is, far more than anything else, the most effective conduit by which the secular world structures the thoughts of the individual.

To make matters worse, many within modern culture are completely aware of the influence of art. The philosophies of the 1700- early1900s have become foundational in society. These philosophies passed from the university level into the societal level leaving generations of people who believed religion to be a farce. Among them were many artists, and these artists set out to propagate their worldview to the intended detriment of the Christian faith. This may seem like the paranoia, but it is not. The secular artistic community has openly declared their intentions. “Franklin W. Robinson, former director of the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design, stated the case clearly by saying that the whole purpose of modern art is to foment a radical shift in our moral values: ‘It demands that we rethink our assumptions about every issue in life, from religion to politics, from love to sex, to death, and the afterlife.’”

Art has fallen victim to social ideology and has become a means of propaganda, intentionally shaping the worldview of America culture to oppose Christian views. In history, it was the church that took art, connected it with intellect, and used it to teach a unified theology. Now, the

tables have turned and art is the very tool through which the secular world undermines faith.

In times past communities developed their own micro culture, limiting the amount of exposure to art and philosophies the average individual could encounter. With the development of new technologies, all of the philosophies and art from the entire world are accessible to the average American, often without the context of their original environment. Culture is no longer restricted by geography. While every town or region will have its own unique culture, the influences on that culture are no longer locally limited. “Kids in Iowa or even Mexico are becoming more like young adults in L.A. or New York City than they are like the adults in their own locales.”71 Children are exposed to multiple philosophies and expressions of art without the information required to fully understand them. However these ideas shape them, leaving them with a changed worldview absent of the knowledge required to explore the implications. This results in a society with a relative view of truth and a worldview that holds to an absence of definable or absolute truth.

Art had previously been synonymous with the search for understanding, or hidden truth, but modern society now looks to the wisdom of humanity to answer its questions regarding the ethereal. This circular belief in human wisdom highlights the flaw of their philosophies. Art, at its core is a search for, or better said, an examination of beauty. It was through the act of creation that God declared, “it is good,” remarking at the beauty of his creation, the completion and perfect resonance, as an expression of himself. In the same way, humanity is driven by the divine image embed at creation to create, revealing

that which is within so that the sacred beauty of the creator can be better viewed, better understood. Beauty is not the goal of art; it is the beginning of art – the essence of art that drives the artist to truth. When art was a tool of the church, wielded in tandem with the wisdom of faith and intellectual knowledge, the beauty discovered drove the viewer to a higher power, a sacred beauty beyond the creation itself, while simultaneously acknowledging the limitations of man. However, in the modern age artists see beauty as an end unto itself, an expression of humanity influenced only by the philosophies of man. Therefore the quest for beauty is not a search for a higher truth, but an effort to encounter beauty without the means to comprehend it. The modern world stares at beauty, becomes enamored by its radiance, but can no better understand it than a child can comprehend gravity, seeing its effect without a notion as to its cause.

This misunderstanding of beauty, the result of mankind’s belief that there is no truth beyond the observable tangible world, has left many to believe that truth itself is a fiction and their art reflects this. “Art has also suffered a tragic loss of sacred beauty, as many modern and postmodern artists have been attracted instead to absurdity, irrationality, and even cruelty.” 72 By mocking the very idea of truth or a quest for knowledge, meaning is considered ephemeral or an illusion of self-deception. Through this, ideas such as morality and ethics become worthless. Without intrinsic truth or value, any sense of happiness if forfeit and life without divine inspiration is akin to aimless wandering. “A good deal of contemporary art is the art of alienation, which, if true at all, is true only about the disorder of a world damaged by our depravity.” 73 Art that has lost its


73 Ryken, Art for God’s Sake, 13.
understanding of sacred beauty drives the viewer away from truth, away from God and creates an absence that has turned much of the art community into a “suburb of hell.”

It should be noted that these philosophies are not new. Throughout history there have been those who have denied the idea of a greater truth or divine power, but their influence was limited because the church was actively combating their ideas. However today the human centered philosophies are bombarding society through every avenue of art, while the church attempts to combat it from inside the safety of their sanctuaries. But the question must be asked, why? Why has the church, once the most powerful and influential producer of art in the world, remained absent from art culture, appearing only to speak out against the sins of art as a whole while making no effort to influence the community at large? Christianity abandoned art and today’s culture is a direct result of its absence.

**Art in the Modern Church**

Over a century ago, when culture began to once again find value in craftsmanship and art, the church, having always struggled with the relationship of the practical and the aesthetic, decided to refrain from embracing this resurgence of art. This attitude is deeply rooted in the theological foundations of the reformation era. Due to years in which the church rampantly abused of the arts, the church has adopted an attitude of separation, distancing itself from art, reinforced by the corruption of art by the secular community. Post reformation churches have moved away from complex design elements, maintaining a simplified, sparse, and astringent use of art. The fathers of the reformation condemned the extravagance and expense of the Catholic Church’s artistic endeavors, believing
resources should be allocated for more tangible and immediate methods of evangelism and discipleship. Physical needs became the priority for finances, and the concept of *Sola Scriptura*, which originally meant that the basis of faith and spiritual guidance should be found in scripture alone as opposed to the whim of a pope, was intellectually extended to include the idea that scripture was the only means through which spiritual enlightenment could occur. Art was then seen as a distraction or prideful indulgence since scripture was the only true source of revelation. Of course the church did not discredit all art, but it became extremely strict on which forms of art it would allow within its door.

As art developed and flourished in culture, Christianity took offense to the deplorable expressions of sin expressed and glorified in the artistic culture. Although such behavior should be expected in a culture devoid of moral and spiritual guidance resulting from the absence of a Christian presence, the church chose to separate itself almost entirely from the world of art. However, the church still had some art forms it was dependent upon. Hymns and music played a vital role in worship, books and various literary avenues were some of best-used tools of evangelism and discipleship, and a handful of Christian leaders recognized the value of television and radio in communicating the gospel. The question became, how to cultivate these arts without becoming associated with the secular world? The answer was to create a new world of art, a Christian art designed for use in the church and Christian communities.

The Christian art of today is completely different in both function and form from the art produced by Christians in the past. “Contrast in your mind the reality of a few centuries ago, the Giottos, the Rembrandts, the Bachs, the Handels, The Vermeers, the van Eycks, with the present day reality. Today, Christian endeavor in the arts is typified
by the content of your local Christian bookstore-accessories-paraphernalia ship.” Art within the Christian culture is extremely limited, and is bound by a reactionary set of criteria developed over the last century. These criteria are in no way officially endorsed, like a set of positions affirmed at a denominational meeting, but they are the behavioral bylaws and expectations expressed to the Christian artists by the art accepted by the church. The basic rules for Christian art are presented below:

1) Art should depict the world either as a representation of a perfect and sinless world, or show the superiority of God over a fallen world.

2) Art should represent a sanctified faith. Ideas such as devout intimate worship, victory over generic sin or the thematic struggles of life, or the power of God expressed in the life of the believer are acceptable. Focus should be placed on the joyful outcome of faithfulness. The negative aspects or struggles of life should not be presented without a clear representation of God’s victory over the issue.

3) Art should avoid topics in which the church has not presented and accepted a clear rebuttal or redemption.

4) Art should be explicitly worshipful, educational, or communicate a clear biblical ideal. Christian art must be overtly Christian.

5) Content is more important than quality, and art without easily identified content is not valued regardless of its aesthetic excellence.

6) Christian art should only be produced within the aesthetic boundaries that the community at large is comfortable with or can be understood with ease.

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This may appear to the reader, especially any reader within the leadership of a Christian community, to be harsh, but each principle listed above can be identified by perusing any Christian bookstore. There are posters, house signs, and books providing encouragement to persevere through a period of strife, but very few works acknowledging or depicting the pain and anguish one might endure. One can listen to any song sold in the store and find that it fits within a small handful of accepted musical styles or progressions. Sampling several songs from various artists will show an almost identical vocabulary spanning all of the sub genres of Christian music, not to mention a lack of diversity when it comes to topics. The most successful Christian painter of modern years, whose art adorns most bookstores, depicted only landscapes imagined in a world without the influence of sin. Nowhere can one find a single element of art that could be misunderstood, or push someone to consider a world beyond his or her comfort.

When considering the art displayed in the evangelical church on a Sunday morning, the same rules apply. The art present will be bland yet energetic, theological yet without confrontation, and nothing will be presented in a manor that Christian culture has not already defined as acceptable art. The songs will be from a selection of Christian radio friendly tracks published within the past few decades. The stage itself will be devoid of art, with the exception of a few well-placed props and lights to make the environment feel comfortable and entertaining. If any live art beyond the musical worship takes place, it will be of the most clearly Christian content possible, such a painting of Jesus and/or the open tomb, a drama depicting a biblical principle, or an interpretive dance set to a Christian song. There will be no raw examination of sensitive
topics or realistic portrayal of personal struggles. Church art is safe, inoffensive, and without confrontation.

“…one could sum up by saying that the modern Christian world and what is known as evangelicalism is marked, in the area of the arts and cultural endeavor, by one outstanding feature, and that is its addiction to mediocrity. This has born bitter fruit—in the stifling and destroying of God-given creative instincts in individuals, in the false guilt feelings of those with creative talents given by God when they try to exercise those talents in a church which looks at them askance as somehow dabbling in an unspiritual sphere of life.”

Christian art is designed to facilitate the practical needs of Christians. It is art housed strictly within the realm of the comfortable, or the familiar. Christian art, as a general statement, places little value on artistic quality or innovation, and perhaps the most disheartening statement of this is entire topic is that every Christian artist knows it. It has become an inside joke among Christian creatives and those Christians who understand the secular art world; Safe content expressed through mediocre art will always find a great acceptance than quality art that challenges the soul or steps outside of the few accepted forms. In the music community the phrase “it sound Christian” is often understood to mean the song lacks the artistic quality or intricacy found in modern secular music of the same genre. Christian music must use certain words, stay within a limited array of topics, and follow a handful of melodic styles in order to find acceptance. In the fine art community, describing art as Christian implies the art lacks both quality and subtlety in order to present an image that directly communicates a single idea. There is no subtext or personal interpretation, lest the message of the image be lost.

It is important that the point of this discussion not be lost while examining the shortcomings of the current state of Christian art. This author is not suggesting that the current forms of artistic expression within the church do not have value, or should be

75 Schaeffer, Addicted, 23.
abandoned outright. This paper is arguing quite the opposite. There is a need for art that is functional and clearly expresses the power of God and the joy of knowing Christ. Christian art serves a purpose, but in an effort to fulfill that purpose, the church has sacrificed beauty, innovation, creativity, and quality in the name of safety and comfort. It is function over form; it is appeasement, not exploration. In short, the term ‘Christian art’ has become synonymous with mediocrity. “The church tolerates [mediocrity] because there is a strange double standard between what we call the real world (our everyday lives) and our spiritual world. We accept in our spiritual world a mediocrity that would be immediately intolerable in what we regard as the real world, which Christians still live in, even though they try at times to pretend they are having heaven on earth.”76

Abandoning Mediocrity

The church has accepted art without dimension, beauty, or quality to create a world separate from the secular and in doing so the church has suffered greatly. By embracing mediocrity, the church has limited itself emotionally and spiritually. It has traded perhaps the best tools for evangelism and discipleship for comfort and control. In short, the church’s addiction to mediocrity has limited its own development and sacrificed its greatest means of influencing the world with the gospel.

There is an expression often thrown around Christian circles, “If it’s Christian, it ought to be better.”77 The implied meaning being that the message of Christianity is the very essence of truth, and armed with that true what Christians produce should be vastly superior to that of the secular world. An honest assessment will conclude that it isn’t…

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76 Schaeffer, Addicted, 42.
77 This was a frequent quote of Dr. Jerry Falwell, Sr. although I was unable to verify where the quote originated.
but it could be! Its time the Christian community stops pretending it is okay with the
current state art in the church, while running to the secular world to find aesthetic value.
Christianity once influenced every aspect of the world. It dared to speak truth, to examine
the indescribable. Christians made art that overwhelmed the soul and resonated the power
of God. It wasn’t perfect, but at least through art there was a voice screaming into the
darkness, “We can show you hope!” There needs to be a return to beauty and honest
expression with a complete desertion of the mundane. For those who carry with them the
spirit of the divine creator, there is no excuse for art that is anything short of an honest
expression of true beauty. This is not a debate of form verses function; it is an
acknowledgement that any sacrifice of form comes at the expense of function and
mediocrity is the enemy of both.

There must also be an acknowledgement of the impact of artistic mediocrity on
the church’s ability to influence and evangelize the secular work. “The credibility of our
message comes into question when we do mediocre work.”78 There are countless stories
of artists who approached Christianity only to be turned off by the lack of quality and
beauty in their arts. One author describes his encounter as, “… a lot of art created by
Christians was bad and a lot of art created by non-Christians was good... Because the
work that bore the name Christian was often poor in quality and naïve in understanding,
Christianity by implication seemed insipid and uninspiring.”79 It should be a
heartbreaking realization that the mediocrity of art within the church has given a foothold
to any question of Christianity’s validity. In the past people were drawn to the church

78 Kyle Cooper, “Titles” (Lecture, Story Conference, Chicago, September 18, 2011).
79 S. Turner, Imagine: A vision for Christians in the arts. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2001)
because of the vast beauty it displayed, allowing the observer to encounter the wonders of God through aesthetic means. By embracing the arts, abandoning mediocrity, and freeing itself to produce and experience beauty through artistic freedom, the church could reclaim its influence and identity in the world. It could produce art that endures and draws people toward salvation for centuries to come.

Thankfully, there is a movement of artists, artists who define themselves as followers of Christ and want to take back the arts. They want to show the world sacred beauty again – they want to give the church back its voice. They care about quality, and they care about truth. They want to use the arts to share the gospel both to the world in general and specifically to the artistic community. They long for a time when the church uses art to speak to the soul in a way a sermon never could, connecting to that spark of God left in humanity at creation that demands creativity.

Interviews with Artists and Christian Leaders

History is an excellent teacher, but in order to suggest methods of effective change in the modern evangelical American church, some of the best insight comes from those already engaged in the effort. As a requirement of this study, the author spoke with several different leaders, artists, and musicians within the Christian arts community who are actively trying to bringing the arts back to the church. The interviews include: Sandra Bowden, Christian artist, author, and leader within several Christian art organizations; Charles Billingsley, contemporary Christian recording artist and worship pastor; Adam Lancaster, Creative Director of Thomas Road Baptist Church; Todd Smith, Professor and Chair of Studio and Digital Arts at Liberty University; Kyle Smith, Music Director at
Pinelake Church; and Makoto Fujimura, artist, author, and Director of Fuller Seminary’s Brehm Center.

All of the interviewees expressed a passionate, yet controlled exuberance about the future of art in the church. Like the moment in a film where the underdog finally begins his or her journey and victory is certain, these experts all showed that glimmer of hope shared by the film’s audience. Some of them sat forward in their chairs to begin the discussion, others chuckled in excitement. Sandra Bowden’s voice changed in such a way one could hear the subtle smile form as she said, “I’ve called this the quite resonance.” Artists have been laying the foundation for years, and the opportunity is now at hand for the church to embrace the arts. The remainder of this chapter will be spend examining the truths presented by these experts, as they addressed different questions regarding the use of arts in the local evangelical church for the intention of discipleship and evangelism.

A note from the author: Change happens slowly. No one, particularly the author or these experts, is suggesting that the church should change over night. Even if it could, it would be a terrible idea, as substantive change in action will not be effective until the culture of the church accepts and invests in the value of art. The ideas and principles expressed here show what the church can become, but the change must happen slowly first by developing an understanding of art in the leadership of the church, then within the congregation. It is only then that substantive changes can occur and new courses of action can be taken. As one interview explains, “Trying to incorporate art before the church has been educated as the value and importance of art won’t work. If the church does not understand the importance of art, any attempt to force it on them will result in failure.”

Adam Lancaster, interview by author, Lynchburg, VA, December 1, 2016.
Setting Goals: Striving for Good Art

All of the interviews began with the interviewee being asked about the current state of art in the church, specifically, if what is commonly presented by a church can be described as good art. Bowden’s answer captured the thought of everyone. “No, No, No, it’s got a long way to go, but there are plenty points of light.”81 There is a consensus that the church has the capacity for good art, but without an understanding of the value of art, a notion of the quality required for good art, what is now presented can be a hindrance.

“Good Art will minister on a deeper level… poor music… becomes an obstacle to absorbing it’s meaning… because we live in a culture with professional [musicians and music] surrounding us. There’s professional graphic design, professional art, all at high quality… We are gonna tune it out if it’s mediocre… and many times it’s less than mediocre.”82

“Art that endures, what culture calls ‘good’, is generative, and will continue to speak and ‘grow’ in appreciation over time. One might say that such a work will have universal resonance not only at the time when it is created, but for many generations to come.”83 With this in mind, the church must begin to shift its mindset from art that answers the immediacy of culture and begins to think beyond the popular to what is timeless. As Billingsley observes, “you rarely see Christian art that is not a copy… we are an echo and not a voice.”84 Art that is a copy of other art will quickly show its age and always be marked as a knockoff. With that in mind, artists must focus on art that represents truths and beauty using, whatever medium he or she chooses, that deliberately stands on its own. This does not mean that Christian art cannot incorporate concepts and ideals from culture, but just like the works of the early church that have stood the test of

81 Sandra Bowden, interview by author, Lynchburg, VA, November 29, 2016.
82 Bowden, interview.
83 Makoto Fujimura, interview by author, Lynchburg, VA, November 28, 2016.
84 Charles Billingsley, interview by author, Lynchburg, VA, December 1, 2016.
time which took an idea from culture and made it new, modern artists must strive to create works that are not copies, but rather a new approach to an old theme. “Good” art stands above its contemporaries because of the sacred beauty and pure quality it demonstrates.

If the goal is to produce good art, then the church needs to set a standard for what is expected of art in the church. It won’t happen over night, but in order to step out of mediocrity, the church needs to develop standards for the art it will accept, display, or implement. Like any skill, it must be developed over time. It will be difficult at first, and will require a considerable amount of effort by church leadership. There will be setbacks and moments of failure, resistance from those who have yet to see the value of creativity, and questions about the use of resources. However, any action taking in the service of God should be of the highest quality and such actions are rarely easy or free of struggle. The key is the keep trying. Keep pushing forward. The rewards of good art, especially in discipleship and evangelism, are worth the effort. Rescuing the soul from sin by introducing someone to Christ, and then leading him or her to a deep and meaningful relationship is worth any effort, and it’s time the church renewed it’s efforts to reach artists.

Intentionality: Reaching Artists

Before addressing any philosophical changes regarding the use of art, there needs to be a shift in the church’s evangelical paradigm concerning the creative community as a whole. Charles Billingsley, an artist and worship pastor with over 25 years of experience working with creatives explains the current relationship between the church and creatives:
“In large part, the arts community is ignored, because [the church leadership] is scared of them. We don’t understand that crowd, and quite frankly that crowd is probably among the smartest people in the city… They are going to challenge your basic message… so we don’t like that crowd… they are going to ask us questions that are hard to answer.”  

Billingsley continues by noting that the leadership of the average church is more comfortable speaking to a sports fan than someone who lives and breathes art because the church’s usual methodology, lecture based communication and group based systems, is more suited to a sporting mindset than an artistic one. “It’s win or lose, fire them up, and get them out of the building to live their lives enthusiastically for Jesus. We ignore the creative community because the church leadership often does not understand them, is not comfortable communicating with them, and, quite frankly, doesn’t want to.”

To address this, one must first acknowledge that creatives are different. Creatives are linked to their art. They are passionate and often close to their emotions, yet driven to find meaning and truth. They invest; they don’t conform. They will often be the outliers and usually don’t work well within standard systems. An artist needs guidance and structure that is tailored specifically for him or her. Artists will often withdraw when treated as a generic member of a group. Creatives need to be handled differently because they see the world differently. This is not an effort to be rebellious, but a reflection of the artistic demand for quality, which cannot be mass-produced. This desire for quality also drives them to be critical, but it is criticism with a desire to see change. They want more than to simply attend a church; they want to become part of its DNA through personal investment. Creatives can take more personal attention, they challenge the status quo, and cause headaches for system driven environments, but once discipled they bring a higher

85 Billingsley, interview.
86 Billingsley, interview.
level of commitment, passion, and drive for excellence than almost any other demographic in the church.\textsuperscript{87}

To a creative, the art he or she creates is an extension of themselves, their emotions and in many cases their faith. “If there is no place for their art, then by extension there is no place for them.”\textsuperscript{88} Churches must build its art around the interests of their communities. Kyle Smith suggests a principle used at his church for creating new avenues of congregational involvement, which they call pathways:

We have to find pathways. We have to see what is important to people, what connects with people, and then find a pathway for those people to express themselves through the church… We have to be willing to broaden our views of what can happen in the church. We as leaders can be controlling about everything, and in many ways that can be good, but it also stands in the way of creativity. We have to open up and make pathways for the arts, allow creativity, and address the needs of the people in the church.\textsuperscript{89}

Chapter 4 of this thesis will examine how to identify artists in the church, and provide methods for engaging them.

\textit{Discipleship through Art}

Bowden, in discussing art for the purposed of education and discipleship, make a vital point of clarity regarding art’s role. Art is not a textbook, a formal theological document, or a historical document immortalizing the details of a moment. It is often figurative or abstract. “[art] may not be technically accurate, but what [it] is doing is pointing out an aspect of theology” art leads to “exploration and conversation” by design.

\textsuperscript{87}A quick evidence of this idea: examine how much time a worship musician dedicates per week to the church in comparison to non-creative volunteers. In most churches, musicians average 2-3 times the hours invested as other demographics.
\textsuperscript{88}Kyle Smith, interview by author, Lynchburg, VA, August 3, 2017.
\textsuperscript{89}Kyle Smith, interview.
“Art should not just answer something so simply that we don’t have to think.” Art provides a visual examination of faith that can add to the Christian community’s spiritual growth by raising question, or examining topics in a fresh way. “Sacred art helps the [church] see scripture, and issues of faith in new ways.”

For art to serve the church via discipleship, the church needs to consider itself less of a presentation or event, and more like a gallery. This may seem like a subtle distinction, but it is the minutia where quality is defined. Right now there is a trend, especially in evangelical church, that “the only art [the church] is interested in is participatory art… when we have a long church history of observing art and appreciating art that we did not participate in.” The standard American evangelical church service today places its value on art the congregation can directly participate in, such as worship songs, choir numbers (putting a large percentage of the church’s family and friends in the spotlight causes the congregation to feel a sense of participation), or drama involving the children of the church. None of these things are negative in themselves, after all it is important for the congregation to be actively involved. However, there are two ideas that need to be addressed to better allow art to work in discipleship. First, the current evangelical culture has an aversion to the idea of “performances.” In many ways the desire to remove the superficial and focus only on the spiritual is a good thing, but the idea has spread beyond the disingenuous to include all art that is presented without direct participation from the audience. This mindset, despite the best intentions, overlooks the value of intrinsic beauty and the church has lost the ability to simply observe art, to be

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90 Bowden, interview.
91 Bowden, interview.
92 Todd Smith, interview by author, Lynchburg, VA, December 2, 2016.
93 Lancaster, interview.
enveloped by its beauty and allow emotional experiences beyond one’s own actions. The church needs to be taught the value of sitting still and enjoying beauty without immediately evident spirituality. The church should surround its members with art, some spiritually obvious and others simply an expression of quality. God designed the soul with a need to experience beauty as much as it needs theological content. Secondly, it can be difficult to reflect or be introspective while also being active. This idea is understood when it comes to the sermon were one sits and listens without physical participation beyond emotional expression, but the opposite is expected with art. This makes sense when the service is seen as an event, but if the church views itself as a gallery there is a philosophical change. The church becomes a place where art is always surrounds the individual. Those who attend can engage with the artist (listen to teaching, have discussions), create and display their own work (participate in worship, or share their own art to others), or simply take in the beauty allowing the art to guide their experience (worship and growth through spirit driven self reflection).

“In the middle ages the church was culture… the church was the location for art.”<sup>94</sup> It is through discipleship of artists that the church can regain influence in culture today. Good art draws the attention of artists, giving the church the opportunity to teach and guide those who aspire to the arts. Discipleship then develops the artist both spiritually and creatively, resulting in more art, attracting more artists, etc. Discipleship leads to evangelism, which leads back to discipleship. Discipleship of the artist begins with making the church a location for art, specifically at that speaks to the local community.

<sup>94</sup> Kyle Smith, Interview.
All of the experts interviewed discussed the value of the church teaching art for whichever avenue of art they have qualified teachers. This can be done through independent courses reserved for artists, through small groups designated for artists and creatives, or through the Sunday morning service. The key is to teach an appreciation for art, encourage art, and simultaneously teach theology through artistic expression. Not everyone enjoys every kind of art, but everyone appreciates some form of art, and this provides an avenue for spiritual development. “You have to find the art that speaks to your congregation, and teach it, allowing your artists to disciple others.”

Art education is especially useful when considering the children of the church and the community. Introducing art at an early age develops appreciation and understanding for the arts, and encourages artists from a young age to link their creativity with their theology. Quality is the result of a developed skill and can be taught by the Christian and secular worlds alike, but teaching the connection between sacred beauty, creation, God, and worship is something only the church can provide.

Art and Evangelism

“We living in the age of the image… it’s the arts that are going to reach this generation.” In the secular world, there are few tools more capable of shaping opinions and belief than those provided through art. The secular world uses all varieties of art to undermine the Christian worldview, and art is how the church can effectively respond. “If churches really want to ‘reach their communities,’ art is the key that will open the door to the creative mind.”

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95 Billingsley, interview.
96 Bowden, interview
97 Kyle Smith, interview.
Every interview conducted answered the question of “How can the church use art for the purpose of evangelism?” with the same answer: Know the culture of the local community. The culture of the Bible belt, which is heavily influenced by music, lends towards musical outlets. However, in the northeast, one of the most educated regions of the United States, there is a greater appreciation for fine arts, and music is a more difficult avenue for the church. These are extreme generalizations, but the idea is that what works in Boston may not work in New Orleans. Art is each community is different. This means there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution for the church. Each church must identify and engage with local artists in a way that not only interests them, but also provides acceptance of the art they care about.

Offering a service that is needed in a community is an effective tool for evangelism. Church leaders already understand this to some extent. If the local community is impoverished, a church may open a soup kitchen or thrift store. If the community is elderly, churches will often organize volunteer groups to cut grass, rake leaves, or even provide home repair work. So how can a church address the artistic needs and desires of a community? Provide education. “I believe art has a wonderful way to add educational opportunities to the church and the community beyond [the church]… art is learned.” Education, specifically free or low cost education, has become a significant tool for many churches to get non-believers into their buildings, many of whom would never enter a church for a service. This principle is already in use by many churches in other areas of interest. Some offer night courses for things like car maintenance, or cooking. Pastors produce podcasts, videos, and even full courses to educate the

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98 Lancaster, interview.  
99 Bowden, interview.
congregation. The church loves education and has found numerous ways to use it effectively. This same approach can apply to the arts. Parents would love to send their kids for free music lessons, many adults would be grateful to attend a class on painting, not to mention the number of people who want to learn technological art tools for graphic design, photography, videography, etc. Thanks to advances in technology, these courses can happen on church property or through a variety of online mediums that already have students lining up. The world is begging for artistic instruction, but currently, the church does very little to facilitate this. Image the impact the church could have if it discovered the needs of the local community, for instance a community where the public school’s art program has recently been reduced, and provided the solution.

Bringing art to the community, especially through education, does not have to be solely an act of the church proper. Once artists are developed, they can influence the secular community directly through educational avenues such as YouTube, Facebook, or any other social platform. “There is a trend in today’s art: people are using training and development as a tool to get their stuff out there. They are creating art, but they are taking you through the journey with them, through the process and the experience.”

Another concept expressed through many of these interviews is the idea of engaging the culture by going into the community. The church should be sending their artists outside of the church walls. If the church has musicians, then they should play their music in the community. Painters can submit their art to local galleries. Craftsmen and women can sell their work in local stores. Evangelism is more effective when it steps outside the walls of the church, and the same is true for evangelism through the arts. Encourage the artists of the church to engage the local art community by attending

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100 Kyle Smith, interview.
events, showcasing their art, and most importantly showing the local culture that they are
not separated from them, but rather they are just as much a member of the community as
anyone else. The only difference is that they have found sacred beauty and want to share
it with the entire culture.

*Does secular art have a place in the church?*

“I’ve have problems with this whole delineation to begin with: Secular Art verses
Christian art. Just because something was made by a non-believer, does that mean it is
not appreciable? ...you can watch a Christmas Carol, and realize the dangers of
materialism, but it’s not a Christian film.”

If the ability to create is innate in
humanity through God’s design, then even with the corruption of the fall there are still
elements of truth that rise through all art. Often it is the art of non-believers that best
depict the need for beauty since that artist lives in absence of sacred beauty.

“Richard Mouw has written in "When the Kings Come Marching In: Isaiah and
the New Jerusalem" in his exegesis of Isaiah 60, of the principle of common grace
operating in culture, and God is in someways welcoming even pagan kings to
bring in their good cultural gifts into the New Jerusalem. So according this this
theological model, we can assume that God's discernment can operate even in
pagan cultures, and God welcomes goodness in them. I add to this "common
grace" a notion of "common curse" which is another aspect of Matthew 5
passages that Common Grace is based. God makes "sun to rise on the evil and the
good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:45) Both
the sun and the rain can be a blessing or a curse. Thus I interpret further Dr.
Mouw's writings to include goodness within the curse; "common curse" creates a
common connection between all cultures as suffering is universal.”

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101 Lancaster, interview.
102 There was also a lengthy discussion of Charlie Brown’s Christmas, in which Mr.
Billingsley provided a commentary on the spiritual nature of Charlie Brown, ending the with
assertion, “But Lucy... Lucy was a heathen.” The room filled with laughter and I was asked to
make sure this declaration was included in this thesis. However, I could find no natural segway
to or from this statement within the context of the discussion above, so it is noted here. You’re
welcome, Adam.
103 Fujimura, interview.
Most Christians would agree that the fall of man was a terrible moment in human history. Thanks to Adam’s sin, all mankind has shared not only in their separate from God’s holiness, but also their common and communal existence on this earth. Pain, suffering, injustice, and tragedy surround all of humanity. This common curse, the consequence of sin afflicts both the believer and the non-believer, making the art of both groups a commentary on a theme. Although Christians have been justified and are being sanctified, they still experience the effect of sin in the world. It may seem a bit unorthodox to find a positive note in such a tragedy, but living in a fallen world that attacks the Christian and pagan equally provides both parties with a shared experience. It is through these topics, these universally felt sufferings, that common ground can be established. This makes art valuable regardless of its origin.

Although art relating to spiritual matters should be deep and intentional, that there is a place and purpose for beauty outside of education. Some secular art captures a thought or expression in a way Christian artists have yet to adequately express, and this art can be valuable to the church.

Secular art can also demonstrate quality craftsmanship, which in itself can exemplify beauty. Bowden gives an example from her own church, which has several art galleries. A secondary gallery called “the work of our hands” displays art that exemplifies quality and skillfulness, but lacks a biblical theme. Numerous examples of woodworking, such as carvings and furniture, and other works of craftsmanship fill the gallery. Not only was this inspirational for the church to see such quality being produced by their fellow congregates, but it encouraged and developed a sense of community among the church, artists and laborers alike, all united over love of quality work. However the gallery has no
implicit spiritual purpose, beyond the appreciation of creative works. In the same way, some secular works can be appreciated.

As with all things, there must be limits. “Art that expresses truth can be used in the church.”\(^{104}\) This is already done in many ways in every church. Sunday sermons include examples from secular sources regarding history, science, politics, movies, music, etc. Secular companies produce nearly everything used in church: kitchens appliances, restroom fixtures, and office furniture are just a few examples.

If the art is of no value to the church, either through expression or introspection, then why use it? Don’t use it. But if it communicates something the congregation should know or contemplate, then the original context of the art doesn’t really matter. The church does not limit the history it accepts to “Christian History,” or use only Christian construction companies when building a worship center. As Bowden notes, no one questions the faith of a surgeon, only his ability to do the job required. There is no such thing as Christian art, or secular art. Only art made by Christians or art made by non-believers, but both groups produce art that is useful to the church as well as art that provides no value at all.

The point is this: Who made the art is not as important as what the art can show or reveal. God is not limited by the intention or religion of man; God can work through an image of Christ made by a pastor, or a song about the struggles of depression written by an atheist. The question is about value, the beauty a work of art reveals.

**Summation of the Interviews**

Each of these experts showed a passion for arts in the church and has demonstrated through their own efforts how effective the arts can be as a tool of gospel message. They believe the church is sitting at the cusp of a revolution in which the arts

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\(^{104}\) Bowden, interview.
will become more prevalent, and the church will regain its ability to influence culture. To be clear, no one suggested that the church should return the political mess of the Middle Ages, but they all believe that through the arts, the church can once again become a voice of hope and truth in their perspective communities. This process will not be easy and will take time, most likely several generations, but it can begin now by changing the mindset and culture of the church.

Each church will have to be intentional about using art that speaks to culture of their community. “Since each church has her own distinctive gifts, I hesitate to suggest specifics without knowing about their location and gift mixes. [It will be] is different for each person, each community and each region… how a community develops these values will have distinct signature.”

God provides each church with the people it needs to effectively reach the lost within their own community, so the church shouldn’t try to be a copy of another church. What works in one place may not work in another. This principle applies to many areas of the church, but specifically to art. The church should embrace the skills and interests God has placed in the people it serves.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, success will only be found when the church demands the best of itself. There are no easy solutions, as quality requires effort. Mediocrity is the enemy, as it does not exemplify beauty. In the same way, theology and Christ like principles need to comprise the foundation of art in the church. “…if good efforts are not accompanied by spiritual growth of the members, it will not amount to much in the long term.” Using art may provide short term success, but it will result in a long term failure if not founded in faith, scripture, and a passion for Christ.

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105 Fujimura, interview.
106 Fujimura, interview.
Conclusion of the Research

The words of Erwin McManus provide an excellent closure to the research of this and the previous chapter:

“Yes it is possible to deaden the soul, but not to silence it… When we stop believing the world can become a better place, when we stop caring about the lives and conditions of others, we lose a part of ourselves… This is the mystery of the human spirit, that God never intended us to live hopeless lives… When we embrace our unique place in creation, when we believe God has created us to create, it begins to change everything for us. It not only empowers us to live, but it holds us responsible for life [and] the lives of everyone we could affect for good.”\textsuperscript{107}

This study of history and culture reveals the power of art in the church and the possible effect it can have through discipleship and evangelism. Moving forward, this thesis will address how the church can implement these principles on a practical level. The following and final chapter of this thesis examines how the church can use art to reach the artistic community with the gospel, and in turn deepen the faith of the entire church.

CHAPTER 4

Returning the Arts to the Church

There is a simple truth that has become evident through this study: The church’s influence in the world is greatly expanded when it uses the arts. When the church embraces the creativity and artistic talent from within its community, it finds new avenues through which to communicate with the secular world. There is a responsibility given to all Christians to use the skills and talents given to them by God for worship, evangelism, and discipleship. Actively choosing to minimize expressions of creative through art effectively sidelines those whom God has gifted. This is not only detrimental on a practical level, but stands in direct opposition to the design of God’s church.

The best way to explain this point is to examine the imagery of scripture. Paul’s description of the church is one of the most referenced metaphors in all of scripture, but it is often viewed in the most basic, mechanical sense. As he describes it, the church is like a human body comprised of different parts, each with a specific purpose. When parts of the body are neglected or ignored the entire body suffers. This passage is often taught by saying without legs one cannot walk, and without eyes one cannot see, but these parts bring so much more than simple motion and sight. Without the eyes, the ravenous beauty of a sunset, the sense of wonder at seeing one’s child for the first time, or the first viewing of love expressed in the eyes of another would be lost. If it were not for the arms, there would be no tactile sense of personal connection found in a handshake. The comfort of a well timed embrace during times of loss, or the depth of love communicated in the gentle touch of a loved one’s face would be a mystery. The parts of the body are more than their simple mechanics; they are the connection between one’s soul, emotions, and
the outside world! They are the avenues by which the senses thrive. In the same way, the health of the church is dependent on the health cultivation of the diversity within its community. Without creativity or art the church can function, but it does so without its senses. At the risk of mixing metaphors, the church is also described as the bride of Christ, therefore, by neglecting God’s gift of creativity, the church is choosing to exist in a marriage where it can never fully appreciate its spouse. Only through the arts can the church see the beauty and majesty God has placed in font of it. This chapter focuses on bringing art back to the local church in a health organic way.

Although the discussion will have application for the entire church, the chapter will focus primarily on reviving art in the local church setting, focusing on evangelism and discipleship.

Change begins with leadership

“To every man, in his acquaintance with a new art, there comes a moment when that which before was meaningless first lifts, as it were, one corner of the curtain that hides its mystery, and reveals, in a burst of delight which later and fuller understanding can hardly ever equal, one glimpse of the indefinite possibilities within.”

Change is never a first step. It is the conclusion of, or perhaps the completion of true understanding. Because of this, it is nearly impossible to change a person’s belief or actions without first allowing him or her to internalize the principles guiding the transformation. The person must reach that moment of realization in which an abstract or academic concept pierces the understanding to become an object of necessity. In order for a church to change how it uses art, the leadership of the church must be brought to a point of enlightenment regarding the value and role of art in the church. Admittedly, this is easier said than done.

Each leader brings with them a set of perceptions about what is valuable and what is effective, and each processes new ideas through the colored lenses of their worldview. In order to begin to change the mind of a leader, one must first identify what is valuable in their perspective. There are numerous books written on affecting change and this thesis will not endeavor to duplicate the wisdom of such a vast collection of works. However, there are a few ways in which the value of the arts can be demonstrated to church leaders, effectively bridging the gap between their interests and the value of incorporating art. The first step begins with a simple question: “What do people think of when they think of you?”\(^{109}\)

As Phil Cooke discusses in his book *Unique: Telling Your Story in the Age of Brands and Social Media*, a local church is one voice among hundreds of thousands of voices, all vying for the attention of the community. Assuming a church wishes to effectively communicate with the hearts of the people, then it must be able to rise above the noise of the crowd. It must stand out in such a way that it is noticeable, interesting, and credible. “[I]t’s not about what you do; it’s about how you’re perceived.”\(^{110}\) Before a person will even consider listening to a church’s message, they have already formed preconceptions about the value and truth of the message based on the image the church projects. “The choices people make … are driven by emotions, rather than intellect.”\(^{111}\). These emotions are informed by what they see when they first observe the church and how it makes them feel in relation to other aspects of their lives. The art of the church, its quality and beauty, communicates the identity of the church long before the pastor can


\(^{111}\) Cooke, *Unique*, 33.
speak a single word. When discussing the need for artistic development, this can be a
great place to being. Examine the art of the local community and the cultural influence
that drive their perception. Compare those to the image the church is presenting and the
differences in quality will become apparent. When a leader understands that art can be
used to shape the perception of the church in culture, they will often become more open
to utilizing the arts.

The next step is to show how art can enhance a leader’s communication to better
communicate the gospel and theology to the congregation. “Ideas penetrate our minds
most deeply when communicated through the imaginative language of image, story, and
symbol.”112 Art provides a means to communicate complex ideas in a way that is more
easily understood and emotionally connective. Take for example a sermon given
discussing Matthew chapter 1 when the angel comes to Mary and tells her she will be the
mother of Jesus. In order to fully grasp the intensity of this passage, a pastor must convey
the emotions, cultural implications, the potential destruction of an engagement, and a
number of other ideas that are difficult to express concisely. Most Christians have
encountered this passage numerous times, so how can a pastor present it in a new light?
Duncan Simcoe, a professor at California Baptist University, studied this passage and
created this work of art entitled, “What if Kate Were Mary?”:

112 Pearcey, Leonardo, 10.
The image is a pastel drawing exploring the idea that instead of the angel coming to Mary, God chose his wife for the task of bringing Jesus into the world. The image depicts a white lily casting radiance onto his wife, with her head glowing like a halo as she contemplates the role she has been given, standing in her everyday life holding her cat. The image however is not completely about Kate. The artwork is an expression of the artist internal question, “what if I were Joseph?” Simcoe’s art is contemplating how he would react to his wife being chosen for such an honor while he is asked to accept God’s will and raise his child. Hopefully, the reader will pause here, examine this art and ponder these questions. Then imagine being able to present this passage to a congregation through this artwork. Imagine how the story would change from a narrative about Mary and Joseph, to an internalized emotional comprehension of the true gravity of their situation.

113 Duncan Simcoe, “What if Kate Were Mary?” 2005. Used with permission.
Leaders may often be standoffish to incorporating art in their communication, but after experiencing the effects of art, they can begin to understand that art is yet another medium at their disposal, not a separate or isolated activity. “The arts are a cup that will carry the water of life to the thirsty. It’s not the water itself; it’s the vessel. What we are doing in the church today is we are just picking up water with our bare hands and trying to carry it to the thirsty. We can still do it, but the effect is minimized by not fully utilizing what God has given us.”

The final realization leaders must accept is not limited to art, but rather how art can help accomplish the true role of a church leader: empowering those in the congregation to do the outward work of the church.

“Imagine with me for a minute … a church where the ministry is carried out by ordinary people, and it is the pastor’s job to identify, deploy, train, and support these ministers. … What if this church were intentionally structured to reach an unlimited number of people in an unlimited number of places? What if this church were more like a movement than a ministry?”

Artists are, by their very nature, influencers. By developing artists within the church, leaders are not only receiving tools to better communicate the gospel, but they are also developing cultural influencers who can reshape the idea of laity involvement in ministry. Major culture change does not occur because a group of leaders collectively decides to change, but because a small number of influential people infect the culture like a virus. Their influence spreads, multiplying until a tipping point is reach. Malcolm Gladwell calls the power of a small number of influencers The Law of The Few.

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Church leaders who want to inspire their congregations to actively engage in ministry will be much more effective if they first identify the influencers within the church, work with them to catch the vision, then allow them to help change the culture. Artists can be those influencers who begin the trends and inspire others. A good example of this idea is the passion movement. Started by a small group of creatives within North Point Church, these influencers and church leaders built a culture of worship through the use of the arts in the college ministry of the church. They didn’t just decide to start a movement, they empowered a small group of talented artists, who created their art better than any other church at the time. This influenced the church until it reached its tipping point and became a movement that went national. Twenty years later, the effects of that effort are still visible in church culture. All of this was possible because church leaders bought in to the need for the arts, identified and empowered artists, and let a small group of influencers change the culture.

Good leaders desire the best for the church, but as with everyone they are often hindered by their own expertise and worldview. Leading them to the conclusion that the arts are a positive tool for the church can take time and will have its challenges, but once they see the positive effects art can bring to the church, they can become champions of creative. This thought is best presented by C.S. Lewis’ word in his science fiction trilogy, Out of the Silent Planet, “You cannot see things until you know roughly what they are.”

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Creating a Creative Culture

A creative culture is identified by three primary principles: beauty, quality, and authenticity. Although the focus this discussion is specifically regarding art, these principles affect every level of the church and should be understood as foundational for every aspect of the church. As this discussion progresses, the reader should remember that a creative culture infects everything from the music department to the parking lot team. Beauty, quality, and authenticity, when prioritized in the church, will bring to life every aspect of the church, enriching the congregation as a whole.

BEAUTY

The term beauty is used in such common parlance that it must be fully defined if it is to be of any use to the church. Thankfully, this definition has already been carefully explored by the church leaders of the past, and their understanding of beauty can serve as a guide for the modern church. Thomas Aquinas defined Beauty as three elements: Integrity, Harmony and Radiance.\(^{118}\)

Integrity means it is not missing anything. When one sees beauty there is never a thought of, ‘if it only had this, I would love it.’ Beauty is complete and causes the viewer to recognize its totality, defined as wholeness by some, with thoughts like ‘I wouldn’t change or add anything.’ The most universal examples include a parent’s first view of their child, or that first realization of love when one realizes the utter perfection being beheld.

Harmony is the act of all elements working together without conflict. This does not imply a perfected peace or some utopian Thomas Kinkade like scene in

which there is no representation of struggle. It means that for something to be beautiful, all of the elements comprising it must serve their purpose without hindering the others. This idea is fundamental in nature because everything seeks harmony and cringes at dissonance. Like a symphony, beauty is shown through the synergy of each musician performing their role in concert with the others. Each plays his or her part in order to form the whole. If even one musician is out of sync, the harmony begins to falter and beauty is replaced with distraction. There is nothing quite as disappointing as a brilliant concept that isn’t fully executed, when the pieces were all there but harmony could not be achieved. Harmony is the balance and precision of every element comprising a work of art to speak allowing it to speak its message clearly.

Radiance is perhaps the hardest to define yet the easier to recognize of the three essential elements. “When we experience a beautiful object, it communicates something profound to us, some kind of moral, spiritual, or intellectual enlightenment. Very often, the communication is beyond language.” Radiance is the ‘x’ factor; it is that intangible element of beauty that is so readily understood when viewed, but steps beyond one’s ability to define it. It is that ‘something’ that infiltrates the soul and captivates the emotions. It is that feeling of unexplainable wonder one experiences when looking the night sky that imbues a confident knowledge that what God has created is truly beautiful. It is that moment when a song seems to almost engulf the entire room, connection the heart to the spirit of God. It is what separates such great works as Da Vinci’s

Mona Lisa, Van Gogh’s Starry Night, or Michelangelo’s Creation of Adam from the prints available at the local craft store.

Creating a culture of beauty means intentionally striving for integrity, harmony, and radiance. There is no formula for mass-producing beauty. It is a time consuming expression of the artist in which the unnecessary is stripped away until all that is left is integrity, harmony, and radiance. Perhaps the best way to incorporate beauty is to recognize its absence. Barbara Nicolosi demonstrates this idea as follows:

“I want to state unequivocally what the beautiful is not. It’s not cute. It’s not easy. It’s not banal. It’s not silly. The beautiful is not sweet or nice. It’s not facile. And it’s not unthreatening. Precious Moments figurines may soothe some kind of deep-seated psychic loss of childhood… But that just means that Precious Moments belongs in a therapist’s lobby, not in the church. Could there be anything as horrifically unwhole as the Precious Moments cross? So let’s be careful what we call beautiful. Call a thing sweet, call it precious, call it pretty. That’s fine. There’s a place for that. But don’t settle for pretty or precious when you have something as magnificently glorious as beauty calling out to you.”

QUALITY

In Matthew 19, a man who wants to go to heaven approaches Jesus. He asks Jesus what he needs to do to secure his eternal citizenship and Jesus’ reply causes the man to turn around and walk away. From the little information provided in the passage it can be assumed that he was a hard working man who had done everything culturally required of him, and would have been considered by any other rabbi of the day to be a good follower of God. This is why Jesus’ answer is so surprising; Jesus wanted more. It is easy to focus on the monetary aspect of this exchange since Jesus asked him to give up his wealth, but there is a greater underlying point, which is too often over shadowed by the temptations of money. The man was hoping his acts were good enough, expecting he would not have to surrender anymore of himself. Jesus’ follow up shows a deeper truth—there is no

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120 Taylor, For the Beauty of the Church, Location 1350-1357.
acceptable minimum when it comes to following God. This is an idea reiterated throughout scripture: God expects a full-hearted, completely devoted level of commitment. This goes beyond one’s belief and is reflected directly in one’s actions. In an act of worship, there is no room for mediocrity because to accept anything less than personal excellence is to withhold something from God. When it comes to serving the Lord, there is no such thing as “good enough.”

“…many Christian artists are lamenting the quality of the ‘Christian art’… artwork that is often used for devotional purposes or to adorn worship spaces. Specifically, many Christian artists see a general decline in Christian aesthetic judgments, as poor or superficial artwork appears to be dominating the Christian visual culture.”121

When it comes to art, quality is a measure of skill and beauty. This is something the church of the Middle Ages came to understand and worked hard to achieve quality in their environments. From the catacombs to the cathedrals, the church provided the highest amount of quality it was capable of producing. Today’s Christian art simply doesn’t qualitatively compare. Developing quality in the church culture begins by raising expectations regarding the skill levels demonstrated in the church.

There are certain ideas surrounding the term “skill” that are commonly understood. Skill defines the how well someone can complete a task. But there is also an expectation of an artist regarding his or her personal skill – skill levels should always be increasing. One of the most dangerous threats to creativity is the little thought which creeps into the mind after one has found success, “You’ve arrived. You have mastered your craft.” In truth, there is always more to learn, always something to be improved.

Letting one’s skill level plateau is the quickest way to get surpassed. A Creative Culture demands that yesterday’s best is not good enough today.

Along with constantly evaluating the skill level presented in the church, there is also a need to further examine the theology being expressed throughout the church’s activities. After all, what church doesn’t care about the theology it is presenting? However, it is easy for the church to overlook certain theological issues for the sake of function. The most prevalent example of this is in worship music. Pick up a hymnal, assuming one can still be found, and flip through the pages. There are songs of praise, songs of triumph, and a number of songs that present truly bad theology. Somehow these songs found their way into the church, became popular, and influenced generations of Christians into thinking the theology they contain represents the theology of the church. The trend continues today as well. Worship music is littered with songs teaching bad theology or taking scripture out of context for the sake of a catchy hook. Other examples include Christian t-shirts, wall decorations, and cute figurines that display a verse intended to make the viewer feel good without any regard to the actual meaning of the passage. This is so commonplace that Christians often acknowledge the questionable hermeneutics, but see no reason to correct the problem. It is this mediocrity that holds the church back from quality. If the church is lax with the spiritual content of its message, then it should not be surprised to find bad theology in the minds of the congregation. The early church developed creeds to avoid this sort of a problem, but in the modern age it is up to the church leadership to weigh all of its effort against scripture and remove anything that does not meet the standard. There is nothing more important than the spiritual quality of a church environment, and it is foundational to producing quality art.
An important note on this topic is that not all art must express a clear theology. There must be a separation of art produced to serve a function, such as worship or discipleship, and art that is created to simply express beauty. For instance, art that expresses personal pain or tragedy does not need to provide a conclusion that drives home a theological point. There is beauty in acknowledging reality, even a reality filled with sin, because it connects with the soul. There is a tendency within the church to dismiss art that does not teach, but art must not be limited to such a narrow scope. In life, tragedy can often be the catalyst that brings one’s attention to the true beauty of God. Sometimes a joyful experience can cause one’s eyes to turn to the heavens without any theological instruction. Art is no different in that the beauty of a piece can be enough to inspire without clearly defining a theological point. When art expresses theology, one must make sure it is correct, but when it doesn’t it should not be held to such a standard.

AUTHENTICITY

This principle of authenticity is perhaps the hardest to achieve and yet the most important of the three principles for creating a creative culture. It is impossible to present quality and beauty if one is also presenting a lie. In church culture, authenticity means creating an environment free of facades.

Creativity requires an environment that presents itself authentically. This means that the image the church presents to both the congregation and to local community portrays the people of the church honestly. This idea is often misunderstood in today’s Christian culture to mean wearing one’s flaws openly, almost flaunting the fact that the leaders and laity of the church are not perfect. This is both foolish and counterproductive to the goals of the church. The Christian life is one of sanctification; although believers
are justified, meaning forgiven for their sins, they are also a part of a life long process by which the spirit of God empowers them to become an even clearer reflection of their savior. One’s identity is therefore not found in his or her sins, but rather in the person her or she is becoming through Christ. Presenting an honest image of Christianity means that the church drops the pretense of a sinless existence, acknowledges that sin is constant battle, and makes every effort to strengthen the believer’s relationship with God so that they are never satisfied living in a state of sin. Part of authenticity is a church culture that is openly seeking to become more sanctified with every passing day, not pretending it has already completed the process. This reality must translate to the arts. A picture of a sinless utopia may have value, but it certainly does not depict the reality in which the congregation lives, or could ever hope to achieve this side of heaven. Having authentic art means some art must also show the progression of sanctification and the struggle inherent in that process.

Additionally, authenticity requires that a church take itself a little less seriously. Church service should exist in an environment where everyone is equally invested in the community. Authenticity means that the church stops presenting its services as if they are a performance or show. Performance driven church – churches that strive to create an environment of cool, relevant, and refined presentations of worship and teaching – are in effect using art to kill creativity. In an effort to appear contemporary, church are in reality presenting an image that stands out as foreign in culture. Here is why: in an effort to be relevant, church services are crafted to present an image that is appealing to culture. The worship uses songs that are currently popular in Christian circles, designed to sound like music from secular bands. The lighting is designed to mimic the style of the large
influential churches, which are in turn imitating large-scale rock or pop concerts. The images behind the lyrics are pretty motion videos produced by or in the style of the mega churches. The stage is designed to look professional yet entertaining, like the stage of a late night TV program or large Christian broadcast. Each element is designed to be relevant and trendy. The problem is that these things are not actually a reflection of cultural trends. All of these efforts are really presenting an image of an isolated Christian community.

As one author explains, what the church calls contemporary is 10-15 years out of date with the secular culture. “…having a band and even lights and haze is pretty normal in many churches… In fact, the band, guitar, keyboard and lights is the new traditional ‘rock’ worship. The culture has moved on to other music; hip hop, R&B, DJ, pop and so much more….”122 To prove this, simply turn on a TV or radio and quickly flip through the stations. Within a matter of seconds one can easily identify the Christian productions from the secular ones because Christian productions appear to be a shadow of what was once trendy. To create a culture of creativity, the church must abandon this attempt at cultural forgery and embrace its own artist abilities. It must present an authentic culture in which the people use art to express themselves in a way that is both inventive and natural, not a copy of other churches. Since the people of the church live in the secular culture, freeing artists to create will be both modern in the eyes of culture, and reflect the faith and truths that are exclusive to Christianity. The church can meet its goal of being attractive to culture by encouraging creativity and becoming something greater; the church can begin to make art that is appealing to the secular world, yet distinguished

122 Carey Niewhof, “10 Things That Demonstrate The World You Knew No Longer Exists” (careynieuwhof.com, December 12, 2016, web)
from it. In other words, they can be in the world, yet not of it. Instead of trying to be like other churches located throughout the country, each local church can find its own identity shaped by the cultural needs and interests of its own community. Of course ideas from another church can be used if they fit the needs of the church, but the goal should no longer be to look like X church, but rather to create an environment specific to the local community.

Creating an authentic culture also requires addressing the idea that the clergy and the laity within a church body are separate entities. Church leaders are not rulers or bosses; they are members of the church to whom God has entrusted to serve the needs of the church. In the same way, members of the so-called laity are not simple attendees whose greatest contributions to the church include showing up on Sunday mornings. The idea that church leaders are somehow superior to other believers is a false doctrine that developed during the time of Constantine (see chapter 2, misuse of the arts) and has created a philosophical division between the clergy and the laity. Don’t misunderstand, those put in leadership by God should be given the respect due to that position, however an authentic environment strives to eliminate the idea that only the leaders of the church are called and capable of performing the tasks of ministry. A creative culture empowers all people in the church to use their gifts for the glory of God. The entire congregation is tasked with sharing the gospel and serving the community, while leadership within the church is designed to empower and equip the congregation to accomplish the past.

Finally, the church must be authentic with the art it presents. One of the best summations of this issue was given by music legend, Bono:

“Creation screams God’s name. So you don’t have to stick a sign on every tree… This has really, really got to stop… I want to hear a song about the breakdown in
your marriage, I want to hear songs of justice, I want to hear rage at injustice and I want to hear a song so good that it makes people want to do something about the subject.”

A creative culture is one in which people can be honest about the pain they are experiencing or the struggles in their lives, for the sake of finding help or helping others. The Bible is full of characters that made poor choices, ended up in terrible situations, or struggled with the realities of life. Job lost everything and half of the book is an examination of different philosophies as to why. Some of the most powerful Psalms come from a point of emotional pain. The stories of the apostles include ups and downs, celebrations and triumphs. So why then does the church limit its use of art and creativity to only expressions of joy, peace, worship, and victory? The church needs songs that were written in times of crisis, art that was painted when life seemed to make no sense, and photography or videography that captures real pain. The church needs this art because it reflects the experiences of the soul. It can provide comfort to others who feel alone in their moment of trial, and it can reinforce hope to those who have made it through their own personal battle. Peter denied Christ three times and almost gave up again while sitting in jail, yet the Bible did not hide this part of the story. Peter’s struggles provide a connection of others going through a similar experience. It is the whole story of Peter that makes him human and allows the reader to understand him. A creative culture demands this authenticity because it is only through the honest expression and acknowledgment of personal pain and strife that people feel safe enough to trust. As Fujimura mentioned in his interview, it is in the pain of life that common ground exists between the believer and the heathen. A creative culture must allow for honest examinations of both the wonder of God and the struggles of earthly life.

Identifying Artists

With the foundation of creative culture understood, one must leader to identify those with creative leanings within the church congregation. Artists come in a variety of personalities and appearances, so identifying who is an artist can difficult than identifying other skill driven individuals. There are, however, some signs that are nearly universal of all artists. Understanding these signs will not only provide insight into the creative mind, but also aid in identifying and discipling an artist.

Artists care about the details of their art, and by extension the art of the church. Every pastor is familiar with the young teenage or twenty something that comes up to them after the service to discuss an area in which they think the church can improve, such as worship music, stage design, etc. To many church leaders this is perceived as arrogance, ignorance, or a sort of insult. But what if it isn’t? What if it is representative of a person who truly cares? Artists are often misunderstood because their creative abilities give them a high attention to detail within the fields they are gifted. They care a great deal about quality, and if the church is presenting art they care about poorly, they will often be driven to offer their advice, not as an insult but in the hopes their efforts can help increase the beauty of the church. If a leader is looking to identify artists, he or she should begin with the people who offer criticism of the church, yet seem to really care about it. One make not like to hear the opinions of an artist, but an artist is driven to make things better.

One of the most difficult tasks of a leader is to separate those who appreciate art from those who are artists. An easy identifier is the amount of time someone dedicates to creative activities. An athlete will spend hours practicing a sport, an academic will spend a considerable amount of time reading and learning, and an artist will spend countless
hours consumed with practicing their craft. Artists, like any passionate person, will invest their time into their art. To demonstrate this idea, one only needs to look around a college campus. Thanks to eclectic upbringings, a high percentage of students will be able to play an instrument. Are all of these students then defined as artists? No. The artists are the kids who spend hours of their day engrossed not only in music but also honing their skills on a particular instrument. They write songs, practice progressions and formations until they have mastered them, and somehow bring every conversation back to music. An artists is more than someone who like art, they are driven to create. Look for the person who is willing sacrificing their time for the sake of improving their ability to make art. These are the true artists.

Artists have an innate ability to communicate beauty and emotions through art. This is because they are gifted with a unique connection to art, in which what may seem mundane to the average observer is revealed as majestic beauty to an artist. “Fine artwork has definite emotional power to those who take the time to unlock its secrets,” and artists have taken the time. A good example of this comes from the author’s personal experience. During a church service years ago, a worship song was coming to a close and it was time for the sermon. Except this particular Sunday included a bonus expression of worship – an interpretive dance. The full experience cannot be understood unless the reader is made aware of how much the author dislikes dancing, in any form, for any reason. The dance began and the young woman fluttered around the stage with large flowing motions that appeared to contain no meaning or purpose. As he sat back and slouched into his chair, he noticed the girl sitting next to him. She was entranced. Sitting forward in her chair with her back arched and her fingertips lightly rested at either side of

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her slightly open jaw, she was engulfed by the beauty of the art in front of her. Her eyes were locked on the graceful moves of the young woman in front of her, blinking only to move the tears from her eyes to the sides of her face. As a dancer, she had a decidedly different understanding of what was happening on the stage than he did. She viewed worship; she viewed beauty, a sacred beauty that moved her so deeply it was all she could speak of after the service had ended. Artists are deeply connected to their art and can see the beauty in the most seemingly trivial details. This is why the art that they produce showcases that same beauty. When looking to identify artists in the church, look for these two details: The affect art has on the individual, and the affect his or her art has on others. Many people produce art, but it is the artist that makes art that connects to one’s emotions. Nicolosi boils this concept into a powerful yet concise expression, “Emotional power is a hallmark of a true artist.”

Although it is not a sign of an artist, when looking for artists within the church, the first place to check is among the youth. Creativity is often more evident in young people because they have not yet chosen paths in their lives which limit or repress one’s creative potential. Finding artists when they are young not only provides the church with the opportunity to train them, but it also enriches the church as young artists are often more willing to dedicate their talents and time for the benefit of the church. Many larger churches use the arts programs within their youth department as a training ground, feeding talent into the rest of the church once the proper skills are developed. This is not to say that artistic talents cannot be discovered later in life, because it can. But creatives who wait to use or develop their gifts until after their formative years often find it

\[125\] Ibid., location1459-60.
difficult to understand and adapt to the trends of culture. This makes identifying talent early a priority.

Creating Opportunities For The Arts

This thesis has endeavored to provide evidence for the value of art in both the historical and modern church so that church leaders can see the extreme potential of art in the hands of Christians. Art has many uses, but this thesis has been a journey through history, theology, and philosophy so that the power of creativity and art can be better used for discipleship and evangelism. With all of the groundwork laid, this final section will discuss the practical ways art can be used to spread the gospel and a deeper knowledge of God with both the secular world and other Christians.

DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH THE ART

Borrowing from the inimitable Rodney Wayne Dempsey, discipleship must include three distinct attributes: Intentional, Individual, and Missional. Incorporating art can enhance the church’s ability to employ each of these attributes, as history has already proved. Art can connect to the emotions of mankind strengthening the bonds between man and God, as well as fellow believers. The early church did this through the use of symbols and creed, as well as other forms of art. Individual in this context means developing each person, each part of the church, so that the whole church is strengthened. Art has been used in countless ways to enrich devotional materials, and has demonstrated the ability to express complex theological ideas in easily comprehended ways. Finally, art

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addresses the Missional aspect of discipleship by equipping the saints with tools, knowledge, and passion to take the gospel outside of the church, as evident by the number of Christian art works, which influence culture even centuries later. Art can enhance every aspect of discipleship, and is crucial for discipling creatives. For the purposes of this study, two different avenues of discipleship through the arts will be examined: community and education.

As each church discovers the creative interests of its community, it will need to develop avenues through which the arts can be both viewed and expressed. This will look different depending on the resources and interests of the church community. Since an exact formula is not possible, the best way to exemplify how the church can move forward using expressions of art as discipleship is to examine Christians and Christian communities who are already embracing the arts.

In many liturgical churches, there is a newfound emphasis on the fine arts, and subsequently the development of community for artists. Many are incorporating art galleries into their churches in which a variety of exhibits are displayed. The galleries can display art created by artists in the church, as well as limited time exhibits of established Christian artists. Sandra Bowden and Makoto Fujimura are among several artists who have full exhibits designed to be displayed in galleries such as these for short periods of time. There are several Christian organizations, such as Christians In the Visual Arts (CIVA), that help church facilitate the development of fine art galleries, help in acquiring new exhibits, and provides resources for discipleship through the arts, such as books on art and theology and weekly art based devotionals. Within the churches themselves, there is an intentional effort to develop the artistic community. There are group creative
meetings for developing skills inside of a particular field of arts, as well bible studies which incorporate art.

A group of Christians in a district of Dallas, TX who noticed a need for community among artists created a community cultural center called Life In Deep Ellum. Located near Baylor University, this center contains a space for artists to gather, a curated art gallery, a coffee shop, plus an events venue for music and other performance art. LIDE is a place where anyone in the community is welcome to come and spend time with other artists, view artwork from within the community, and create their own works for display, covering anything from painting and sculpting to videography, photography, and music. LIDE is also a church. During the week, the staff spends time in the center talking and discipling the people who regularly visit. They talk faith and philosophy with anyone who wants the discussion. On Sundays, there is a church service in the venue area. LIDE serves as an example of a church that has gone to great lengths to create a community for creatives.

Community does not need to be as complicated as either of these examples. Some churches find success through tying their education and community efforts together.

Education:

One of the most effective ways to disciple artists is to offer to train them. Just like in II Timothy when Paul describes the pattern of the older generation teaching the younger, the older creatives within the church need to be involved in teaching the younger generation. This can be done in a number of ways:

Classroom education may seem a little traditional, but it is still effective for teaching skill-based courses. Churches can offer lessons in any field in which it has
experienced personnel able to teach. If a church has quality musicians, it had everything it needs to give music lessons. If the church is located in a community that values fine arts, odds are good it has several skilled artist in the congregation who would be willing to teach a class.

For some art fields, such as videography and photography, it is easy to teach using an apprenticeship system in which a knowledgeable teacher takes a small group of students under his or her wing by allowing them to participate in developing a piece of art which would otherwise be beyond their abilities.

These two methods also provide the added benefit of developing small communities of artists by the very nature of their design. They also provide an avenue for the instructor to being teaching theology to the community is way that is natural and well received. After all there are few better ways to teach sacred topics then through creative arts, as the two are so easily intertwined.

Finally, the church should not overlook the value of education via the Internet. Although this does not develop community in the traditional sense, it does lend itself towards evangelism.

ENCOURAGING EVANGELISM THROUGH THE ART

Christianity in the church is great, but we are called to be in the public square."127 Discipleship bring a believer closer to God, but a true relationship with Christ can only be experienced fully when the love one has received is made manifest by the expressing the gospel message to the lost. When considered in light of this truth, the use of the arts in the church can only be seen as proper if it is used to influence the hearts of the lost, bringing

127 Andrew Moroz, Sermon on Unity, Gospel Community Church, August 6, 2017.
them to an encounter with the spirit. Evangelism through the arts happens when the church disciples creatives and sends them out into the world. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of evangelism methods that have been developed over the years and the Christian community would not benefit from this thesis providing yet another one. Instead, presented here will be examples of actual Christian art set free in the secular world. By considering these efforts, the reader will see several ‘styles’ of evangelism. Each effective, yet each presenting the truth of scripture in a different way.

The first concept to consider is the use of art for directly presenting spiritual truths in a thought provoking way that can lead the viewer to a scared beauty. Through this encounter, the observer is left open to discussions of faith in which the gospel can be explained. First, consider the art of Sandra Bowden in her piece entitled The Path of Life.

http://sandrabowden.com/collage/path-of-life

This piece represents one’s journey through life. It is technically proficient, and is a beautiful piece, revealing in a unique way the wisdom of Psalm 16. It meets all of the qualities outlined in this thesis, yet presents a clear spiritual truth. Her work has been featured in a number of major galleries all around the world, both Christian and secular, without sacrificing either the quality of her work or the message it carries.

Makoto Fujimura’s work takes the idea of abstract art even further. The reader is encouraged to examine his gallery at silenceandbeauty.com where he uses color and textures to convey the persecution of Christians in 17th century Japan, which was recently depicted in the 2017 Martin Scorsese film “Silence.” Through his personal art, Fujimura has influenced the worldview of thousands and his work on Scorsese’s film has helped to show Christianity to millions in a way culture praised for its beauty. Through the film,

128 Sandra Bowden, Path of Life (SandraBowden.com). – Used with permission.
the tenets of Christianity are openly presented in a masterful way. Through his paintings, Fujimura engages the emotions to explore the idea of sacrifice and trauma as an act of beauty, allowing the heart to connect the viewer back to Christ’s sacrifice without needing to be explained.

In the world of music, a handful of Christians have found notoriety in secular markets. Almost of these songs have one thing in common: They were beautifully written lyrics that addressed honestly emotional topics, such as love, fear, or the struggles of life, and they all did so in a way that projected hope. In addition, the accompanying music was innovative and of top notch quality. One of the most noted groups of Christians who make music is Switchfoot. Read these lyrics from their song “Stars.”

Stars lookin at our planet watching entropy and pain
And maybe start to wonder how the chaos in our lives could pass as sane
I've been thinking bout the meaning of resistance, of a hope beyond my own
And suddenly the infinite and penitent begin to look like home

Nowhere in this song does it directly mention religion, and it never hides the struggle the author is dealing with, but it does present the internal drive of humanity to look towards something bigger than itself. The lyrics are truly poetic. Switchfoot’s songs don’t sound Christian or secular. They sound like Switchfoot. The present their own art that is accepted by culture, yet screams the truth of a life in love with Christ.

And often-overlooked genre of art is that of fiction. However, when considering the size of the audience who read works of fiction, it is possibly one of the most important mediums available. C.S. Lewis wrote his “Out of the Silent Planet” trilogy, Madeline L’Engle created “A Wrinkle in Time,” and of course J. R. R. Tolkien presented the world with “The Lord of The Rings” trilogy, among many others. Christian authors
have the amazing opportunity to weave theology into the fabric of captivating fictional adventures and effect change in their readers through their imaginations. When asked why she would write books for a secular audience, L’Engle replied, “If I understand the gospel, it tells us that we are to spread the Good News to all four corners of the world, not limiting the giving of light to people who already have seen the light. If my stories are incomprehensible to Jews or Muslims or Taoists, then I have failed as a Christian writer.”

Books of fiction are such an effective method of evangelism that other religions are beginning to train fiction writer to spread their own views into culture. Currently in fantasy fiction, the Mormon Church is producing more quality writer than almost anyone, and BYU is offering classes specifically targeted at this field. The same principles apply to all areas of the arts, if it is effective in shaping the beliefs of others, then the secular world will use it. To counter act this, Christians must engage the art and begin revealing the sacred beauty of the gospel to the world. When Christians produce quality art, it affects the world. It changes minds, and opens hearts to the gospel.

Summary and Areas for Further Study

By now it is clear that the art provide innumerable opportunities for the church, particularly for evangelism and discipleship. Art allows the church to present itself honestly and effectively to the local community. It opens doors for better communication and education within the church. Most of all, when the church accepts the use of art, it welcomes artists into the church. Churches that create a creative culture provide artists with a family of believers who not only accept them, but also cherish the gifts God gave

them, because it is through their gifts that the church is filled with works of sacred beauty. In short, by embracing the art, the church moves closer to fulfilling it’s calling of going into the world and bringing the gospel to all people, artists included.

In order to conclude this thesis, the author must first acknowledge the limitations of the study. Although extensive study was completed regarding the history of art in regards to discipleship and evangelism, there are a number of other areas that could inform this discussion that have yet to be explored. First, due to the truly massive amount of art produced by the church since its conception, this study was limited to only a small selection of works which stood out as the most influential in relation to the stated goal of the thesis. Further study is needed regarding other expressions of art employed by the church throughout history, focusing on the precise motivation behind the creation and implementation of the art.

There is also a true need for an impartial examination of the misuses of art throughout the history of the church. The scope of this thesis would not allow for a thorough exploration into this topic, but such an examination would prove very helpful to any church looking to incorporate the arts into their common practices.

Out of necessity, this study is focused on the American evangelical church. However, there are a number of other denominations and nationalities, which incorporate art in unique way. Further study of this should be conducted to provide a more broad view.

Finally, there is an inevitable question of finance when dealing with the church, and this thesis does not attempt to examine the financial implications of incorporating art into the church. To the best of this author’s knowledge, no such research as been
attempted. Data and practical solutions regarding the cost of using art to its fullest would be very helpful to church leaders and should be examined further.


Jackson, Donald. “The Saint John Bible” (Saint John’s Abbey, Youtube.com, Jan 8, 2008) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BK9oCX5lBLQ


Miles, Margaret R. *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1985


APENDIX A

Section 1: Art of the Early Church

Figure 1 - Early Christian Symbol - Chi-Rho

Figure 2 - Early Christian Symbol - Dove

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Figure 3 - Early Christian Stele From 3rd Century Showing the Anchor and Fish Symbols

Figure 4 - Example of Early Christian Art - Inscription of ichthus in Greek.

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Figure 5 – Example of Catacomb art – Catacombs of Rome – Jesus Healing the Bleeding Woman

Figure 6- Example of Catacomb Art - Catacombs of Rome - Thought to be an image of Mary nursing baby Jesus

Figure 7 - First example of Christian sarcophagi art - Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus

Figure 8 - Example of Sarcophagus Art – Constantina’s Sarcophagus

Figure 9 - Example of Basilica – Saint Apollinaire in Italy\textsuperscript{138}

Figure 10 - Image of Hagia Sophie in Modern Day Istanbul

Figure 11 - Example A of The Golden Mean
Figure 12 – Example B of The Golden Mean
APPENDIX C

Approvals and Documentation

Approval to use “What if Kate Was Mary?”

Duncan Simcoe

Subject: Permission Request for "What If Kate Was Mary?"
To: Juan Dugan

December 5, 2016 at 1:56 PM

Dear Joshua,

Thanks for your interest in the piece. Not sure if you are referring to the drawing in her collection, or the couple of paintings that I sent to her as files. In any event, I am glad that you some use for the work in any event. So, consider my permission given towards its use in your project.

You never know where the wind is going to blow when you make a piece...

Best,
Duncan
8/18/2016

Joshua Dugan
IRB Approval 2576.081816: Understanding the Current State of "the Arts" in the Church

Dear Joshua Dugan,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School