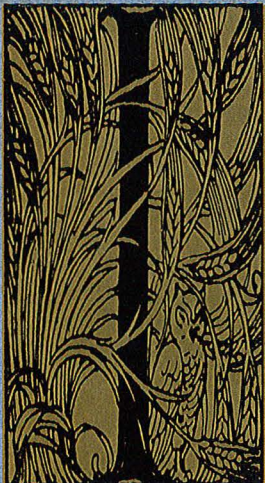




Summer 1998
Volume 29,
Number 2



IMAGINATIVE FAITH:

*The creative expression
of
spirituality*

HOT TOPIC

We'll occasionally print a question about a subject of current interest in the Stone-Campbell movement churches, or in Christendom at large. The "Hot Topic" question is designed to generate dialogue from those holding pertinent opinions on any facet of the subject. We will print responses to the previous "Hot Topic" in next quarter's issue. This quarter's Hot Topic:

Is art important to the life of a Christian?

To respond to this quarter's Hot Topic, you can write to us:
Kelly Sprague
1651 Crestline
Troy, MI 48083

or e-mail us:
sksprague@juno.com, or integrit@mich.com

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
—Romans 15:5-6



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Integrity is a quarterly journal dedicated to stimulating personal and public thought, prayer, and discussion about living the Christian life. Its roots are in Restoration Movement Christianity, encompassing Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ/Christian Churches, and the Disciples of Christ, but Integrity strives for unity among all Christians. Published by a non-profit corporation, Integrity is intended to be a ministry of reconciliation which utilizes the varied talents of a large community of believers. These believers, united in faith but divergent in opinions, seek to accurately reveal God to both the church and the world so that all may become one as He is one. Accordingly, it should not be assumed that the views expressed by individual authors necessarily represent the opinions of either the editors or of the Board as a whole.

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Back Issues We have over 25 years' worth of back issues on a wealth of topics. You can also access our web site, which has issues dating back to 1993.

William Palmer
1607 Rockford
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Contents

Summer 1998 • Volume 29, Number Two

Art for the glory of God	5
<i>Dan Matson</i>	
Everyone's art: The ministry of writing	10
<i>Victor Knowles</i>	
A debtor's 51st psalm	12
<i>Becky Pickering</i>	
A Christian artist's odyssey: Where can I use my gifts?	14
<i>Nancy McClane</i>	
Sing to the Lord a new song (I'll even write it for you!)	18
<i>Amy Davis</i>	
Allegory: the veil that reveals	20
<i>Elton D. Higgs</i>	
A pen and ink meditation	22
<i>Shawna Dowdy</i>	
Creative preaching	26
<i>Mark Frost</i>	
Worship as visual encounter with God	31
<i>Curtis D. McClane</i>	
Book review: <i>Walking on water: reflections on faith and art</i>	36
<i>Reviewed by Debi Shepberd</i>	
Imaginative leadership	38
<i>Silas Shotwell</i>	
Song of a tuneless one	40
<i>Noreen Bryant</i>	
Bending the Twig	42
<i>Laquita and Elton Higgs</i>	
Book review: <i>Art and worship: a vital connection</i>	44
<i>Reviewed by Curtis D. McClane</i>	
Readers' response	46

The design of this issue is dedicated to the memory of our friend Maude Endres, a vibrant woman for whom the Christian life and visual art were inextricably intertwined. We will miss you, Maude; you're an inspiration!
—Managing Ed.



God has certainly sustained us during this hectic summer season. I have been relocating to work with the Troy Church of Christ, and in the process moving all of my materials and letters connected with *Integrity* to a new office. Additionally, I was waiting to get back online so I can answer some e-mail. We have had several good comments about our first issue, and we appreciate your feedback. Keep the e-mails and letters coming!

I personally feel you are going to be in for a real treat with this summer issue! Dan Matson in his work "Art for the glory of God" gives us an exciting and solid theology of creativity that has sorely been needed through the years. Victor Knowles' contribution, "Everyone's art: the ministry of writing," encourages all of us to take up our pen/computers and begin writing for encouragement—it is a ministry that all can participate in.


In "A Christian artist's odyssey," Nancy McClane shares her painful yet exciting journey of discovery in learning how God could use her gifts in an atmosphere of non-acceptance and hostile rejection—this is where spiritual maturity and courageous faith are developed. Amy Davis shares with us the process and joy of allowing God's Spirit to create within us a new song, and giving us the courage to share it with others in her "real-life application" article entitled, "Sing to

the Lord a new song." Elton Higgs has stretched our thinking and appreciation in his piece "Allegory: the veil that reveals." He shows us that often allegory, an instrument of human imagination, is the only form that can truly enlighten us about spiritual realities. Becky Pickering has creatively provided us with "A Debtor's 51st Psalm." This illustrates the kind of inventiveness that can really capture life's experiences and convey it in such a way that others identify. Mark Frost reminds us in "Creative preaching" that creative communication methods are needed to display the creative character of God and his power to change the preacher and the audience. In "Worship as visual encounter with God," I approach a delicate and often neglected part of our corporate worship, and I maintain that the visual contributes in a unique way to one's experience of God. Silas Shotwell lifts up the Old Testament character of Caleb as being a model to pursue in "Imaginative leadership." This type of leader in the church today will display a "different spirit" and follow God wholeheartedly. Noreen Bryant represents all of us who have no gift for singing and appreciate beyond measure those who do—those who transport us into another dimension when we hear them. Laquita and Elton Higgs provide guidelines in "Bending the twig" for families who are looking for

resources to use as family devotional material. Contemporary family life is often so frazzled and fragmented that not much time is left for that. Their guidance and counsel is much needed and appreciated.

Debi Shepherd and I have written two reviews on books relevant to our theme to complete this issue.

We send out this issue with a prayer on our heart that God will in incredible ways open up eyes, hearts and minds to explore the vast world of creativity and its faithful expression. The creative expression of truthful reality will set us free!


Curtis McClane
Editor-in-Chief



Art for the glory of God

Daniel C. Matson

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I suppose each artist has different thoughts about why art work is what it is and why it came to be, given the moment's medium, style or content. As each year begins and ends, there is a certain wonder about what was produced, or will be, and in what quantity, uniqueness and, perhaps, acceptability.

For a number of years I have alternated between painting and poetry. Uncounted numbers of paintings and over 700 poems emerged, the latter covering most of the artistic disciplines. My poetry is an exercise that gives focus to what I believe the various dimensions of art are. The need to make poetic statements is driven somewhat by painting, although neither of them necessarily deals with the subject matter of the other.

From the beginning it seemed to me that producing art in its various forms is a spiritual process. Poetry verified it. Having accepted that, I pondered to what extent further inquiry would conclude that evidence of human spirit is reflected in the art and how it would be discerned. I have sought to investigate the spiritual side of creativity in my new book, *Art of Art*, which awaits publication.

What is worth creating? Should the artist shy away from statements where the conscience is uneasy about how God's Spirit would perceive the work? Is that a valid inquiry for the artist to make? Why not, if the artist aspires to be a respectful child of God? What about depicting the ugly, distasteful elements or episodes of

life? Doesn't the artist have a duty to show all of it? In other words, is any restraint on art legitimate? How does "Whatever is just, pure, lovely, gracious, worthy of praise, etc., think on these things..." align with that concept of artistic endeavor (Phil. 4:8)?

Am I, the artist, really the creator, or merely the assembler? Is my art an expression of who I am, or what I am? How does what I produce affect my relationship with the Great I AM?

At one stage in my development as a painter I thought it a worthwhile gesture to experience the same painting processes as some of my famous predecessors. I dreamily wondered if the effort would result in a capture of their spirits in paint. I took what I regarded as the major turning points in the careers of Cezanne, Van Gogh, Picasso, Rothko, Pollock, and Matisse and laid the out on canvas to see what of their spirits would emerge. I chose their works because I felt they were the most radical departures from what had occurred previously. They all came within a century of each other.

I enclosed a human-sized painting (76" x 46") of one of each of my impressions of their master work in triangular glass cases I call Trisms (tm) and surrounded them with circular walls 8 feet high and 27 feet in diameter. The entire construct represented a cross-section of a spaceship.

The Trisms were placed in a six-pointed star pattern with each of the described paintings facing the walls of the ship. I shaped each canvas so it was convex and upright. Collectively they formed a circle within the circular walls. Back to back with each of

them was a concave painting of mine that I regarded as a composite of all of them—a merger of all our spirits. In the very center of the Trisms was a narrower one made of mirrors. Viewers were able to see themselves and paintings integrated in the reflection as they walked between them.

The panels forming the inner and outer walls of the ship were painted to represent reflections of the universe as seen while traveling at multiples of light speed. The universe is shown to expand according to the position of the viewer: vertical representations from the outside, horizontal from within the ship. Artistic license allows us to go well beyond scientific "reality." Art, after all, invited the inquiring mind to express itself in ways unique to each artist.

A purpose of the work just described was to alert the scientific community to the need for ample art as a prerequisite for the well-being of long-range space travelers. The more profound meaning of the entire construct was to share a notion I have about communication.

What if space travel results in a discovery of alien societies? (How would that test our faith, since scripture does not seem to refer to them?) Suppose they are visually oriented. What would hasten meaningful exchanges between earth humans and others? Thus far it appears that math and verbal symbols would constitute our entire effort.

My art statement suggests that if aliens were to perceive the works of the identified artists as presented, the speed of their learning curve about us

would be accelerated. The reason is that each of the works is vastly unlike the other. This proposes that an alien mind could observe the range of human thought on a single subject, namely, how we describe something in space in widely different fashion.

What is the relevance of all this to our Christian walk? Why is art a valid part of it?

How do any of us perceive the appearance of God? His Spirit? Our Savior? The Church? Are any two persons' views of them alike, let alone those of persons within one or more congregate settings? It is doubtful. If all snowflakes differ, consider the human variables involved in thought about any concept, spiritual or otherwise.

Art is a natural expression of our appreciation of God's love.

What would be the Christian's burden of sharing spiritual values with alien others of God's creation? That they don't need them? How could they be as important as earth humans? How would we deal with such ultimate cultural and racial disparity, given our past record? What sort of arguments against mission efforts would prevail? The otherworldly are too heathen? How many exclusionary devices would we employ once the novelty of their existence subsided? How many devices would relate to form and appearance, such as proper settings for collective worship?

The analogy to aliens is nothing more than reference to what has al-

ready occurred and continues to exist in our relations with others.

What edifices and embellishments would we recognize as proper settings for worship? What answers do our history suggest?

Church buildings of my heritage are traditionally bereft of symbolic artistic expressions. Visual imagery of spiritual personalities and surroundings and all related icons are to be regarded as distracting and probably sacrilegious. Still, I am comfortable with Spartan surroundings simply because I am used to them.

In the course of things my wife and I were privileged to make four tours of Europe with art historians who were steeped in the symbolism of church art and architecture. What eye openers they were to us. Not only were we humbled by the antiquity of what had survived centuries of cultures, but especially by the spiritual application of it.

We were led to the reality of how followers of Christ were instructed and reinforced in their beliefs by physical surroundings in places of collective worship. The very stones shaped and placed by their builders still cry out their messages, as do the exquisite wood carvings and intense patterned colors of window glass. The realization struck us that much of this preceded mass distribution of Bibles and the ability of common folk to read them. How poignantly the stories unfolded, from creation to the crucifixion and ascension and beyond. How befitting of the labor of artists and craftworkers of our forbears in their depiction of the living

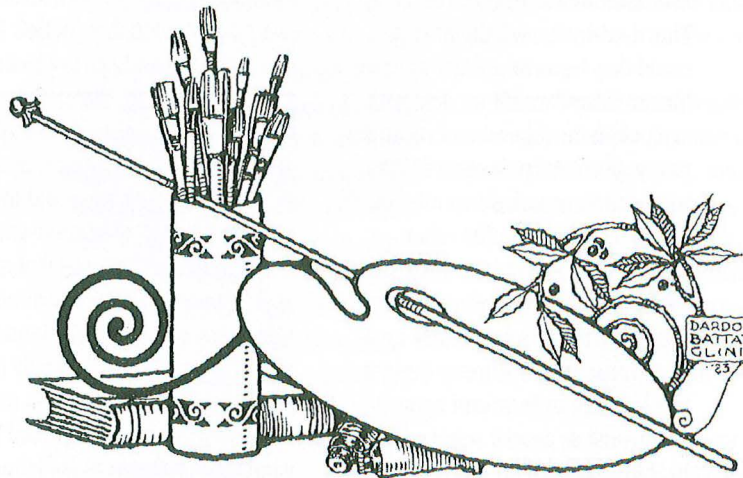
Word that it still survives with the printed and spoken Word. What should their preservation mean in the face of arguments that these objects are subject to being worshipped for their own intrinsic worth?

I have noticed two thresholds of inquiry emphasized among professing Christians when considering spiritual affairs. In their simplest form they are:

1. What is wrong with something; or
2. What is right with it? All problems seem to arise from the order in which one of them is asked first. Rather than being discriminatory after the fact of investigation, when the former attitude prevails, there is automatic rejection, usually without investigation. The latter approach seems to imply that enough security and well-being exists to allow toleration pending further scrutiny.

What is art like when the spirit of the artist merges with the Spirit of God?

When the artists and skilled craftworkers of another era spent all their God-given talents and entire lifetimes as offerings to the Lord, it was their spiritual sacrifice and worship. Is theirs any different than ours in God's sight? How then can we discard them except in ignorance? The magnificence of their work may be overwhelming to us but they are still monuments to the living God. They are constant reminders in a sinful world of who He is to all who would seek after Him and be led to worship in spirit and in truth. God will judge all people in this as in all things, according to individual attitudes and responses.



Perhaps we are the alien society our predecessors were communicating with when they expressed the glory of God in their art. Was it their fervent prayer that Christianity would not die as long as their works could be experienced? If anything characterizes artists it is the hope their works will outlast their generations. How should we honor that?

Art is personal to the artist and the observer. Sensibilities and sensory perception of it are of the individual. What one likes is not liked by another. Tastes differ with awareness and appreciation. God makes us all different from each other, yet in His likeness. We need not always be looking over our shoulders to see who will be critical of what we may enjoy or not.

Autonomous church congregations likewise can enjoy local art and architectural prerogatives. Their design and detail are simply reflections of cultural tastes. Art, after all, is the taste of taste that takes its place. Using good taste is what God expects of us in this matter.

Art is its own language. If art can help an alien society know the human mind, what are the possibilities for the Spirit's work in us? In my book, *Art of Art*, I take poetic views of music, theater, sculpture, painting, architecture, writing, dance, photography, cyberspace and other aesthetics. There really is no exception to the Spirit's work in all of the artistic disciplines. They involve creativity of ex-

pression, a process which God has shared with all of us. What we make of it is what counts.

Art in its many forms is a gift of God for our enjoyment. When we consider how pervasive it is we are astounded. Art is the sight of sound and the sound of sight. Not one of our senses is immune from it. Art is as basic to the human spirit as anything can be. It is there for us to enjoy or to stifle. Have we considered that to deny ourselves creation or appreciation of art may be sin?

Where have we heard before that seeing we don't see and hearing we don't hear, even when shown or spoken to by the perfect Communicator? He was not deterred from His Father's business by such dullness. Nor should the artist be dissuaded whose purpose is to seek after His will.

Art is a natural expression of our appreciation of God's love. However we may style it, let us recognize it and use it for that end. What is speaking if not art? What is singing, hearing, reading, praying, moving, breathing, living? Whatever we do in word or deed, is it not to be to the glory of God, our acceptable worship?

A surge of elation comes with creation. It makes one step back and stare at what is now there that wasn't there before, and the thrill is that it is not a copy of a copy but is new to the artist and perhaps to everyone. How worthy a use of our time.

And God looked at what was created, and saw that it was good. †

Dan Matson is a member of the University Christian Church at East Lansing, MI, and is an attorney in the general practice of law.



Everyone's art: The ministry of writing

Victor Knowles

Where would our churches be without the ministry of writing? Think for a moment of the vital and voluminous writings of Thomas and Alexander Campbell. Where would we be if these men had not put their thinking on paper? The restoration movement produced other great writers.

Or would it be more appropriate to say that these people produced the restoration movement? Barton W. Stone. Walter Scott. Moses Lard. J. W. McGarvey. David Lipscomb. B. W. Johnson. (many of us own a well-worn copy of *The People's New Testament With Notes*?) Isaac Errett. Robert Richardson, biographer. Robert Milligan. James DeForest Murch. R. C. Foster. We are blessed beyond measure with a wealth of treasure from the pens of these "ready scribes!"

The writing ministry is ordained of God. The Lord told Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua" (Exodus 17:14). God commanded the prophet Habakkuk, "Write the vision and make it plain" (Habakkuk 2:2). David declared, "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (Psalm 45:1). Jesus told Satan, "It is written" Matthew 4:4).

Luke sat down to write an orderly account of those things which are "surely believed among us" Luke 1:1-3). Paul put heart in his pen—he wrote "with many tears" (2 Corinthians 2:4). John mentions the ministry of writing nineteen times in his three epistles. Jude was very diligent to write concerning our common salvation. He found it necessary to write about contending earnestly for the faith (Jude 3).

Jesus instructed John on Patmos, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches" Revelation 1:11). Seven times Christ told the angels of those churches, "Write!" Truly, the writing ministry is ordained from above.

► Words are power

The opening words in my high school Vocabulary Workshop book (Jerome Shostak, Oxford Book Company, New York) read, "Words are power! They are the key to better understanding of ourselves and of the world around us. They are indispensable to vocational and social success." Words are also indispensable to our eternal welfare. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,

and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

The power of words can be either positive or negative, helpful or hurtful, soul-saving or soul-damning. "Death and life," wrote Solomon, "are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit" (Proverbs 18:21). That goes for written words as well as those that are spoken. The pen *is* mightier than the sword. Peter's sword mutilated one man's ear, but his pen has motivated millions of hearts. While we rejoice at writings which exalt truth, we despair at the abundance of false teaching. "The false pen of the scribe certainly works falsehood."

► What kind of writing do we need in the church today?

Good writing. Better writing. Writing that moves readers to think, cry, laugh, remember, plan, repent, change, try, try again, attempt new and wonderful things for God. I'm more concerned with the writing that rules than the rules of writing. Sir Winston Churchill was once criticized by a young intellectual for ending a sentence with a preposition. Churchill scribbled a note to the young man. "This is the sort of nonsense up with which I will not put!"

We need people in the church today, young and old, male and female,

to become "ready scribes." Who will write the hymns we will sing for the next one hundred years? Who will be the next Knowles Shaw? Tillit S. Teddlie? Charles Reign Scoville? Who will write our history? Will there ever be another James DeForest Murch? Who will write the commentaries and study guides? The Bible-school literature? Church growth manuals? Doctrinal books? Devotional books? Who will write the tracts? Essays and articles?

► Letter writing is an invaluable ministry

One of the best things we can do is to write notes and letters of appreciation. One of my favorite stories comes from Robert Conklin's book, *How to Get People to Do Things* (Contemporary Books, Chicago, 1979). A gifted executive, looking back on his career, realized how greatly his life had been influenced as a youth by a certain teacher. He traced her through the school, found that she was retired, and wrote her of his appreciation. He received this reply:

I can't tell you how much your note meant to me. I am in my eighties, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely, and like the last leaf of fall lingering behind. You will be interested to know that I taught school for fifty years and yours is the first note of appreciation I have ever received. It came to me on a blue, cold morning, and it cheered me as nothing has in years.

The pen *is* mightier than the sword. Peter's sword mutilated one man's ear, but his pen has motivated millions of hearts.

Whenever I tell that story I can hardly get through it! It is so touching. And our people can reach out and touch the lives of many who are forgotten. Make a list of people who have influenced your life for good. Then write them and tell them!

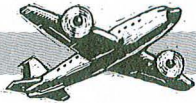
► Encouragement through personal letters

I'd also like to suggest the ministry of writing encouraging letters. Do this at least once a week. Write someone you think may need encouragement. We do this on Wednesday night every once in a while. (We have a fixation on learning. We need to start doing!)

So we sit at tables with pencils, stationery, addresses, and stamps. We write to missionaries, ministers, members—anyone we can think of that might appreciate a letter of encouragement. The next day scores of letters go into the mail to bless people all over the world. Some of these letters may mean the difference between failure and success in the kingdom of God. Some have written back that the letter of encouragement kept them going when they were ready to throw in the towel. This is a ministry all can become involved in.

Write on, fellow servants, write on! †

Victor Knowles is the Executive Director of POEM, Peace on Earth Ministries. POEM seeks to bring people to peace with God through Jesus, and encourages peace between fellow believers in Christ.



POETRY

A debtor's 51st psalm

Becky Pickering

Have mercy on me, O God,
According to Your unfailing love;
according to Your great compassion,
blot out the debt I owe You.
Erase the debit and cause me to stand before You debt free.

For I know what I have borrowed,
the ledger is ever before me.
You alone I owe, it is from Your storehouse I have robbed,
so when You say, "This is outstanding between us,"
you are correct.

It is true that I was born into a family of careless borrowers and robbers.
From my beginnings I have learned ways to avoid
looking at the things I do that keep me stealing from You.
But I also know that You have put within me the desire
to face my destructive tendencies
and You continually teach me wisdom in the deepest part of me.

Take "Whiteout", and Your perfect correction tape;
and clear my name, so that I can stand before You.

Let me hear joy and gladness,
even as the destructive bonds that bind me are broken
and the life I have built around them crumble.
Don't look back at the ugly bonds I've built.
Don't look at the other things I've done to hurt people
because I was afraid to be taught.

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a continuous spirit of rightness within me.
Do not refuse "to do business,"
with me, although I deserve no less,
and neither take Your Holy Guidance from me.
Give me back the joy of knowing that You are my Father
and give me a willing spirit, to keep on keeping on.

Then will I teach the children of Your ways,
and the adults heavily in debt will see
what a joy it is to live debt free.
Save me from the overwhelming knowledge
that I have done the very things, that in my youth,
I swore I would not do.

Save me, O God, For You are the only one
who can give me back my voice
That I may sing your praises
and declare the rightness of your plan.

I know that You take no pleasure in the holier-than-thou attitude
of those who think there investments are sure.
I know that You are not impressed with the austerity that I have practiced
in Your Name.
For the only sacrifice You desire is a
vulnerable heart, a willing spirit, and a realization that we are all
debtors in Your eyes.
And in doing so Your spirit can find room to live.

And then will this life prosper again;
And then will You protect its investments.
Then whenever I refuse a risky investment or receive a gracious dividend,
it will not be an act of self-righteousness
but an act of love.

Becky Pickering and her husband, Joe, have been married thirty years. They have three children, and attend the Disciples of Christ Church in Elkland, MO. She is a high school special education teacher.



A Christian artist's odyssey: Where can I use *my* gifts?

Nancy McClane

Looking back at my life I can see how God blessed me with talent and opportunities, but it has been difficult to use them specifically for the cause of Christ. He blessed me with a mother who convinced me as a child that I could do anything artistically that I set my mind to. She was very sick a great deal of the time so she motivated me to sew, bake, and create Bible class visuals for her by telling me how wonderful I was at everything I did. As a child eager for affirmation and attention I believed every word she said and even though I wasn't necessarily blessed with exceptional talent, I developed exceptional confidence in my own abilities because of her encouragement and love for me. I could sew and bake and paint at the age of eight. I was given private art lessons as a child even though my parents couldn't really afford them. Both parents encouraged me to be the best at who God created me to be and there was never any doubt that I wanted to be an artist.

I won the art scholarship my senior year in high school and majored in art at Freed-Hardeman University, selling my work at different exhibits. The Associates on campus would ask me to illustrate cookbooks, and decorate for spring fashion shows. I didn't know it at the time, but I think some

of the excitement and joy in volunteering my talent came from the loving, gracious way June Oldham affirmed me in my talent. Later, God would teach me how to serve in persecution and rejection but many hard lessons would need to come first.

Most of the time growing up in non-instrumental Churches of Christ my perspective was one of a fellowship of believers who were very non-visual, left-brain, and pragmatic group of people. Stoic common sense and logical thinking were much preferred above aesthetic self-expression. And I had also developed that side of myself beautifully. During my early years in this environment, I developed the rational, thinking side of my personality as much as I had the creative, intuitive side. After I took the Myers-Briggs personality profile I found out that only a very small percentage of the population had the particular personality type I had. My family really teases me about this when I do something a little too "different."

I think I was able to be so strong in such opposite areas because I had learned to compartmentalize my life. I knew the church did not embrace artistic creativity. I could see that the visual was always kept very low-key and was only allowed to be expressed in certain acceptable ways. So I decided I would do my "art thing" as a career

and keep that separate from my church work. I can now see that this decision was based partially on my own immaturity and ignorance of how God wants to use the total person in His kingdom, but because I never saw the church encouraging or embracing the expression of individual artistic talent, I just tried to fit in.

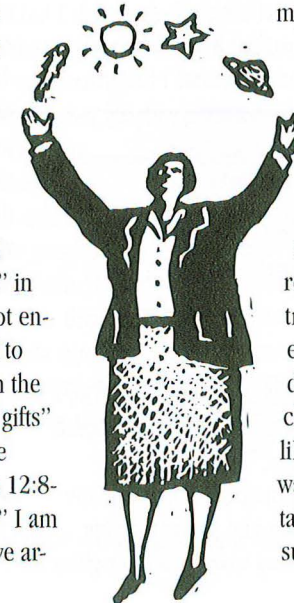
We can't truly be Christ's followers and compartmentalize our lives. God wants to permeate every aspect of our lives. He can use *all* of our gifts in the body of Christ! Everything we think and plan to do should be done to His glory. I think some Churches of Christ believe free expression of the visual arts (even in a Christian context) is worldly and offensive. The Restoration Movement was a reaction against some of the creative excesses of high church, but I think we threw out the baby with the bath water. It's almost like there's an unwritten creed which dictates that very little visual expression will be tolerated. The God I know and serve is not like this at all! Any talent expressed to the glory of God should be respected.

It was expected and encouraged that I use my "spiritual gifts" in the body, but I was not encouraged or expected to use my "other gifts" in the church. By "spiritual gifts" I am referring to those listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 and by "other gifts" I am referring to my creative ar-

tistic gifts. Even though "spiritual gifts" are the only gifts specifically mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, all abilities and talents are referred to in verse 4-6, and this includes my "other gifts." Paul is clearly telling us not to compartmentalize the use of our abilities, but to understand the body imagery and use all of our gifts for the good of the whole.

We had been in ministry serving at a few different churches before I truly began to understand this passage. I would do some creative work in Bible classes I was teaching and help Curtis illustrate a sermon idea here and there. It was during these years that I saw I could use my artistic talents in the body indirectly. I used my artistic talents in the socially acceptable way of homemaking and a ministry of hospitality. I constantly opened my home to others, cooked and prepared colorful, delicious meals, decorated my home with my own art work, sewed clothes for

my children, and taught art part time in the local elementary schools. I organized a yearly art show for all my students and was asked to judge other art shows in the area. I felt respected and like a contributing member of society, but no matter what I did creatively in the church, I never really felt like I was needed or wanted with my particular talents because of the subtle pecking order of



gifts I saw in the church. Many times I wished I could have lived in the Middle Ages as an artist because they were highly prized and respected as visual teachers of the Word of God before the Bible was printed. Many cathedrals in Europe still show the beautiful frescoes, stained glass and architecture of respected Christian artists.

I never really felt like I was able to use my creative ability in a satisfying dynamic way until about twelve years ago. I was moving ahead with my painting skills and I wanted to use that ability to make the Bible lessons come alive for the children I taught.

So I decided I was going to paint a huge mural on my classroom wall to depict the awesome beauty and tranquility of the garden of Eden right after God's creative masterpiece was conceived. I spent all summer in my spare time painting the whole wall of the classroom. It was a fantastic rendition and I was very proud of my work. That's why it really shocked me when word got back to me that I was just showing off and I had also desecrated the building with my

At one point a mural I did of Jesus on the cross was taken down, folded up, and stuffed under a pew.

painting.

As I thought about this response, I realized that perhaps I did have some hidden motives. I think I did the painting in some part to prove to my fellow brothers and sisters that my gifts were just as worthy as their gifts.

It was as this time that I began to take a good hard look at my motives for serving and using my gifts as I had. I had felt like artistic gifts were looked down upon by my fellow Christians and I wanted to be appreciated and accepted. I was looking to humans for acceptance instead of God and I saw clearly that a works-based ministry performed to impress others was sinful and very wrong—the exact opposite of the “mind of Christ” revealed in Philippians 2.

The next church we ministered at was a fresh start for me, a chance to minister and use my talents for God alone. I would seek His affirmation only. I decided that everything I did to serve would be behind the scenes between God and me. I was so disillusioned with the people pleasing, competitive, works-based kind of ministry that I decided no more.

I was mature enough not to need the praise of others. The problem here was the I didn't do anything proactive with my talent because I was afraid people would think I was doing it to show off. I was still being motivated by others instead of God only. This congregation had a very utilitarian, pragmatic mind-set and didn't see the need for creativity anywhere. The classrooms were very bare, no bulletin boards were ever maintained, the baptistery didn't even have a painting. Finally, I decided I would make a difference regardless of what people thought so I asked the communications committee if I could have a bulletin board ministry. They said no, they would rather have permanent pictures up in the foyer. One

time a mural I did on paper of Jesus on the cross was taken down, folded up and stuffed under a pew.

At this point I felt my talent was totally disrespected and so did even less. I began to see realistically that any serving and using of my talents done at church would be done in an atmosphere of rejection. For a long time I used my talents outside the church. I developed a very successful craft business, giving a donation to missions every year. I also taught art part time at our local elementary school and painted a huge literacy mural on the wall outside the library wall. Other schools started asking me to paint murals and last summer I painted a map of the world on the parking lot. I felt so respected at school even professors from Michigan State University would consult me and praise me. The Lansing *State Journal* did an article on me.

The children loved me as their art teacher and the staff where I worked were so kind and respectful I couldn't understand why my brothers and sisters in the church were so uncaring and disrespectful. After a Ladies' Day a painting I spent hours on was thrown in the garbage even after someone asked them to save it. I don't blame the precious people at this church and I forgive them. I don't even think they realized how these responses stifled my creativity, but I do believe God used each of these experiences as a two-fold lesson for me.

I had learned that God wants us to serve and use our gifts even when we feel disrespected and unappreciated and he will give us the strength to do it. The second great lesson was that creative people do their best work when motivated by love, respect, and encouragement.

I guess I'm not so different from most people. I like to feel loved and appreciated when giving of myself and serving others. But the challenge and most mature use of one's gifts comes in an environment of hostile rejection. That's when courage and strength from God is at its greatest. That's when you begin to realize the difference between serving God and serving for the praise of people. Look at the crucifixion: Jesus' greatest act of service came in the midst of hostile rejection. We must persevere and not be discouraged when we are rejected in the use of our gifts. This was the hardest lesson for me to learn because I have always been motivated by praise.

I realize that not everyone has the same taste. Even in creatively open churches, people must respect others' wishes and use their talents in an atmosphere of co-operation, each one preferring the others. I also think as we bear with one another, differences that a free and open atmosphere, full of love and respect, will encourage people with different and unique talents to flourish and accomplish great things in the kingdom! †

Nancy McClane is an artist, teacher, and board member of Integrity. She and her husband, Curtis, minister to the Troy Church of Christ in Troy, MI.



Sing to the Lord a new song (I'll even write it for you!)

Amy Davis

The Psalter contains a wonderful call to creativity in worship in Psalm 98:

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—shout for joy before the Lord, the King.” (Psalm 98:1-6).

The Lord *has* done marvelous things. And he knows how forgetful we are. That's why in the Old Testament people so often responded to an encounter with God by giving him a new name based on the experience,

building an altar, or singing a new song. (Gives new meaning to Hebrews 13:15, “Let us therefore continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name.”) Miriam and the Israelites sang a new song to the Lord after they crossed the Red Sea on dry ground (Exodus 15). Mary sang a new song when her cousin Elizabeth recognized the Christ child in Mary's womb (Luke 1). And when we stand with Jesus on Mt. Zion, we will sing a new song that only the redeemed can learn (Revelation 14). What new songs are we singing to God today?

► What experiences with God in our own lives could be commemorated by a new song?

Although I have written a few pieces for school assignments, I do not have the brain of a composer. Composers *think* music; they have music constantly going through their minds waiting to be written down and fitted together into a finished work. The only tunes I have going through my mind are catchy commercial jingles; “Your thirty-one Metro Detroit Ford Dealers—Think Ford First.” (Able to sing along, weren't you?!) However, a few summers ago,

after memorizing Psalm 139, there was suddenly music to go along with it. Since I usually forget new tunes before I am able to write them down, I stopped and prayed, “Lord, this is your song. I can't write music. If you want this written down and shared with others, then let me remember it.” It is now a piece for 4-part a cappella choir. And just a few weeks ago, as I was having a very frustrating week with a sick baby and a short temper, he gave me another song based on his words to Paul, “Your grace is sufficient for me. Your strength is made perfect when I'm weak. And Lord, right now I feel so weak, and so I claim your promise. Your grace is sufficient for me.” This song was a gift of encouragement from my Lord, a new song that I could sing to remind myself of his sustaining presence.

► The source

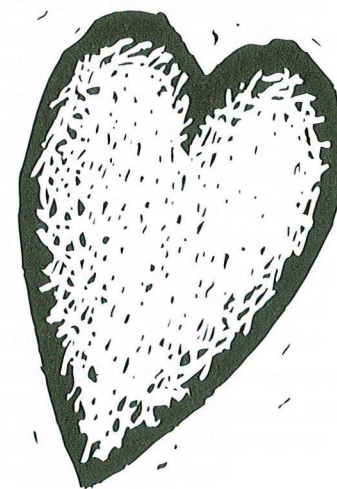
He has also given me new songs to sing to him during personal times of worship (several times while I was vacuuming!). I did not plan them or write them down or share them with others but simply let the prayer of my heart flow out in a song. The Lord revealed himself to me at the altar of praise. Abraham experienced God as “The Lord will Provide” when God provided the very sacrifice he demanded. For Abraham it was a ram, for me it was a song.

Even the praise comes from you. Every prayer that I raise comes from you. Fill my mouth with words of

worship and I'll give them back to you, because Lord, they're not my own. They come from you alone. Even the praise, every feeling and phrase, even the praise comes from you.

This song by Claire Cloninger changed the way I look at worship. God is the source of creativity, even in worship. The mythological muse is a beautiful image, but it is the Spirit of God who truly stands beside and breathes creativity into us. Now, that's inspiration!

Think back to the movie *Amadeus*, when Mozart is dictating the *Requiem* to Salieri. The *Requiem* may have been in Salieri's handwriting but the music was pure Mozart! Salieri had the musical training and ability to write down what Mozart sang to him, but this merely made him useful to the one with superior talent. Salieri may have written a *Requiem* of his own, but have you ever heard of it? Do you see where I'm going with this?



When we get out of the way and let the Spirit shine through, we have the beauty of a spontaneous fresh experience. John 3:8 "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." Sunday morning. Someone begins a song that is on his or her heart (but not on the order of worship). The pianist improvises a song that expresses the mood of the congregation and prepares their hearts to receive God's message. Without planning, every part of the service seems to rein-

force the same message. The minister abandons his prepared sermon because the Lord shows him a greater need. Can you hear the Spirit wind? He comes into what we have and makes it so much better than it was. he completes the work he began in us.

Sing to the Lord a new song. Will you try it? Will you build an altar of praise the next time God reveals himself to you? Start in your prayer closet alone with your Savior, and as he overwhelms you with his glory, just start singing. †

Amy Davis is a mother, wife, singer, and piano teacher who worships with the Troy, MI, Church of Christ.



A CLOSER LOOK

Allegory: the veil that reveals

Elton D. Higgs

Recently I was told of a very strict Christian couple who pulled their children out of Sunday school because the teaching materials used imaginary situations to reinforce biblical principles. It seems these parents were opposed to their children being presented with anything fictional or imaginary, however constructive the purpose behind it. How sad for the children, because the very essence of children's play involves their self-made adventures of imagination, by which they practice at being adults. Furthermore, they learn

not only by precept, but by examples and "what if" projections. The rejection of all forms of fiction would seem to bring into question the many instances in the Bible of stories told (or used) to make a point and not primarily to convey literal facts, such as the parables of Jesus and the frequent use of allegory, which is the presentation of one thing in terms of another.

Paul, in fact, uses the term "allegory" to describe the lesson to be derived from the story of Abraham's two sons by different women:

Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

(Gal. 4:21-26, RSV)

But it is not only literally true stories that are given an allegorical application in the Bible, for created allegories are designed specifically to convey truths that underlie the surface of their narrative, as in the apocalyptic passages of Daniel and Revelation. Prophetic dreams, such as those of Joseph in Genesis, also embody truths which are made more impressive through the necessity of allegorical interpretation. It seems to me that we can conclude that imagined stories, and allegory in particular, may be used to convey truth in a

way that people pay special attention to.

There are many historical examples of extra-biblical allegory written by Christians, and, indeed, most of the great allegories in Western literature were written from a Christian perspective. I am thinking of such works as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, to mention only the best-known ones.

It was this fact that emboldened me to propose a special course in Christian Allegory at the university where I teach. Although the secular setting in which I taught this course made me aware of the special need to be objective about the religious significance of the works I covered, reading and teaching them impressed upon me the way they can speak God's message even to unbelievers and doubters, to say nothing of how they can enrich the lives of those who are already committed to the doctrines reflected in them. I want to illustrate for *Integrity's* readers some of the ways that allegory can be a special avenue to enlightenment about spiritual realities.

The most-read part of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is the first section, called the *Inferno*, which depicts the perfect justice of God's punishments in Hell. Dante is conducted on a journey through the nine circles of Hell (as he imagines it, of course) and views the whole range of sins and punishments, from the most venial (those committed through weakness or lack of knowledge) to the

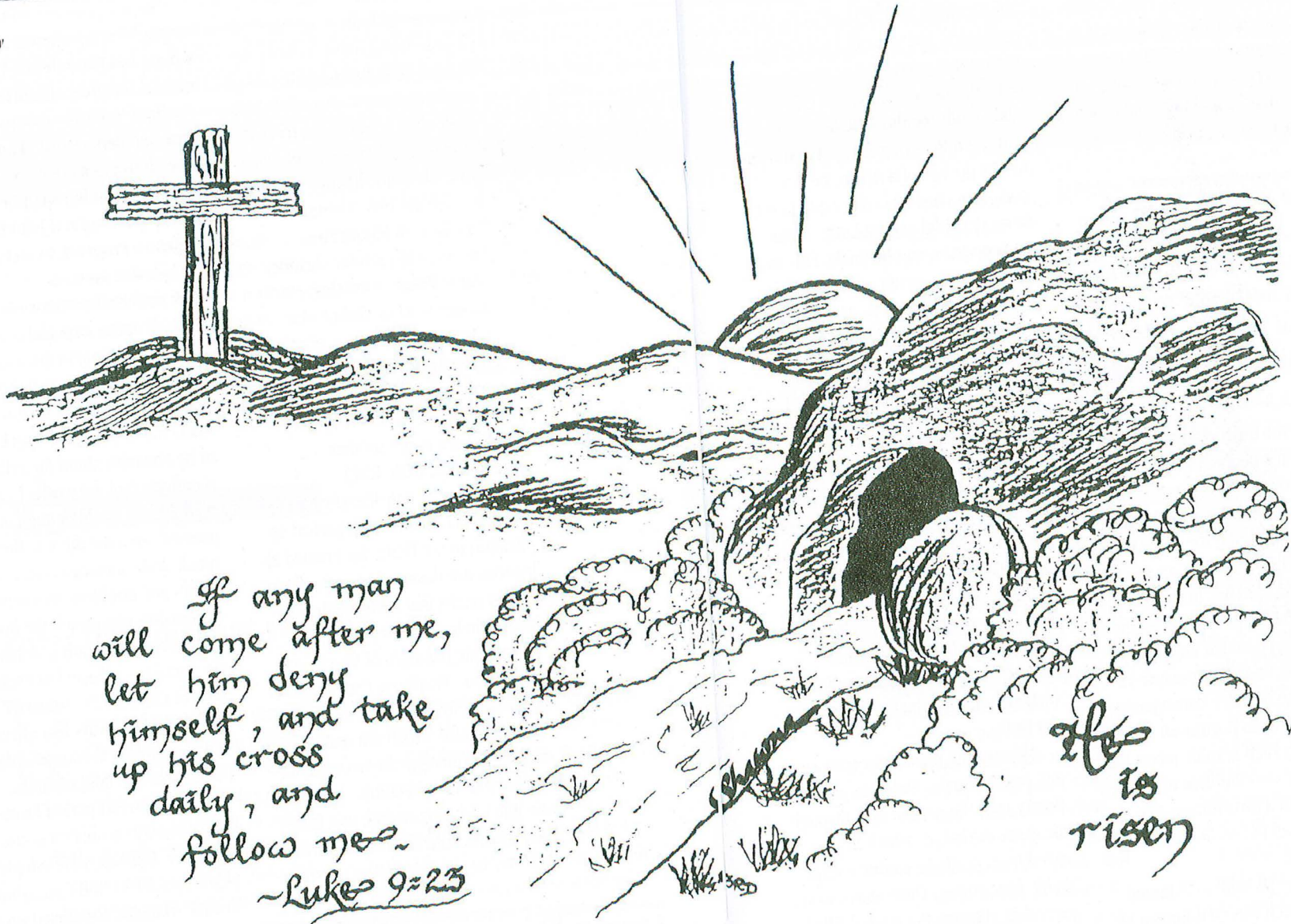
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I want to illustrate for *Integrity's* readers some of the ways that allegory can be a special avenue to enlightenment about spiritual realities.



PEN-AND-INK MEDITATION

Shawna Dowdy



If any man
will come after me,
let him deny
himself, and take
up his cross
daily, and
follow me.
~Lukes 9:23

He
is
risen

Shawna Dowdy attends the South Redford Church of Christ with her husband, Jerome. Besides her pen and ink drawings, she paints murals, is a calligraphist, and arranges flowers.

most deadly (premeditated deceit and treachery). The appropriateness of the punishments to the sins is seen in such scenes as gluttons being forced to lie in stinking garbage (since they have made garbage bags of themselves), fortune tellers with their heads on backward (able only to see what is behind and not what is ahead of them), and hypocrites wearing

Dante's gift was to portray all of this pictorially in such graphic terms that the insidious deceitfulness of evil was laid bare with a forcefulness that mere doctrinal instruction could not have equaled.

leadens robes which are gilded on the outside. The most common characteristic of the people in Hell is that they are doomed to endure for all eternity an intensified form of what they rebelliously did for profit or pleasure while they lived on earth. In other words, God has forced them to deal with the harsh or filthy reality of what they had deluded themselves into thinking had some positive reward with no negative consequences. Dante's gift was to portray all of this pictorially in such graphic terms that the insidious deceitfulness of evil was laid bare with a forcefulness that mere doctrinal instruction could not have equaled.

The Faerie Queene by Edmund Spenser is much less well-known by people in general than is the *Divine Comedy*, but anyone who has taken a survey course in English literature

has probably been introduced to it by reading sections of the first Book, which portrays the perilous adventures of Redcross Knight (representing the virtue of Holiness) as he goes on a quest to deliver the country of a beautiful maiden from a marauding dragon. The young woman represents Truth (or the True Church), and when Redcross is separated from her by the lies of a villain, he becomes increasingly vulnerable to yet more deceitful manipulators of his inexperience, and he finally falls victim to his own pride as he is imprisoned by a giant who is, with symbolic significance, a puffed up bag of wind. Redcross is delivered from the giant's prison, but he must undergo discipline and instruction in the House of Holiness (where three of the principal instructors are characters named Faith, Hope, and Love) before he can deal with the dragon (always a symbol of the Devil). The fight in which he finally slays the dragon is filled with allusions to symbols in Scripture, such as the Water of Life and the Tree of Life through which Redcross is renewed during the two nights separating the three days of the battle.

Although he must show courage and perseverance, Redcross achieves victory over the dragon only through the grace of God, by which he is saved from perils he cannot escape in his own power. Once again, as is typical in allegory, the symbol-filled narrative carries the reader along, presenting truth indirectly, but in images that etch themselves on the memory.

Probably the best known of all Christian allegories is John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, written by a self-educated tinker in the late 17th century while he was imprisoned for preaching his faith. His famous book tells the story of a man named Christian who flees the City of Destruction (the sinful society of mankind) to seek deliverance not only from the predicted incineration of his city, but also from the burden on his back (his sinful nature), which he can by no means remove. He is instructed by a man called Evangelist to make his way to a certain Wicket Gate, where he will be told what he must do. However, he is deterred by the false advice of Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, who counsels him to take a supposedly easier way. But only the Gate to which he was originally directed can put him on the "straight and narrow" path which leads to salvation and the release from his burden. When finally, after more peril and more instruction, he reaches the point at which his burden falls off, we are presented with one of the most marvelous portrayals of a saving encounter with Christ in all literature:

He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a Cross, and a little below in the bottom, a Sepulchre. So I saw in my Dream, that just as Christian came up with the Cross, his burden loosed from off his back, and began to tumble; and so continued to do, till it came to the mouth of the

Sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.¹

The placement of the Sepulchre at the bottom of the same hill upon which the Cross rests is a brilliant stroke of imagination which gives us a special insight into the "burying" of our sins when they are removed by the power of the Cross. Christ is no longer in the tomb, but that burial spot is symbolically the final resting place for our sins, which will rise to haunt us no more. That is a point which could not have been made nearly so effectively through straightforward doctrinal instruction.

One of the best modern expounders of Christian doctrine, C. S. Lewis, is also an apostle of sanctified imagination and a writer of religious fantasy which includes some very memorable allegorical passages. (He has one explicitly allegorical work, *Pilgrim's Regress*, which depicts his own journey "back" to his spiritual home from the "foreign" country of secularism.) None who are familiar with his *Narnia* books will forget the episode where Aslan, the lion representing Christ, sacrifices himself to rescue a wayward boy who has betrayed his brother and sisters. Aslan's submission to humiliation and to being sacrificed on an ancient stone table is a representation in other terms of the crucifixion of Christ, but the juxtaposition of the two in our minds forces a fresh view of the biblical event being mirrored. The stone table on which Aslan is sacrificed is a place for the execution of God's absolute justice, but as it breaks in half when Aslan is resurrected, we see

with new eyes the fact that the power of sin to destroy us through God's judgment has been forever broken and made impotent. Again and again, Lewis clothes the truths of God with fresh life in his stories.

It is fitting, then, to conclude with the words of C. S. Lewis in which he asserts the special function of allegory as an avenue of truth:

For the function of allegory is not to hide but to reveal, and it is properly used only for that which cannot be said, or so well said in literal speech.

The inner life, and specially the life of love, religion, and spiritual adventure, has therefore always been the field of true allegory; for here there are intangibles which only allegory can fix and reticences which only allegory can overcome.²

Since Scripture itself manifests allegory as a special way to present God's message, we should value its potential even as an instrument of human imagination addressed to clarifying what God has already revealed. Many have profited thereby. †

NOTES

1 John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Henry Frowde, Oxford U. Press Warehouse, 1904), p. 43.

2 C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (New York: Oxford U. Press [Galaxy Books], 1958), p. 166.

Elton Higgs has been a professor of English at the University of Michigan-Dearborn for 33 years. He is a frequent contributor and a longtime Board member of Integrity.



REAL-LIFE APPLICATION

Creative preaching

Mark Frost

Push the metal fitting of the seat belt into the buckle until it clicks. . .

The flight attendant was reciting her familiar litany as the plane taxied toward the runway.

Pull the strap to tighten. To unfasten the seat belt, lift up . . .

Sitting directly in front of her, a businessman mindlessly thumbed through a recent *Money* magazine.

Make sure your seat back and tray table are in the upright and locked position and that all carry-on luggage is stowed under . . .

A husband and wife seated over the wing were already fast asleep.

Keep your seat belt fastened securely around you until the captain has . . .

Babies wailed; siblings rived; teens chattered excitedly.

In the unlikely event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, an oxygen mask will . . .

Most of the passengers stared straight ahead, oblivious to the message.

What a metaphor for preaching: an important, but overly-familiar message; a communicator who has the message down pat; listeners who have "heard it all before" and thus cease to hear at all. One wonders what difference there might be between the message spoken in the airliner and the message spoken in church.

"The difference," suggested a friend with whom I shared this analogy, "is that the airplane is actually going somewhere." The fact that such a remark could be made—much less that it is true enough to evoke a smile—is a witness against the purposelessness of many churches and the blandness of the preaching therein. I would suggest that any message that can be slept through or mindlessly ignored is not authentic preaching. In fact, I believe that faithful preaching is by definition creative preaching.

► Preaching mediates the creative word of God

In preaching, it is nothing less than the word of God that is proclaimed. And it was through his word that God created the world. "God said 'let there be. . . ' and it was so." As Lynn Anderson comments,

Preaching reflects God's creative act, thus is itself a creative act. Preaching orders ideas which shape experience. Like the primal creative word of God, the preached word also gives form to substance and life to matter. The preacher can actually expect the word he speaks for God to change the very form and essence of persons.¹

Because God's Word carries creation power, creativity in preaching must be more than emotional manipulation or rhetorical gimmickry. Rather, it springs from the power inherent in God's word—power to call into existence that which does not yet exist. When a preacher senses that his message has become dull and routine, the solution is rarely found in a new book of sermon illustrations. Rather, attention needs to be given to three vital concerns.

► Allowing God to create new reality in the preacher

Studying a text in order to "get up a sermon" will yield just that: a sermon. One must bear in mind, though, that the dictionary defines a sermon as "a serious talk on behavior, responsibility, etc., *especially a long, tedious one.*"² Surely we aim

for more in our preaching! Creative, life-altering preaching begins when a preacher opens up his life to the power of God's Word. This means that preacher preparation begins long before sermon preparation.

The apostle Paul spoke of the necessary process in his second letter to the Corinthian church: "and we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."³ A preacher must approach the text unveiled. From the context, it is clear that the veil is a mind made dull by preconceived notions.⁴ The best such a preacher can hope for is that he can convince his hearers that God's glory is somewhere underneath the veil.

God spoke through a blazing bush and a drubbed donkey, through robed royalty as well as a naked prophet, through six-winged seraphs and a bug-eating baptizer.

But only an unveiled preacher can truly reflect the Lord's glory to his hearers. An unveiled preacher is open to the movement of the Spirit within as he encounters the text of God's Word. An unveiled preacher does not shrink from the power of that Word, even though it may pierce him like a sword, sear him like a firebrand, or shatter him like a hammer. An unveiled preacher approaches a text humbly, seeking not only its truth, but its transforming power. In approaching the Word unveiled, one

becomes the canvas on which God's creativity is continually displayed "with ever-increasing glory."

► Seeing creative possibilities in one's listeners

As a preacher sees himself being transformed into Christ's likeness, he recognizes something very important about his hearers: they too are works in progress, being fashioned by God's Spirit:

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.⁵

Preaching is more than lobbing grenades into the midst of nameless, faceless enemies. It is more than releasing words into space with the vague hope that someone might hear and understand. Preaching is a divine-human collaborative effort. As a result of the process, human beings become a "letter" containing the message of Christ. But by God's grace, the influence of the preacher is also apparent in the finished product. Thus our hearers bear witness to the quality of our ministry as well as to the power of God's Spirit.

Realizing this changes how one views the task of preaching. It fuels a desire within to know the people to whom one preaches—to know their hopes, fears, struggles, dreams, desires, hopes, passions, and joys. It also awakens within the preacher a

longing to see his hearers not as they are but as God wills them to be. As Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians, "My dear children . . . I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you."⁶ It is this longing which drives a preacher's desire to communicate creatively.

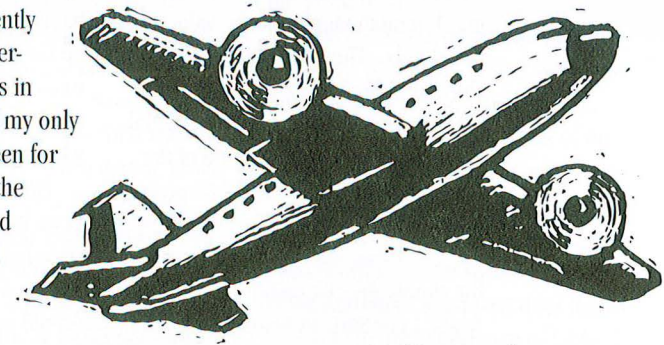
I've consistently tried to instill certain basic values in my children. If my only concern had been for the integrity of the message, I could have conducted seminars in Christian ethics for my

kids when they were toddlers. But my longing to actually see ethical conduct as a part of their character forced me to get creative. How do you teach abstract concepts like truthfulness and altruism to a first-grader? A burning passion to mold the child's character will drive a parent to find a way! And the result, as seen by a neutral observer, will be creative communication. In the same way, a preacher's craving to see Jesus' character in his hearers will drive him to find creative ways to transmit the message.

► Using creative communication methods

Finally, a preacher must attend to the communication process itself. My ministry training at Harding College was long on biblical knowledge Bible study tools. One course on sermon delivery that drew on the principles of classical rhetoric was the sum total of

my training in the actual process of communication. In my early years of ministry, sermon preparation was a delight as I used my study tools to add to my knowledge base. But sermon delivery was frustrating as I saw the pearls I had



mined in my study received with blank stares, yawns, and even snores.

Slowly, I came to see the necessity of gaining skill as a communicator. I discovered that my neglect in this area was enabled by my ignorance of the variety of means God uses to get his point across. God spoke through a blazing bush and a drubbed donkey, through robed royalty as well as a naked prophet, through six-winged seraphs and a bug-eating baptizer. In the Bible, he speaks in stories, parables, laws, songs, psalms, letters, exhortations, diatribes, rhetorical questions, wildly fanciful apocalyptic language, genealogies, and yes, even sermons! Obviously, God himself values variety and creativity in communication.

Fortunately, there is a wealth of contemporary resources to aid the preacher in gaining communicative

skill. I am deeply indebted to writers like Fred Craddock⁷, Thomas Long⁸, Eugene Lowry⁹, and David Buttrick¹⁰ for helping me attend to the process of communicating God's eternal truth in a way that can be heard with enthusiasm. Even more, I'm indebted to a host of Bible characters for challenging me to be creative in preaching. Jeremiah taught me the value of visual aids. The prophet Nathan showed me how to use "innocent" stories to cut through layers of denial. The apostle John reminds me of the need for vivid, even fanciful imagery. From Israel's prophets I learned that there is a time for drama and a time for simple proclamation. And from Jesus, I continue to learn how to live and speak the priceless good news of a God who would stop at nothing to redeem his fallen creation.

► As goes the pulpit...

Our money-and-success-driven culture says that the jet-setters ignoring the flight attendant on the airplane are really "going somewhere"—climbing career ladders, making deals, doing meetings, outfoxing the competition, taking "status" vacations. That same culture hangs a bargain-basement price tag on the message I proclaim week after week. But if that message is true, it is the church that is really "going somewhere."

How I go about my task of preaching may well make the difference between someone losing their way or making the final destination. An old adage says, "as goes the pulpit, so goes the church." Knowing this, how can I give anything less than my creative best to proclaiming God's new creation? †

Endnotes

- 1 Lynn Anderson, *Freshness for the Far Journey*, (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1992), p. 72.
- 2 *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1984). Italics mine.
- 3 2 Corinthians 3:18
- 4 2 Corinthians 3:14-17
- 5 2 Corinthians 3:2-3
- 6 Galatians 4:19
- 7 Fred Craddock, *Overbearing the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978) and *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985).
- 8 Thomas Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989).
- 9 Eugene Lowry, *How to Preach a Parable* (Nashville, Abingdon: 1989).
- 10 David Buttrick, *Homiletic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

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Worship as visual encounter with God

Curtis D. McClane

The sun broke through the afternoon clouds, bounced off of the window panes, and displayed a dazzling array of prism colors on the cross. A soft gasp escaped from the crowd gathered there. This was the final worship assembly for those participating in the dedication of the new Z.T. Sweeney chapel at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. We had already been treated to a pastoral setting with running water in the baptismal font and greenery surrounding the sanctuary. And now God was adding the crowning, grand finale with the rainbow colors dancing in glee around the bronze cross affixed on the wall behind the speakers' stand.

On this particular afternoon, as never before, I discovered that a corporate worship assembly could be a visual encounter with God. Because of this experience, I was introduced to the reality that visual surroundings contribute in a unique way to one's encounter with God.

Even though my heritage and background had little room for the visual in a worship assembly, this dedication service touched a deep part of my soul that had not been stirred for ages.

It seemed that silent chords of angels' harps deep within the dark caverns of my soul began to play music that chased away the demons of medi-

ocrity, the stench of predictability, and the grind of the ordinary.

This particular afternoon forced questions upon me. Voices within my head would not stop. The questions came cascading over the folds of my cerebellum. The following are representative of some of those questions: Why has the visual aspect of worship been downplayed in so many of our congregations? What part does the visual play in the experience of faith? Is there a "theology of seeing" that plays an important part in the ministry of Jesus?

One incident touched my heart that relates to this entire issue of visual expression of faith. A friend of mine related a situation where in a western state a new convert was chastised for her expression of the visual. After she was baptized, she desired to show her appreciation to her new found family in Christ. She crocheted a large panel of the crucifixion of Jesus and donated it to the church. Her art work was hung in the main foyer. But not for long. After heated discussion and rage over something so outrageously "Catholic" hanging in the main lobby, the piece was taken down. This young Christian was hurt and puzzled over what the furor was about.

In this article I want to explore the biblical, historical, aesthetic and practical foundations for the visual arts

being included in the worship setting. With such a foundation I am seeking to make a case for “visual surroundings contributing in a unique way to one’s encounter with God.”

► **The biblical foundation**

In the Pentateuch, the first section of the Hebrew Bible, it is by no means an accident that “seeing” is an important part of the divine record. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, he “saw” that it was good. In addition to his “seeing” that every part of the creative act was good following its completion, there is an in-depth visual description of the creation and the created order. The Genesis narrator is attempting to paint verbal pictures for the reader so that he/she can “see” what went on during those early days of the earth.

Following the flood, after Noah and his family leave the boat, Noah sacrifices some animals on the altar. It is during this worship offering time that God speaks to Noah and informs him that the rainbow in the sky is His commitment to never destroying the land again with a flood. I have always thought that as Noah prepared the sacrifice the beautiful bow made its way across the expansive heavens as God’s response to human worship. (See Genesis 8 and 9).

On another occasion, when Moses is in the desert near the mountain named Horeb, tending his father-in-law’s flock of sheep, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. The bush was not consumed. Moses was intrigued by this phenomenon and inched forward to

investigate. It was during this epiphany that God tells Moses to take his sandals off because he is standing on holy ground. And during this encounter God reveals to Moses His plans for the future of Israel.

During the actual reception of the ten commandments, the people of the nation Israel gathered at the base of the mountain while Moses went up. The earth shook, lightning, fire and smoke filled the area. This visual manifestation of God’s presence was a Stephen Spielberg par excellence!

You do not have to read very far in the annals of Israel’s history to discover how important the visual was in the forming, defining and maintaining of corporate faith. Whether we are looking at creation, the ten commandments, the burning bush, or the shaking mountain—it was clear that God was interested in appealing to the visual to make his presence known. It is this presence that provides the impetus for a visual manifestation of reverential worship.

In Jesus’ own ministry the synoptic writers carefully point out the sight that Jesus restores to the blind. And in the gospel of John the man born blind pays homage to Jesus after finding out who restored his sight. The existential reality of “vision” provides the backdrop for seeing the essential work of God in the lives of human beings. In the famous walk on the road to Emmaus Jesus encounters two disciples who do not recognize him. But it is during the time of table fellowship that their eyes are opened and they really recognize Jesus. The natural symbols and elements of communion

are a visual contact point with the essential deity and nature of Jesus. It is by participating in this symbolic supper that we encounter the mystical presence of our Lord. Just so, the visual and aesthetic dimension of our worship assembly provides space and time for our own personal, mystical encounters with the Living, Risen Lord.

► **The historical foundation**

Even though the Anabaptist movement of the fifteenth century sought to eradicate all vestiges of medieval visual art and icons from their houses of worship, the entire Protestant movement did not follow that direction. Ironically, though, the Restoration Movement did associate art and icons with the corrupt medieval church and saw as part of its calling the restoration of the pristine, unadulterated worship style of the primitive church.

Not having the benefit of current research, those leaders had no way of knowing just how significant a role the arts undoubtedly played in the history of the early church.

Since the early leaders of our movement relied heavily on the ability of reason to bring about restoration, it was not deemed important to find a place for the aesthetic. Not having the benefit of current research, those leaders had no way of knowing just how significant a role the arts undoubtedly played at such a time in the history of the early church.

In 1922, a British officer discovered in Syria the ancient ruins of a

house church with intricate paintings on the walls. For about fifteen years excavations continued on this site. It was named Dura-Europos. For sixteen years (240 A.D. to 256 A.D.) this house, converted into a sanctuary, was used by the Christians in that region for their assemblies. This house church at Dura contained eight rooms, with “the baptistery and the assembly hall provid[ing] the most concrete information on early Christian liturgies” (Janet R. Walton, *Art and Worship*, Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988, page 22).

The paintings in the baptistery consist of eight particular scenes from the Bible: two are from the Old Testament and the remaining six are from the New Testament. The major painting, near the baptismal font itself, is a rendition of the Shepherd and the Sheep. Below it is the fall of Adam and Eve. On the remaining walls are the following pictures: Procession of the Women to the Sepulcher on Easter Morning, the Healing of the Paralytic, Jesus walking on the Water, The Woman at the Well, David and Goliath, and a garden scene, possibly the garden of Gethsemane.

“For the community at Dura, these subjects described significant moments in the history of God’s relationship with people, emphasizing a divine response to human beings in need” (Ibid., 23). Perhaps too, this selection of pictures may represent orthodox, stabilizing events in which the Durene community sought to articulate major tenets of its faith in a metropolitan setting with so

many competing ideologies to choose from. At any rate, it would be hard to improve on such a selection as significant events which might be used to remind congregants of the nature and content of the faith they shared.

Perhaps most interesting and germane to our point here is how early this work was done. We are only looking at one hundred and fifty years after the close of the New Testament canon. The use of the visual to express core elements and scenes of the Christian faith is not exclusively a medieval phenomenon. If one is to object to the use of the visual in the sanctuary, the "medieval icon" argument can no longer be sustained. Representations of Biblical characters, scenes, and events existed earlier than most of the extant New Testament Greek manuscripts!

► **The aesthetic foundation**

It has been a source of fascination for me to watch how well most of us decorate our homes, but when it comes to the sanctuary we grudgingly and sparsely hang something here or there, calling it an attempt at decorating. Admittedly, history has produced its abundant examples of overkill in some religious traditions, but must we trade the extravagant for the empty? Such vacuous worship places tend to reflect a blandness of style in the worship experience itself. And it's not much of a step to say that blandness of style comes from a form void of meaning.

We have been reluctant to pursue the connection between beauty and truth. Does a thing have to be bland to be godly and acceptable? Could it

be that truth is expressed aesthetically? Could it be that the very nature of truth is beauty itself? Perhaps a philosophical no-nonsense perspective on life, handed down from the agrarian cultures that our forefathers came from, has dominated our expression of truth to the exclusion of powerful and dynamic dimensions that would imprint the message on hearts, minds and souls much more deeply.

Think of the natural materials and objects we adorn our homes with. What would be wrong with adorning our houses of worship in the same way? Furthermore, it would offer new ways of thinking about worship if we were to include themes surrounding the natural world. Think of the great visual lessons that could be attached to the grapevine. Think of the powerful principles that could be imparted with the rose and its care. (Does the vine and the branches ring a bell?)

The aesthetic dimensions of faith have not yet begun to be probed fully. It is to be admitted that such exploration may hold some unconventional and uncertain expressions, yet one's understanding of the nature of God would seem to allow for such ambiguity. It would seem to follow that since we cannot imprison the very God we worship, neither can we confine and limit our expressions of adoration as we direct our hearts in reverence toward the divine. The exploration and probing would need to be done in the context of the body, and with sensitivity toward those who have not appreciated the aesthetic through the years. Oftentimes

necessary changes are preceded with tender care and loving communication. The educational framework of the local church may need to be utilized first.

The aesthetic foundation is not limited to visual, but also there is sound, smell and movement. One dear Christian brother told me of a liturgy he attended on Pentecost Sunday in which twenty different ethnic peoples were represented with the text from Acts 2 being read in those indigenous languages simultaneously. The sound gave one the impression of what it must have been like on that original Pentecost Sunday when every person present heard the first gospel sermon in their own native tongue. Could we approximate the "sweet smelling aroma" that we are to be for Christ? If we did, what aroma would we choose? And what about movement? A replication of Jacob wrestling with the angel of God could hold profound implications for those watching. What valuable lessons might follow?

► **The practical foundation**

As I bring this article to a close, I want to mention some practical aspects. First, if we are courageous enough to begin exploring the visual and aesthetic aspect of our worship services, we begin with the several and individual gifts that are possessed within a given body of believers. Gender issues aside, men and women could pool their gifts in creating unique and stimulating worship assemblies in which all magnitudes of the aesthetic are utilized for the common good.

Second, young and old alike would be encouraged to work together, thus eliminating some of the generational communication gaps that are being bemoaned everywhere. It would be enlightening and bonding to see the generations working and learning from one another.

Third, a new paradigm for worship assemblies would emerge. This model would constantly be searching for the most "truthful" aesthetic expression on each occasion that disciples are congregated to demonstrate their love and praise to God. This emerging model would take into account a biblical and theologically sound reason for the assembly, while at the same time not be bound to a meaningless tradition that eliminates the various artistic visages at one's disposal.

Fourth, this would provide a natural bridge to contemporary culture in which visitors and newcomers would not feel so totally alienated in a foreign environment. Most of our people are very familiar with the numerous dimensions of the aesthetic in the workplace: oral, aural, tactile, etc. Even movement and smell dominate the work world. Is it any wonder that newcomers feel so strange in a place devoid of such natural realities?

Fifth, and final, every congregation and its spiritual servant-leaders need to identify the hitherto forgotten and disenfranchised members. This means conducting a personal survey and interview of each member and finding out where their spiritual gifts are and having the courage to ask each individual to dream about using

those gifts in exciting and new ways for the mission of the local church.

► Conclusion

It is hoped that this brief discussion of worship has opened new corridors of faith in which we will have the courage to open some closed doors. What is lurking behind each door need not be feared. What need be feared is what will happen to the historic Christian faith in another generation if we fail to explore and incorporate the aesthetic into our assemblies. What is precious to many of us will be deemed untenable. What is dear to us will be considered

archaic. What is comfortable to us will be considered irrelevant. And, what is traditional for most of us will by then be judged to be unbiblical! "Visual surroundings contribute in a unique way to our worshipful encounter with God."

Biblical, historical, aesthetic and practical considerations provide a solid basis for making such a claim. This is not the last word, obviously, on this topic. I hope that this inquiry will generate some discussion in your home congregation. Also, feel free to call, write, or e-mail me (address on inside front cover). I am in process and know that there are many unexplored facets of this theme. †

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BOOK REVIEW

Walking on water: Reflections on faith & art

by Madeleine L'Engle

Harold Shaw Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1980.

Review by Debi Shepherd

In the beginning, God created. . .

By the act of creating a story, a cake, a building or a sermon we honor God by becoming what we were made to be — images of God, the Creator.

Many guides have taken me on a journey of understanding the connection between art and the faith I hold dear.

Through the eyes and ears of my children, I have learned to see and hear art that was invisible to me in the past: the shape of pain in

sculpture by Michelangelo; the precision of Bach chorales; sunflowers the way they look to van Gogh; songs of hardship by Woody Guthrie—works that know the human condition and open the heart to the love of God.

Through the words of C. S. Lewis, I have learned to see my life as an adventure, to know imagination is a gift from God, to understand that it is possible to feel deeply and think deeply, and to take pleasure in work well done whether it is by others or myself. Lewis also introduced me to others—Dorothy Sayers, George MacDonald, G.K Chesterton, and even Jane Austen—who have taught me to know the human condition and open my heart to the love of God.

Indirectly, Lewis also introduced me to Madeleine L'Engle. Reading her comments on the book jacket of one of Lewis's works prompted me to read *A Wrinkle in Time*, a novel for children. In *Wrinkle*, she weaves a story of a family, children, adventure, physics, and theology that is engaging and life-affirming. Her numerous novels for young people and adults,

and meditative books about her own life experiences have been a staple in my library ever since.

Her reflections on faith and art in *Walking on Water* have validity and meaning to me, because I found that her work knows the human condition, and points to the love of God. In *Walking*, L'Engle explores the idea that art is not necessarily godly because it was made by pious, godly people, but because it is made truthfully and points to the truth of God. She concludes that Christian art is not necessarily art about Christian subjects, but rather art that expresses the truth about the Creator.

She writes, "We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

L'Engle is earnest and transparent about her own struggles to be faithful both to God and to her work. *Walking on Water* is challenging, sometimes disturbing, and inspiring to anyone who desires to participate in the work of the Creator by a creative act. †

L'Engle writes, "We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."

Debi Shepherd is an Integrity Board member and worships with the Troy, MI, Church of Christ.



Imaginative leadership

Silas Shotwell

Two of the men in the congregation walked toward me with smiles on their faces. They grabbed my hand enthusiastically and said, "Silas, you have been selected by the congregation to be one of our new elders." I didn't know whether to shout, cry, or run. A whole series of questions ran through my mind: "Do I need this? Do they need me? Is this God's will?" The enthusiasm of the two brothers was obvious, but my own misgivings were greater than my anticipation.

Why would I even question such an opportunity? I know men who campaign for leadership roles, who manipulate themselves into the public eye, whose very identity seems to depend upon titles. So why not me?

I'm sure the bad leaders I have known were a part of my reticence. There have been too many "wolves in shepherd's clothing" in my observation.

But I've known far more good elders than bad. I began naming their names, rehearsing the memories. In my personal prayer diary I have written the names of the men in my life whom I've admired most and 90% of them were elders.

So why the reluctance?

A big part of it has to do with the negative changes that I have seen leadership bring to people. I have seen

men who were vigorous, bold, imaginative, who were given leadership responsibility. And many of them became cautious, overly dignified, and protective. I'm not even talking about those that became pompous and dictatorial, but about those who lost their sense of possibility.

Many of the best elders I have known have resigned. They couldn't take the unrealistic and unscriptural expectations. They were selected because they had shepherd's hearts but they found very quickly that most modern congregations hardly resemble flocks of sheep. Highly educated, over-stimulated, rugged individualists not only make poor followers, they can eat their leaders for lunch!

At the insistence of the congregation, I became an elder. I frankly didn't last long in that role because it was simply not for me in that place. But I learned a lot, and I believe my own faith is stronger as a result. I hope I helped a few folks as well.

I continue to serve as a church leader as an evangelist. I work alongside godly elders and deacons. I deal with many others as a part of a ministry called Safety Net. I try to help struggling, burned-out, faltering leaders. It is a gratifying ministry.

One of the people I tell my folks

about is Caleb. His story is in Numbers 13, 14 and Joshua 14, 15. He was a leader that was "different."

God himself called Caleb "different." "But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it" (Joshua 14:24.)

You know Caleb's story. He was one of the twelve spies sent into Canaan to spy out the promised land. He was forty years old at the time and was a leader of the tribe of Judah.

In criss-crossing Canaan from one border to another he saw the richness and he also saw the obstacles. He saw walled cities, strong tribal groups, and even giants. But in all of it he saw God. And he believed God had brought the Israelites to this place and that He had given it to them.

Ten of the spies gave a negative conclusion to their report. They saw the richness, but they were overwhelmed by fear. Caleb wanted to forge ahead and Joshua agreed with him. But the fear of the others overcame the multitude and years of death and defeat ensued.

What made Caleb's faith different? Where do we find such leaders today?

Caleb was not so much a man of great faith as a man of faith in a great God. He knew what God had done and he knew the promises God had made. He knew that God could conquer giants and walled cities. He firmly believed that God would continue to lead His people.

I think Caleb had breathless

expectation. I think he was joyful and confident that he worshipped a God of surprises. Jesus would later say, "Believe in me," not "believe certain things about me." Jesus also challenged his disciples to have the faith of little children. That faith is an expectant and imaginative faith. Caleb had it.

Too many church leaders have thought their job is to defend a creed. And when that happens, spirituality dies. In his daily devotional guide, Oswald Chambers said that the mark of spiritual life is "gracious uncertainty." I think Caleb would have liked that.

Leadership in the church should be exciting! It should involve breathing the rarefied air of the promised land, seeing giants as bigger targets, and walls as barriers God loves to bring down!

Caleb saw that, and so should we.

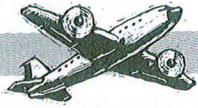
Our task is not to maintain the status quo but to move upward and onward. That movement not only determines that we keep moving in spite of obstacles ahead, but also in spite of critics behind. Some good elders have stood up to giants in the land but have fallen to the attacks of pygmies in the church.

We must also consider the awesome impact of listening to our fears. The whole multitude of Israel fell because of the infectious fear of ten leaders. What could infectious faith have done?

There simply must be more Calebs!

I hope it can be said of every leader who reads this article, "Because my servant _____ has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land. . . , and his descendants will inherit it." †

Silas Shotwell preaches for the Hood River, OR, Church of Christ, and works with Safety Net, a ministry for ministers. He has a D. Min. from Abilene Christian University and has been a full-time minister for 39 years.



Song of a tuneless one

Noreen Bryant

Breath-
taking:

This metamorphosis
of mere mortals—
machinist, medical assistant, mom—
they take a breath
and exhale multicolored vapor
too rich for me to match.
They sing, and
grow wings
of angels.
God must delight as he inhales
their fragrant sacrifice of praise.

Oh, their song! Their melodious melting of voices!
In the otherwise tight-lipped austerity of our tradition
Our one beauty.

Not mine to share, though.
What's their secret?
What rite of initiation have I missed?
What gene/muscle/brain cells are theirs
And not mine?

My tuneless warbling plummets.
I hide behind silent, though gamely moving, lips.
Rather miserable, embarrassed, my brow furrows.
I can't decipher the black and white symbols
of a language that will never leave *my* mouth.

Such lovely noises my brothers and sisters can make!
Tearful in its presence, I close my eyes.
The cloud of witnesses becomes a palpable mist of praise
It takes shape and I crawl inside.

Eyes wet, closed—
I am
trans-
ported.

Melanie, soaring. Jacob, clear as morning.
Don deeply stirring our bones
(do you call it baritone or bass?)
Diane, who beams (only when singing)
Pete, Maralee, Jamie, my Bruce—all
transformed by their tuneful praising.
All
together:
Old, young, men, women—all
stripped of worldly trappings.
Nothing but one glorious voice.
My sisters and brothers can do *this?! Yes!*
All
together.

And finally,
I am
in-
spired.

I have found my voice:
it is theirs.
Ours.
One voice!
My brothers and sisters catch up my tuneless soul
and we rocket
skyward.
Our collective breath—
Breath of heaven!

We are

God-
breathed.

Noreen Bryant is Integrity's tone-deaf Managing Editor. She writes this with love to her tuneful family at the Heritage Church of Christ in Clawson, MI.



Bending the twig

Laquita and Elton Higgs

Many of us aspire to have a family devotional time every day, but in reality the practice is often elusive. As busy schedules interfere, children lose interest, or parents tire, family worship falls by the wayside. Though family devotions are a challenge to parents' perseverance, stamina, and creativity, they are worth taking the time and effort to make them interesting and meaningful. The habit is best formed early in a child's life, but it is never too late to begin.

Apart from the usual Bible story books, we have found three little books that have given new life to our devotionals with our preschooler. After trying several books, we found that these are the ones she wants over and over. We had little success in motivating our Rachel to pray, but we found help in *My Very First Book of Prayers* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993) by Mary Hollingsworth. The inexpensive book of prayers encourages a child to talk to God about the ups and downs of life and to pray for the people who are important to the child. We do not necessarily stay with the text, but we use the pictures and themes as a springboard for Rachel to pray about the things that concern her.

Rachel loves to find her favorite songs in *My First Hymnal* (\$12.95; Nashville: Sparrow Press, 1994),

which includes the words and simple music to seventy-five Bible songs, with colorful illustrations by Dennas Davis and accompanying text by Karyn Henley, who uses simple language to explain what the songs mean. Available separately are an audio cassette tape and a video tape. The latter, labeled as being for two- to six-year olds, includes twenty songs from the Hymnal, has a simple story line and clever pantomime, and is useful for learning the motions to the songs.

The current favorite in our house is *My Little Book of Big Bible Promises* by L. J. Sattgast (\$9.99; Sisters, Oregon: Questar, 1996), a creative look at the promises of God. The author uses simple situations that are meaningful to a child in order to teach trust in God and in his eternal truths and promises. An excellent little book!

Ginny Hogg of Dallas, Texas, uses some creative ideas for their family devotionals. Ginny wrote the names of children's songs on slips of paper, and at devotional time each of her three children chooses a song by drawing a slip from the container. To help the children remember for whom they should pray, Ginny made a prayer album that includes pictures of family and special friends.

Another important topic is whether to educate a child in a public school, a private Christian school, or home school. There are no easy answers to that puzzling dilemma. More and more parents are choosing Christian schools if they have the financial resources, but we have friends at church who decided to send their children to public school with the idea that it would be their mission field. They are very involved in their children's education and have taught after-school Bible clubs for several years with great success.

Kelly Sprague of Troy, Michigan, also sends her two children to public school, and she recommends two helpful books, both of which are published by Focus on the Family and can be ordered by calling 1-800-A-FAMILY.

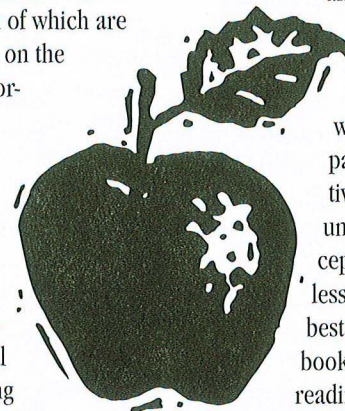
How to Help Your Child Succeed in the Public Schools by Cheri Fuller is, according to Kelly, "a practical guideline for helping children succeed both academically and spiritually in the public school setting. Fuller's basic premise is that 'the bottom line to your child's success in school is parental involvement.' On the whole, children are better behaved, more

motivated to learn, score higher on achievement tests, and are more apt to maintain their values and grow in their faith when parents are directly involved in the school and their child's learning." Fuller gives practical suggestions for parental involvement, and the book also includes lists of resource organizations, reference books, audio and video resources, and titles of good children's books categorized by age group. Kelly notes that a parent can profitably reread Fuller's book many times as a child progresses through the public schools.

Kelly also suggests *The Way They Learn* by Cynthia Ulrich Tobias, who discusses the various learning styles that children have. Being able to identify the way a child learns helps a parent to be more effective in helping a child to understand difficult concepts, to stay interested in lessons, and to draw out the best in a child. Tobias's book is considered required reading for anyone who truly wants a child to succeed in school.

Please share any of your suggestions about family devotionals or educating a child. We learn from each other. Contact us at 9 Adams Lane, Dearborn, Michigan 48120; or Ehiggs@umich.edu.

Laquita and Elton Higgs, both graduates of Abilene Christian University, have generously offered time, talent, and spiritual direction to the Integrity ministry for more than 17 years. Both are occupied as professors at the University of Michigan, and as parents to four-year-old Rachel. Says Laquita, "Alexander Pope, the 18th century English poet, said, 'Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined.' Accordingly, we call this regular feature of parenting advice 'Bending the Twig.' All of us as Christian parents should be committed to a great deal of unashamed 'twig bending' for the Lord, and we need each other's help to do it."





Art and worship: A vital connection

by Janet R. Walton

Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988) Paperback, \$15.95.

review by Curtis D. McClane

This delightful book probably has a limited reading audience. Since the author was Associate Professor of Worship at Union Theological Seminary in New York when the work was completed, her ultra-liberal background may unnecessarily cause people to shy away. She is a professional musician and a liturgical educator.

The strength of this work is centered on its approach to the topic of art and worship. Historical background and traditions, the liturgical needs of the contemporary church, listening to artists and what they have to offer, looking toward the future, and suggesting principles needed for healthy dialogue—all of these form the major chapters of the book. One section is missing. In order for this resource to be helpful to our religious tradition, there needs to be a first chapter on the biblical and theological foundations for art and worship. This reader would be very interested in such a work coming from the pen of Janet Walton.

The author states that her work “deals with ways in which the arts can be used within worship to provide connections between what is invisible, that is, human faith and divine reality, and the palpably deep longings and concerns of our being.” She contends

that most contemporary liturgies make no real connections with the world of today’s parishioners. She points out that all one has to do is look at the artist, musician, theatre director, etc., and see that the current issues of the day are being dealt with in those media forms. The liturgical form is strangely silent on the most important daily struggles of those who come each Sunday to make some connection with their lives and their experience of God.

In the first major chapter, Walton provides two examples of an inherited artistic tradition that she believes provides a significant starting point for dialogue on this subject. The house church of Dura-Europos and the cathedral at Saint Denis provide the two models for exploring the possibilities of what direction art can take in this quest for inclusion within the liturgical setting.

For Walton the house church at Dura-Europos provides four main ways in which art contributed to the worship of this early Christian community. Art stimulated memory. Art depicted the demands of the early Christian gospel. Art complemented oral instruction. Art stimulated a variety of senses.

Walton’s concerns about what

should be the focus of daily connections with liturgy might differ sharply from what most readers of this review might consider as important. A social activist perspective, with liberationist assumptions about power and authority, dominates the discussion about connecting with the world. A feminist theologian, she advocates the possibility of different ways of naming God and challenges the status quo.

Her discussion of beauty is sharply focused and very insightful as one tries to sort out the reality and varieties of what defines the aesthetic. Very helpful are the three dimensions of beauty outlined: pleasant, truthful, and original. This last category, originality, is probably the most difficult for a religious tradition that is within the confines of a mindset in which it tries to recapture and maintain original forms. But one question is often overlooked: what of the originality of the first believers?

Crucial to the author’s introduction of art woven into worship is her section on what art has to offer. This is most instructive and enlightening for those who have never considered the significance of art in worship, or for those who are unclear about what art would encompass in this setting.

While challenging her readers to be prepared to develop a future tradition, she provides illustrative material detailing what other services and liturgies have looked like during certain holy days. This is the how-to section of the book. For non-liturgical churches of the Restoration Movement, it would be difficult to implement exactly what she has provided. However, with some cre-

ative minds and a worship ministry that is free to dream, it would be exciting to see what groups could come up with based on this material.

The last chapter provides twelve principles about forming a partnership between the artist and the church. Most of them are self-evident.

However, principle number three needs to be shouted from the steeples of our churches: “make clear that mutual reliance upon experience is within the province of both (i.e., the church and the artist) and that one’s experience is not “better” than the other’s but different.” (p. 113). The attitude of mutuality, partnership, collaboration and respect dominate her list of principles. In an interesting way all twelve principles appear to apply to church life in general anyway. But when applied to the discovery, recognition, and implementation of the marriage between art and worship, they are particularly pertinent.

Even though the author’s philosophical and theological presuppositions differ sharply from mine, I found this book to be extremely instructive. It was such new material for me that I could not put it down! I highly recommend it to worship ministries that are attempting to implement art and other visuals.

No doubt if the principles, challenges and assumptions about art are taken seriously in the local churches, the worship service will take on a different look with profound results. Pick up this little volume and allow your mind to explode with the dynamite ideas contained in it!

Curtis D. McClane is the Editor-in-chief of Integrity.

**Regarding
"Cookies to communion,"
Issue 5, 1997
via e-mail**

Thanks for the continuing information and inspiration. Please allow me to offer a couple of corrections to the Issue 5, 1997 article, "Cookies to communion," by Peggy Sanford.

The first is not so important, just a typo. "Mark Dauphin" in Birmingham, AL, is actually *Mac* Dauphin. He doesn't mind the error so much but people trying to contact him will probably want to know his actual name.

The second seems more important to our congregation and to the fellowship of Stone-Campbell Christians. The Cahaba Valley Church of Christ is the congregation described in the article and having a "husband and wife team" serving as co-ministers. I'm the wife, and it's true that my husband and I "share all ministerial duties." But it's not true at all that "some people simply don't show up on the mornings she preaches."

It's more accurate to say that the congregation lost members over

women's participation (and related issues) before I came into this job. People who remain in this body feel more or less comfortable with my role, but have been loving and accepting to a person. I doubt I would continue in this job if church members found themselves in less-than-full fellowship because of my role.

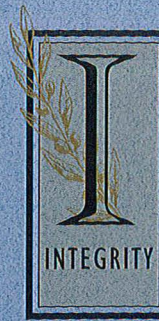
Because I never actually spoke to Peggy Sanford myself (she had friends doing the interviewing for her study), it's easy to see how facts could be confused. We (my husband, the elders, and I) just don't want to misrepresent what this shift in gender roles has meant for the unity and cohesiveness of our family. It's been important for this group to maintain unity in the Spirit even while they sometimes disagreed about the manifestations of the same Spirit.

Thanks for hearing me out.

Katie Hays

Quality is all-important: piety and a prayerful spirit will not turn a bad play into a good one, and all too often sloppy books, amateurish plays, and syrupy music provide intelligent people with powerful arguments against the church.

—Dorothy L. Sayers, 1944, from
Dorothy Sayers: A careless rage for life, by David Coomes



Coming up in *Integrity*

If you would like to submit materials for any of these upcoming issues, please do so! You will find submission guidelines on the inside front cover.

Fall 1998

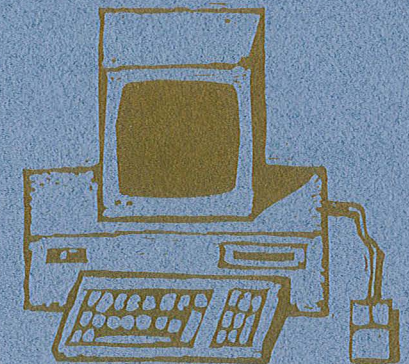
No Creeds but Christ:

Challenging the creeds of our "non-creedal" movement

Winter 1998

Clash of consciences:

How do the "strong" and the "weak" worship together?



Start typing!
We're looking forward
to hearing from you.