

Let the Painter Preach

(and the preacher paint).

An Essay on the Relationship Between the Church and the Arts.

By:

Craig Key

Azusa Pacific University

Dr. Monica Ganas

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“What is so *Christian* about that tree?”

There is a new town hall that is being constructed. It will serve as a forum for discussions about all of the most crucial issues that effect humanity. It is being constructed brick by brick by those who are blazing the trail in culture: the artists. Here one brick is laid—a song about war. Here another—a painting of the homeless. Here is a film—a love story. Here is a photograph of a leaf which has curves and contours like a beautiful woman. Following behind each bricklayer is an imposing character holding a sledgehammer. It is a large body with much force. It smashes the first brick claiming “this song is secular.” Now the next—“This does not help spread the gospel!” The next brick falls, “There was sex and swearing in that film.” And the last, “This could cause someone to stumble.”

There is a severe lack of understanding in the church about art, its nature, and its purpose. There is a great gap that has existed between these two schools of thought since the renaissance and reformation. Artists don’t understand the church, and the church does not understand artists. This gap is blocking the exchange of ideas between two of the most crucial and necessary groups of thinkers on the planet. But it does not have to be so. If this essay accomplishes nothing else, it will establish a bridge across this great

gap to allow artists to see how necessary religion is to their trade, and the religious to view the arts as a help in the quest for spiritual truth, not a hindrance.

“The popular arts facilitate our cultural conversation by aiding us in our communication, social criticism, social unity, and collective memory,” (Romanowski 57). As the church swings away at anything that the culture—that is the culture that is outside of the church—attempts to build, they are robbing themselves of the discussions at the heart of any religion. The church should be aiding artists in this discussion—unless, of course, this is a discussion of which the church is frightened of.

To be fair I should provide a definition for the word “church” in the sense that I use it here. The word can have many connotations and I do not want to offend anyone (lest one needs offending) over a wrong inference. The New Testament uses the Greek word *ecclesia* which has come to mean a gathering or a meeting (Easton). However, the etymology comes from “to summon forth.” This would then cover all believers under the scope of the word church. This is *not* the definition of the word that I am operating on. The word “church,” used here connotes the general attitudes of organized religion. More specifically, I am speaking mainly of, but not limited to protestant evangelicals (because that is the tradition in which I was brought up). This is the “church” which has been trained wrongly with regards to the arts.

This church has been trained to look for overt God signs—that is, an artist making evident in his or her work a biblical and spiritual message that is clear cut, black and white, leaving no room for interpretation. In “secular” art work, John and Jane churchgoer seem so blinded by the lack of a God sign that they cannot even see how much God may exist there.

Frankie Schaeffer, son of famous theologian Dr. Francis Schaeffer, was once giving a speech to a group of Christians. As a part of his speech he showed an abstract painting. In response, an audience member raised his hand and asked Schaeffer, “What is so Christian about that painting?” Schaeffer thought for a moment, took the man outside, pointed to a tree and said, “What you asked me in there would be like asking God ‘What is so Christian about that tree?’” A tree may not be Christian, but it is beautiful, and it is good. The same goes for a work of art. This is the concept that is difficult for the many in the church to understand. As the title of the book by Brian D. McLaren and Tony Campolo says, it is an “Adventure in Missing the Point.”

Because of this poor perspective from which to view art, the church seems to be constantly one generation behind the arts. When the arts expand, the church is hesitant to accept these new ways of expression. The reason for this is because the church is not looking at art for art’s sake, it is looking at art to find God signs. It is not until “Christian artists” incorporate the God signs with which the church is familiar, into the new styles of art (for instance, Christian rock) that the church will be see that good can come from this new style.

An example of this lag can be found without looking far. Music is an area that has constantly had the church on edge. It was considered a form of holy worship, so it was often hotly debated. In the 18th century, religious music began to go beyond the boundaries that had been previously established. Composers "borrowed" common melodies and even secular/popular songs, rewriting religious words to them (Schneider). Waltzes were one brand of music that began to show up in church music. They were once highly criticized by the church because of its closer hold and rapid turning

movements. “Religious leaders almost unanimously regarded it as vulgar and sinful (Heikkila). However, by the time that my parents were children, many of the popular hymns were set to the beats and melodies of popular waltzes. At the same time, artists like Elvis Presley and The Beatles had good churchgoers all across America protesting the fast drumbeats that resembled African American music, and the lyrics that were unclear and vulgar.

Fast forward to my adolescence and we have church members who wanted to incorporate the drums into a more “contemporary” worship service, while many people wanted to return to the same waltz like hymns that had been so heavily protested a century or so before. Today it seems to me that most church worship services resemble rock concerts, and parents are ecstatic if their children listen to music as wholesome as Elvis or The Beatles.

This delay happened in the painting world and the literary world as well. Ideas like impressionism or the novel for instance, were difficult for the church to accept because they seemed deceitful. The church, as a whole, has tended to miss the value of art for art’s sake. It does not understand that a piece can be relevant and important to religion even if it does not speak directly of the sacred, but rather speaks toward the crucial issues of humanity.

These matters date back as far as Augustine which led him to comment on the matter in *De Doctrina Christiana*: “We should not avoid music because of the associated pagan superstitions if there is a possibility of gleaning from it something of value for understanding the holy scriptures” (71). Rather, in Augustine’s opinion we should use music to help understand God’s truth. To put it in a more practical light, Augustine said

(almost jokingly), “We were not wrong to learn the alphabet just because they say that the God Mercury was its patron” (72).

The relationship between religion and art is incredibly important because they both help us to understand more fully the issues of humanity and spirituality with which we are all faced. Paul Tillich is one of the most profound theologians of the modern era to make sense of these two worlds. He believed that religion’s ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture. His theology of culture has been summarized with this classic phrase: “Religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion” (Tillich 42). Indeed the religious should not be looking for flaws in art, to condemn the work of an already fallen person. Rather, it is the job of religion to look for the redeeming truth in fallen work and see how it can point to the sacred.

Art is the search for...

Before I continue in this discussion of art and the church, I would like to take time to describe my own definition of the word “art.” As I have studied this field and learned more from artists, my own definition of the word has changed quite dramatically. From the time I was a small child, when I thought of art, I thought of paintings and sculpture that were aesthetically pleasing, or music that was aurally pleasing. This definition is somewhat limited, in that all art can be subjectively pleasing. One may find beauty where another finds ugliness. So it became clear to me that this definition would not satisfy as a working model for such a significant word.

Flannery O’Conner defined art this way: “The basis of art is truth, both in matter and in mode. The person who aims after art in his work aims after truth” (65). An archer aims an arrow at his target. Whether he hits it or not, he is ultimately striving to hit the bull’s-eye. In the same way, an artist may or may not hit the bull’s-eye—in this case, truth. But he strives for truth. As he expresses something from deep inside of himself, he is searching for truth.

Augustine said, “When I search for truth, and I arrive at truth, I find God” (Qtd. in Tillich: *Theology* 12). If truth existed outside of God, he would not be God. So then, any search for ultimate truth will be found only in an ultimate God.

Art is the search for God.

Whether my kinked chain of reasoning (admittedly I am no philosopher) to tie together the creative with the supernatural works or whether it does not, I would like to take some time to further argue that art and the spiritual are connected. The two are intertwined and in fact depend heavily upon one another.

The most obvious—and to me beautiful—art form that is undoubtedly tied to the creator is creation itself. The heavens and the earth have been created so wonderfully and so masterfully that their beauty cannot be denied. Nature is the heavenly example of art that is laid out before us. In nature we have lines and shapes that are more beautiful and intricate than anything conceived by a man or woman. There is color, balance, space—all the rules taught in art classes from the elementary to the university are derived from what already exists in creation.

When I was 19, I moved away from Minnesota, “The Land of 10,000 Lakes,” to the concrete jungle that is Los Angeles. I found myself with a great longing inside within about a month of being here. At first I was excited to see this massive city and all there is to do, but I found myself longing for peace and solitude—a place to go and see green plants and brown earth (that was not planted by a gardener).

I found my little slice of creation in the San Gabriel Mountains which were relatively close to the dormitory in which I lived. Whenever I needed to get to get away I would park my car at the base of Garcia Trail and hike two and a half miles to the top.

From there I could see two worlds divided by these relatively small mountains. To the south is city block after city block as far as the eye can see. The view is especially awesome at night with streetlights twinkling, almost blending into one another. Juxtaposed to the sea of man made light are the stars in the sky which were much less imposing. Looking north, one sees nothing but the deep valley carved out by a river. There is an occasional headlight winding around the canyon road, and mountains in front of mountains in front of other mountains.

As I sit there, usually at night, I view these two worlds with some uneasiness. I long to be in the world of the natural, to be where the only light I see is that which God has provided me in the sun, the moon and the stars. Yet as I sit there I am reminded of the world that I actually live in by the galaxy of daunting street lights that burn on without end. Because I am human, I have a natural longing to be in God's creation. It is in the creations of God, not the creations of man, that we find the most beauty.

Novelist Annie Dillard wrote an interesting short piece on the beauty in created order called "Heaven and Earth in Jest." The title quotes a passage in the Koran in which Allah asks "The Heaven and the earth and all in between, thinkest thou I made them in *jest*?" (Dillard 83). She detailed the events of a walk that she took one day along a pond. All of the frogs would jump into the water as she approached, but as she drew closer to one it seemed paralyzed.

"As I looked at him, he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped; his very skull seemed to collapse and settle like a kicked tent...An oval shadow hung in the water behind the drained frog; then the shadow glided away." (82-3)

What Dillard had witnessed was a giant water bug which had paralyzed the frog with enzymes. These same enzymes liquefied the frog's body from the inside, and then sucked out the frog's innards through the same hole that had made to inject the poison. This grotesque natural phenomenon captivated her fully and completely. The way she wrote about it illustrated that creation is still a thing of beauty. Dillard concludes that there is great beauty in the big picture of God's creation: "We must somehow take a wider view, look at the whole landscape, really see it, and describe what's going on here. Then we can at least wail the right question into the swaddling band of darkness or, if it comes to that, choir the proper praise." (85)

While the beauty of creation and that of the creator is compelling and I should like to write an essay on that alone, it is not the only thread that ties the world of art and the world of the spiritual together.

Author Robert Wuthnow introduces his book Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Artist by looking at the life and work of David Ellsworth, a popular woodworker. Ellsworth began his career making wooden salt and pepper shakers on his lathe in Colorado. He began to experiment with making wooden bowls and now makes and sells those as well. Ellsworth says that each time he makes a piece he gives himself as much time as he possibly can to understand the spiritual connection between himself and it. He comments more on this connection here:

Spirituality is my work. The two are inseparable. When I'm doing it, I'm not thinking about it, there is a connectedness with it that is immediate and direct.

I'm like a pianist. I'm not concerned about the technique as I perform. So

working at the lathe is similar. It is an avenue through which spirituality can express itself (4).

Although many would not consider the making of kitchen tools a spiritual experience, Ellsworth takes great care and pride in each piece because he feels that it is the outpouring of his intangible soul/spirit onto a tangible object.

Immediately following Ellsworth's statement about spirituality in his art, Wuthnow makes an insightful comparison between these two worlds:

If there is a single key to artists' perspectives on the spiritual it is this: spirituality, like art must be practiced to be perfected. The way of the artist involves doing, rather than only believing in the possibility of doing. It requires training, discipline, and a considerable investment of oneself. (4)

I think many of us do not recognize the striking similarity of getting in touch with one's artistic side and getting in touch with the supernatural. For instance, I could learn all of the facts about God, memorize the scriptures and read all of the prominent theologians of old and new...I could be a walking encyclopedia of knowledge about God and have no idea of how to pray or have any interaction with God at all. In the same way, I could choose to study the arts in a systematic fashion—memorizing all of the rules of what makes something aesthetically pleasing, observing all of the classical artists (which I wish were true), and so on. But when I pick up a paintbrush, I am helpless (this part is true). I can say with some certainty that if my life really did depend on my producing any likeness of anything on canvas that I would be a dead man.

Both spirituality and art require discipline to see slow and steady progress. It could be said that spirituality is an art form, and some are more disciplined to practice

their art than others. Often we expect that once we reach encyclopedic status, we will just automatically be better at our art, but we must pick up the brush every day and practice—starting with the small things and moving up as our hands and eyes get more comfortable and we become more skilled. The same is true for practicing spirituality.

Music is a good example of the connection between art and spirituality. For thousands of years it has been a cornerstone of community. Be it in Africa, Asia, Europe, or the Americas, cultures, old and new, gather around music. “Music, especially sacred music, has a powerful efficacy to soften the heart into tenderness, to harmonize the affection, and to give the mind a relish for objects of a spiritual character” (Jonathan Edwards—qtd. in Detweiler and Taylor 130). According to Detweiler and Taylor, music, even popular music, is a central element in the development of a cultural identity—it’s part of our fingerprint that we leave on this world. “We should not be surprised that pop music has much to say about the shaping of contemporary notions of God and religion” (130). Perhaps the reason that art can be so feared by the religious community is because it is such a powerful tool. As goes with anything of great power, there is great danger as well.

A chapter in Irving J. Rein’s book, Rudy’s Red Wagon, dealt with the powerful rhetoric of popular art. The chapter was aptly named “The Rhetoric of the Popular Arts. Here Rein writes about other forms of expression/communication (in this case public speech at a political rally) and our natural biases that skew our reception of any message that is sent.

The political spectator knows that, above all, the public-address form is designed to maintain or change his attitudes and beliefs. He naturally, therefore, comes to

the event prepared for a verbal onslaught on his political attitudes; and he sharpens his critical senses in order to analyze the ideological arguments with which he knows he will be bombarded. He will be alert to anything that accords with his views and can be applauded, and equally ready to reject claims and assertions contrary or inimical to those views. (Rein 74)

Art is unique in its ability to “lower the guard” of its viewer/listener and deal a significant blow that is sometimes unexpected. Rein contrasts the political spectator with the concert-goer. Whereas the political spectator has braced himself for what he will hear, and has preconceived notions as to what he thinks on those topics, the concert-goer is not expecting to be bombarded with politics. Therefore, if there is a political message in a song (especially a song that the listener enjoys), then he is absorbing the content and perhaps even singing along in agreement with the content—whether he would normally agree or not. “Since he perceives the form as being pleasurable rather than persuasive, he may listen to the piece many times...This repetition makes the potential power of the piece enormous” (Rein 74).

I do not mean to cheapen the effect that art can have by making it sound as if we should be sneaky about expressing ourselves. For although Freud might say that this subconscious “absorption” will have a great effect, I would also contend that eventually when someone loves something enough (even if, at first, for sheer aesthetic or surface value), he or she will take time to at least attempt to understand the message that is being communicated.

Any good piece of art will move its viewers/listeners. The arts are often the first to stir up any kind of social or political movement. Perhaps Bono said it best when

interviewed about his political activism, “Ideas of changes have always come from culture. In a healthy democracy and society, there should always be exchange between the arts, economics and politics...great ideas and great melodies have a lot in common” (Qtd. in Argyrakis 45). There are other tools that help bring about social change, but none have as pure a reception—that is one without biases—as the arts.

**And if Protestantism means that, first of all, we do not have
to cover up anything, but have to look at the human
situation in its depths of estrangement and despair...**

The majority of our classical art came from the church.

“Much art has been created to serve religion. In fact, the church was the great patron of the arts for centuries. “Religion fuelled art, and art was filled with religious imagery and spiritual devotion” (Detweiler and Taylor 285). This changed quite drastically during the renaissance. Artists began painting “secular” paintings—that is, paintings that were not of religious characters or containing religious themes. Music also began to evolve during this time. Composers would write music without words, or hymnals with long musical intervals. Since church music began in the form of a chant, it was thought of as an abomination to have music without lyrics and the Council of Trent was held to set guidelines for what church music should be (Schneider). This new idea of art for art’s sake, rather than art for God’s sake paved the road that led to the modern arts as they are today.

A similar kind of uproar occurred in the world of painting world during the renaissance. When paintings became less about capturing the exact details of a scene,

and more about capturing feelings, the church had a difficult time accepting those changes.

Vincent Van Gogh recognized the good that was coming from the art world, and the hindrance that the church had become so he decided to start a new religion where the artists would blaze the trail towards spiritual truth (Schaeffer 30). While it seems that him taking his own life at the age of 30 would point to the fact that his religion did not uncover for him the truth he was seeking, Van Gogh may not have been too far off. He recognized that those who did not pretend to have all of the answers about God, but rather were in a constant search for Him, were much closer to Him than the priests who claimed to have all of the answers. Van Gogh failed, because he did not need a new religion. Rather, the religion he left (Christianity) needed a new perspective similar to his own: Looking to artists as cultural prophets and not excommunicating them for thinking outside the box.

One of Pablo Picasso's most powerful paintings is titled *Guernica*. The painting is named after a town in Northern Spain that was bombed by Italian and German planes who were a part of the fascist movement in Europe and were trying to help Spanish fascists fight against the national loyalists that were in control of Spain. The painting depicted an awful scene of seeming sheer chaos. Cows, horses, and men are strewn about with agonizing expressions across their faces. Paul Tillich once referred to *Guernica* as the best Protestant religious picture of the modern era.

I named this picture, because it shows the human condition. And if Protestantism means that, first of all, we do not have to cover up anything, but have to look at

the human situation in its depths of estrangement and despair, then this is one of the most powerful religious pictures (*Art* 95-96).

Both Van Gogh and Picasso had spiritual insights that were incredibly relevant to the modern and postmodern societies that they lived in. Yet the church seemed to be wearing blinders that prohibited them from seeing the spiritual truths that each of them expressed in their art.

At the same time the renaissance was influencing the arts and cultural aspects of society, the reformation was influencing those in the church. Many Christians thought that the church had dived too deeply into iconography—the worship of religious images. Luther and the protestant movement considered it idolatrous to worship statues of the patron saints. There were many similarities in these practices to the worship of pagan statues. The movement was attempting to get rid of this sort of idol worship, although certain images, like the cross, managed to survive the reformation.

Over 500 years later, I grew up in an evangelical church with minimal stained glass (it was a cross—one color, in the back of the sanctuary) absolutely *no* paintings in the building, and Sunday school rooms that were wall to wall white, except for the occasional felt board which somehow could use the same background landscape to represent the location of every story in the bible.

The protestant church has never recovered from the reformation as far as the arts go. While the Catholic Church has continued to provide some of the greatest authors (Greene, Mauriac, O'Conner), painters, musicians, and filmmakers (Capra, Hitchcock, Scorsese, Gibson), the protestant church has done little more than created an entirely new genre of art which is consumed only by other Christians. There is Christian music,

Christian fiction, inspirational books, and even Christian greeting cards. All sold at stores which have “Christian” or “Bible” somewhere in their titles—therefore ostracizing anyone who does not identify with that name.

I once tried my hand at rock-stardom by playing guitar in a band during college. There came a time in our short-lived careers when we needed a manager to handle all of our booking and financial issues so that we could focus on the artistic side as well get through our classes. The woman we hired was a Christian and had several connections in the Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) industry. We were instantly (whether we wanted to be or not) dubbed as a “Christian Band” and began playing at churches and youth conferences instead of the bars and coffee houses at which we wanted to play. I remember one night after a show she said to us “You know, worship music is really popular right now. Have you guys ever considered being a worship band?” Although she may have been well intentioned, my manager was missing the point of being an artist. It had just been suggested to me that I change to playing holy and sacred music which is meant to lead people into the presence of God because it would gain for me greater popularity—in other words, more money.

Jan Boettcher is a High School English teacher as well as the drama director at Constance Free Church in Andover, Minnesota. She had this to say on the subject of Christian art: “To me the term is ridiculous. I don’t see that there should be a field called Christian Art. Art is art, good or bad.” This entire genre seems entirely devoted to making art that is one of two things: Firstly, Overtly religious and evangelical in nature. This includes pictures of Jesus, or other biblical characters and events—not so different from the very same kind of iconography that the protestants tried to get rid of. The

second is art that is riddled with niceness. There is no pain in Christian art lest it be pain that was taken away by Jesus; there is no darkness or depravity. Growing up as a product of Christian culture, the only paintings I remember hanging on our walls were a few Thomas Kinkade prints (mostly of lighthouses), and the classic “Jesus Loves the Little Children” which shows an illuminated Jesus with neatly combed hair and fair skin surrounded by angelic looking children.

“Some people are so caught up in Matthew 28:19 [Which says: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” *New American Standard Bible*] that they try to incorporate it into every area of their life,” Says Boettcher. “That is good, but I don’t think that has to be the qualification for art. It does many things, and one of them is to spread the word, but that is not all it should do...I am not going to stop doing everything else to evangelize. The missionaries already do that.”

Evangelicals seem to be caught up in this idea: “evangelism.” By definition, evangelism is: 1. the winning or revival of personal commitments to Christ. 2. militant or crusading zeal. There seems to be a stream of thought in the evangelical church that all expression or communication is pointless unless it is pointed towards the cross. Growing up, I remember being trained in my youth group to be able turn any conversation into a short, four point gospel presentation any time I was speaking with a non-Christian. The art that follows in this same school of thought does not place value in a piece that might get one thinking; it only places value in art that tells one what to think. “When Christians think of the arts as something that can be used to win the world to Christ, they create an

unrealistic expectation of the arts and put unfair pressure on artists. Christian songwriters are automatically expected to write “Christian songs” (Turner 49).

The Apostle Paul was one who was certainly schooled in Greek mythology and theology. There are even hints of platonic philosophy throughout his epistles which make up the majority of the New Testament.

Truth is not exclusive to believers. We accept this in areas such as medicine, cartography and space exploration but begrudgingly in philosophy, psychology and the arts Christians sometimes reason that if unbelievers are “darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:18) they can never come up with any accurate insights into the human condition (Turner 41).

By this reasoning, it somehow seems ludicrous for a Minister to go to see a counselor who is non-religious for help in understanding himself. In fact, the qualification for being a good counselor should be having a thorough understanding of the human psyche and an ability to help people understand and overcome their issues. But why are we so hesitant to learn from those different than ourselves?

Donna Heinrich is an art teacher as well as a licensed pastor in the Vineyard Christian Fellowship. I asked her what she thought about the way that the church dismisses art that is dubbed secular. “God’s gifts are irrevocable,” she said. “If a child is producing beautiful work but does not know the Lord does that discount those gifts? No, the hand of God is on him.” Heinrich points out what for some may be difficult to accept: God uses those who know him, as well as those who do not. In the Old Testament book of Joshua, two Hebrew spies are helped by a foreign prostitute named Rahab—and she is called righteous. Christ uses prostitutes and tax collectors in his

teachings as people from whom we are to take example from—not people who we should convert. So why do evangelicals wear blinders that do not allow them to view anything good in anyone or anything that is not also evangelical?

To be fair, I must say that it is much easier for me to criticize the evangelical body of believers because it is the tradition with which I am most familiar. While evangelicals may focus too much on evangelizing, they may contend that the charismatic denominations focus too much on the Spirit of God and its workings. Both of those parties may point fingers to the Catholic Church and say that they do not focus enough on either. Yet Jesus did not heavily preach evangelism—that was the Apostle Paul. He also did not focus much on the Spirit. Jesus' teachings were centered on the kingdom of God, and how we, as a part of that kingdom are to treat each other. God is multi-faceted and therefore any accurate religion should reflect that. And I am simply emphasizing that the arts should be practiced and celebrated equally with evangelism and the spirit, to reflect the God who has created us.

I have mentioned the “blinders” which the church wears and I feel that I should explain more fully. The problem is skepticism. There is a fear of the unknown, and assumptions about art that is unfamiliar to us that leave us incredibly skeptical of any art at all, unless it is full of God signs. It seems that the church may have its guard up against art so as not to get hurt. We act as if artist's sole purpose is to destroy religion—or worse, destroy God. Great progress can be made between the church and the arts if guards are dropped, and each party sees that their purposes may not be so different after all.

Of One Cause.

The teachings of Jesus call us to love our neighbor, to help those in need, to feed the poor, and not to oppress those weaker than ourselves. There are many artists at the front of pop culture today who are pushing for those very same things. No one has done more for the AIDS epidemic in Africa than Bono. He is one of the most well respected men in the music business, and in political circles as well. He is well recognized as a humanitarian who has helped millions of impoverished people in Africa and around the world. He was even nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Bono is not only active in carrying out Christ's radical agenda of social justice in the world, he is even being downright evangelical at times: "You broke the bonds/ You loosed the chains/ Carried the cross/ And my shame/ You know I believe it." Is a line from one of U2's most popular songs from the *Joshua Tree* album. "Redemption, atonement and the substitution death of Christ. There would be no more succinct a theology of the cross in all of the songs coming from the Christian bands [who are held] as models of sound theology" (Stockman 73).

Despite the fruits of Bono's labor, and the witness that he is of love in the world, he has for quite some time received a steady stream of negative criticism from the

Christian press. It seems that all the work that Bono has done for mankind is overshadowed by the horrible reality that he sometimes smokes, drinks, and swears. In fact, *Relevant* magazine, a Christian based publication whose goal is to get Christians involved in culture, received criticism for doing a cover story on Bono (to which I will refer shortly). “Although I haven’t read the article, the fact that you portray him as someone who is faith based and seeking the truth is totally disingenuous” (Howell 6). This was written in the “Letter to the Editor” section of the July/August edition of *Relevant*. This truly is an adventure in missing the point—the man admits that he did not even read the article to see what Bono has to say.

Although I could write for pages more about Bono, he is only one of many examples of celebrities who are championing some incredibly noble causes. Chris Martin, the lead singer of Coldplay has been very active in a non-profit organization called “Make Trade Fair,” a group committed to social justice in third world countries where farmers get paid unfairly by big corporations who turn around huge profit margins off of sweat of the farmers back. Make Trade Fair is involved in as small a level as helping individual sugar and coffee farmers, and as large scale as being active lobbyists of the World Trade Organization.

Martin, and Make Trade Fair are making sure that underprivileged people are being treated fairly. These principals are strikingly similar to the Levitical and Deuteronomical laws in the Old Testament on the same issues. “You shall not oppress a hired servant {who is} poor and needy, whether {he is} one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns” (Deuteronomy 24:14). Not to mention the teachings of Jesus, who constantly called his followers to help the poor and feed the

hungry. “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20). Chris Martin is acting more Christian (in the biblical sense—not the modern cultural sense of the word) than most churchgoers, yet I have never heard a Coldplay song aired over Christian radio, and I have never heard of any Christian based organization supporting their music.

The list goes on. There is an organization known as Artists Against Hunger and Poverty (AAHP) with a list of hundreds of a-list celebrities including: Bruce Springsteen; Peter, Paul & Mary; Phish; Kenny Rogers; Melissa Etheridge; Natalie Merchant; Pete Townshend; Chicago; Shania Twain; Carlos Santana; The Moody Blues and many more. AAHP does fundraising concerts, albums and many other charity events to help feed hungry people. These are the causes that the church should be fronting. Or, in the current situation, since other non-faith based groups are leading the way towards social justice, the church should get behind them and be excited about what is going on.

It seems to me that Bono and his celebrity friends are doing the work that Jesus Christ called his followers to do with much more force than any church or mission with which I have ever been involved. “If the church doesn’t respond to this, the church will be made irrelevant” (Bono, Qtd. in Argyrakis 43). In this instance Bono is speaking of aids in Africa, but overall the church must respond to humanity, to all people. We must respond to what artists are already responding to.

There is common ground here. The church and the arts truly are of one cause: the search for truth, and the desire to help those in need. If the church could get behind all the good that artists are doing in the world, and vice versa, so much more could be accomplished.

What I have said here has been said before. I pray that the discussion continues on into the future, bringing the world of the sacred closer to the world of the creative. So, to end this essay I will defer to those much more knowledgeable and infinitely wiser than I am.

To the church, a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

The church is only the church when it is there for others....It must participate in the worldly affairs of the human social order, not ruling but helping and serving. It must say to human beings of all occupations what a life with Christ is, what it means “to be there for others” (78).

And to the artists, a letter from the Pope:

Even beyond its typically religious expressions, true art has a close affinity with the world of faith, so that, even in situations where culture and the Church are far apart, art remains a kind of bridge to religious experience. In so far as it seeks the beautiful, fruit of an imagination which rises above the everyday, art is by its nature a kind of appeal to the mystery. Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption (John Paul II).

May the arts and the church continue on in their quest for good, their struggle for truth, and their search for God. May each party lay down their biases, their skepticism and their preconceived notions about the other, and learn from each other. Let us support one another. There is a new town hall that is being constructed. Let us—humans—build it together, brick by brick.

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