

Authentic Worship and Artistic Action
Calvin Institute of Worship (2005)
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I. Authentic Worship.

In these few minutes, I want first of all to recognize your hunger and thirst for the Lord; I want to encourage you to stay hungry and thirsty—you can never overeat at God’s table of righteousness. But I also want to address some issues that test the extent to which your hunger and thirst reach beyond the boundaries of what we usually call worship.

The purpose of this first section is to be sure that we set corporate worship in the context of continuing worship. When this is done biblically it does not decrease the value of corporate worship but lends it an urgency and brilliance that it might not otherwise have.

Above all, authentic worship—Christian worship—is grounded in the very things that comprise our life in Christ: faith, hope, and love. Each of these is a totality, each a self-identified completion, each co-inherent, each a clear reflection of the other, each participating in the other without confusion or separation. (Note the parallel the Chalcedonian statement on the Trinity.)

As to faith, it is within itself the substance and evidence of everything that is *of* God and *from* God through the Word of His power, summed up in the very Person of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, the Author and Finisher of this faith. Faith is itself the substance and evidence of the unseeable and the hoped for. It is in itself the substance and evidence of everything made ours in the unassailable work of the Triune God. It is the substance and evidence of which utter trust, utter confidence, and utter belief are the consequence. It is both a magnanimous gift from God and, on our part, a radical act of the will, foolishness to the world, yet utterly sensible to the Father. It neither is nor can be fueled by anything temporal, artifactual or circumstantial. It is its own filled-to-the-full condition.

Everything imagined, crafted, thought, said, done, within and around us, is of no consequence apart from faith. Our faith might be weak; it might be like a smoking flax or a bruised reed, but faith is still faith, leading from faith even to more faith. So we

pray, “Lord, increase our faith. I believe, help Thou my unbelief.” With this prayer constantly before us, we leap from the arms of the seen to the unseen; we leap from the arms of creature to those of Creator, and God accounts righteousness to us, and with that, grace, upon grace, mercy unending, and a peace that passes all understanding.

Even so, in one of countless paradoxes, faith is not left to itself just as no person of the Trinity is. Hope is the inevitable and only possible avenue for those who live by faith. Hope lends forward concretion to faith. Hope continues faith’s substance and evidence, urging us onward yet onward. Hope verifies that which will eventually be seen, for hope that is temporally seen is not hope. Hope then is seeing ahead with the eyes of faith, the eyes that are focused on the finalities that every word of God promises. Hope extends faith’s substance and evidence into every quarter of our sojourn. It urges us to extend our joy, our hunger for purity, our lament, our light and darkness into the promises of the new creation where faith and hope become sight.

Love is God Himself in that He neither needs faith or hope as guarantors of anything contained within His sovereign design. As He Himself is love above all, containing everything of His character within its infinity, He commands that we love with the same absence of condition that He exemplifies. We are commanded to love, yet it is a gift given in order that the commandment may be fulfilled. Even as we are commanded to love we learn to love the very desire to love, even though we do so as smoking flaxes and bruised reeds. As with faith and hope, love is expected of us irrespective of temporal conditions. Love is the engine of faith and hope. It is, according to I Corinthians 13, even greater than each. And in the words of Galatians 5:6, love is the effectualizer of faith, even as it roots and grounds it (Ephesians 3: 17). These three, faith, hope, love, are gifts from God through Jesus Christ, the Author, Finisher, and all-wise synthesist of the whole. The just—the righteous ones, then—loved and loving, hoping against hope, live by their faith without which it is impossible to please God, without which we are lost and undone, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Hence faith, hope, and love, comprise a single, unassailable spiritual vanguard, if you will, that oversees and equips the whole of our living. This kind of living encompasses:

- *A life of personal holiness toward God; an expansive hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- *A life of proclamation and reconciliation, as if God Himself were making His appeal through us.
- *A life of comprehensive stewardship dominated by temperance, hilarity, and generosity, shown in love for every possible neighbor in all possible conditions.
- *A life of unceasing prayer dominated by adoration and intercession especially for the lost, the downtrodden, and the persecuted.
- * A life of glorying in unceasingly glorifying God.

Only now are we free to turn to the word worship because the life that we are called to live *is* our worship, our authentic and unceasing worship, our life of continuous outpouring. It excuses nothing from its purview. It is a full life within which the ordained specificities and sacraments of corporate worship are undertaken. Authentic worship, then, is a continuous outpouring of all that I am and all that I can become in light of my turning to the God of my salvation through Jesus Christ. The often quick-mouthed then forgotten saying that all of life is worship is brought up short, sobered, recharged and filled to the full with the richness of the law and prophets peering into the fullness of the word of Christ in the Gospels and Epistles. In short, whether we live or we die, we do so unto the Lord. Or we don't. We worship the Creator or we worship creature. In any case, we worship and our worship comprises our witness.

Given these concepts, it might help to think of unceasing worship in a twofold way.

A. Worship as the exclusive subject.

This is where, by intent, by design, and by content, we specifically give ourselves over to worship. Worship is the intended subject and everything done is tuned to and directed toward the specificity of intended worship. This can and must happen both in corporate gatherings but also in times of private intercourse with God through Christ. Because God is Author and Finisher; because, through the work of the Spirit, He is both Means and End; because faith, hope, and love are unqualifiedly at work in the specificities of

adoration, nothing temporal, artifactual, or circumstantial can be depended upon to bring this kind of worship into being. Instead, everything temporal, artifactual, and circumstantial is offered up *because* we worship. We are freed from our offerings in order freely to offer. We look then, to the Giver, not the gifts

B. Worship as the continuing object.

Here we refer to the sanctity of living unto God in *all* of our living. This is where faith, hope, and love, undergird our daily round: our variously defined work, our rest, our conversation, our hobbies, our parenting, our courtship and marriage, our ways among a sin-trodden world and a poverty stricken civilization. This is where we worship in implicit ways, often unconscious ways, yet we worship nonetheless because we are living sacrifices in all that we are and in all that we do. God is magnified even while hidden within in the mainstream of all our doings. This too is worship: worship as the object even as any number and many kinds of everyday actions become the subject.

So we can safely say that faithful Christians live one way only. They worship unceasingly whether worship is the subject or the object. Therefore, there is only one call to worship. It comes with our salvation where we turn from fallen worship to redeemed, blood cleansed worship. I know I keep saying this, but I must say it again: We do not gather corporately to worship. We gather as continuing worshipers whose object all along is to worship, in order to continue this worship, now as the chief subject, in each other's company.

II. The Arts and Unceasing Worship.

As to the arts themselves; as to Christians both making art and engaging with them, there is only one primary direction for artistic action. Made or experienced, art is an action toward God through Christ, made bold by its faithfulness, and only then by its content. It is an act of worship—a faithful offering—the artist offering his artistry and body of work, and the experiencer co-offering both the work itself as well as her engagement with it. This means that worship in spirit and truth, in the beauty of holiness, and as a living sacrifice, is above all, worship both beyond and with the artifact, but not because of it. Faith, hope, and love, are the conditions that guarantee its acceptance before God.

Therefore, all worshiping artists can take comfort in this refreshing, undergirding, even relaxing thought. As we offer, Christ perfects. God sees all of our offerings—all of us, for that matter—perfected in Christ. So take heart, flat-singing altos; take heart, understaffed leaders; take heart, mom-and-pop churches: no budget, few art makers—all amateurs. Take heart, for while we offer, Christ perfects. Likewise take heed, we who laud the independent glory of a masterpiece or hide in the shadow of known mediocrity or depend on the working action alone to be acceptable unto God: for in these we join all other vocabularies of legalism—and we fail.

Further, a theological understanding of artistic action makes it clear that there are only two working arenas for the artist of faith:

1. In humble service both to and with the liturgy, the whole of which is in complete obedience to the Word and the Sacraments.
2. As artist-in-residence—I like this particular use of the expression—in the world of general culture in any number of artistic callings.

As to artistic work within the liturgy—that is, when worship is the all-encompassing subject, the arts are not intended to be *the* worship, to create worship, to act as the artifactual Paraclete, or to define or mediate God’s presence. Instead, they are meant to point and give testimony to the all-preceding work of the Spirit whose task it is to teach, to inspire, and to draw us ever closer to God through Christ-in-us; whose task it is to so elevate the Word of God that the arts can only be offered in unqualified praise and in faithful response to its full testimony. There is no one stylistic or procedural formula for this. The Holy Spirit does not have a favorite style to which He preferentially turns in exercising His power. Artistic power within the liturgy—it is always there and always experienced—is not God’s power. Rather, it is limited power—artifactual power—that lies within our power to enjoy and to offer without being mastered by it. After all, from the very beginnings of time, we have been authorized to be sovereign over both what God creates and what we make. While we in our fallenness want to reverse this, our redemption corrects it.

As to the second arena, that of artists-in-culture, their work may be variously defined and variously practiced. It may grace an office building, be displayed in the Guggenheim, used in a commercial jingle or turned from plan to reality in a wood shop, a theater or dance studio. For the artist of faith, all these doings are acts of worship even though its various customers and publics may give this fact little or even derisive thought. While these artists are practically homeless—no natural abiding place for them—they are still worshipers; their true citizenry is in the heavenlies, seated with Christ. From there they go forth in countless creative ways, walking the pathways of general culture, in the world but not of it, clothed in God's many callings, to serve, inform enrich, dislodge, and company with the cultures of humankind. Though worship may not be the primary subject of their work, they can take holy comfort in knowing that it is always the object.

Now let me clarify something. The foregoing is not meant to imply two separated domains, two alienated processes and languages for art—the one holy, the other unholy, with boundaries fixed and categories irreconcilable, no chance for crossover or synthesis. This is blatant dualism. Rather, the difference lies in artistic scope. This is what I mean. Artistic action within the liturgy, especially in our culture—in whatever style it settles itself—is fundamentally simple, shallow, and familiar, whereas art in general culture and in festal settings in the church can and should run the full gamut, from useful access to downright shock and awe. Now I need to explain and defend what I mean by simple, shallow, and familiar.

By simple, I mean un-complex, procedurally, idiomatically, and stylistically. A cursory examination of virtually all current day practices will verify that liturgical art is simple art, occasional efforts in complexity notwithstanding. Historically speaking, I realize there are times when what we call complexity was a regular part of the liturgical diet. But it was always set in the context of simplicity, whether of chant, chorale, metrical and paraphrased psalm, hymn, icon, image, gesture or dramatic effort. Furthermore, I'm not sure we know that much about the perceptual skills and authentic response of the congregations in the various eras in which what we now call art music was done. I do

know for myself that as a result of better theological thinking, I have had to move from viewing the church as a fine arts institution, from using church music as an aesthetic schoolmaster, from assuming beauty to be the counterpart of holiness, maybe even its litmus test. I have had to move from raising standards as a primary calling to working toward them because the higher calling of excelling righteousness demands it. And while, in the early part of my 74th year, my hunger for beauty and my anger over its ravagement in this diseased culture, burn more intensely than ever, I have found out one of my idols; I have ever so slowly moved it from my nearby altar to a high place, only discover that it was still an idol and just as powerful from that distance. It had to be destroyed, not just removed. Now I am not only free to say what I've just said, but even more free than ever to seek singular beauty while taking pleasure in its many common siblings. I am becoming freer to teach rather than scold. I am slowly being delivered from beauty as a master only to seek it out as both my servant and God's.

In the second place, liturgical art is shallow art. By shallow, I think of a spectrum within which shallowness and depth lie at opposite ends of a seamless practical weave. Thus, shallowness does not mean mediocrity any more than simplicity does. It is not the negative side of aesthetic excellence, anymore than the shallowness of a Bach gigue is the negative side of the opening chorus of the *Saint Matthew Passion* in all of its complexity and depth. Shallow means milk as compared to meat, each meant to be pure, integral, and nourishing. Once again, a cursory examination of liturgical art throughout its practical spectrum shows us that shallowness has always held a strategic place. When depth is sought out it should deepen shallowness, not obfuscate it; and it should extend the boundaries of the known rather than darken counsel with the unknown.

By familiar, I mean that liturgical art, however we classify it (traditional, contemporary, emerging, blended, millennial, or rock/jazz-based) is already familiar to those who expect their prior choices to continue in their worship setting. Otherwise, they have no way of connecting, and given our current addiction to creating the best possible conditions for connecting, the various styles and approaches that we choose are little more than a repertoire of traditions, selected for those already used to that tradition, even though it

comes from the nearby times and practices outside the church. In other words, tradition does not necessarily depend on long passages of time to become tradition. Tradition, more than anything else, is contextual comfort. “What I’m used to” or “What I expect” has no fixed chronological criterion. Let’s face it—and here’s where we come upon another issue—when people come to worship, especially when they are told that the purpose of art is to prepare for, lead to, or enhance worship, they will naturally expect to be prepared, led, and enhanced by the familiar—what they already know about. In essence, then, tradition is a comprehensive watchword for all currently used styles despite certain fancy and sometimes misleading labels to the contrary. The only difference is whether the tradition—the contextual comfort—has come from the inside or the outside. Of course any outside tradition, once established, becomes an inside tradition

However, simplicity, shallowness, and familiarity can turn inward; their practitioners can use spiritualized super glue and close themselves into a window-less, door-less practical cubicle where flexing, breathing servanthood is turned into nothing other than provincialism: traditional, contemporary, blended, emerging, etc. The languages and dialects of authentic liturgical action begin to inbreed; and another practice can be added to the lexicon of crippled traditionalism: same-o, same-o churchmanship—false cool, Laodecian cool—worship by conditioned reflex. I do not want to be harsh for the sake of harshness, but I am deeply troubled over the ways we glue ourselves down in our various styles, the way we falsify our talk about cutting edge relevance and depend on an assortment of labels to validate us: creativity, ministry, excellence, awesomeness, uniqueness.

There are exceptions, thanks to the Spirit-driven servants who honor authenticity, wise change, and practical integrity—exceptions who empty their practices of pretense and pseudo newness; exceptions who serve the Word in the liturgy and preach a gospel of artistic expansiveness that challenges the authentic worshiper to hunger for newness, even though it be timid newness, but newness all the same; newness in its gentility, modesty, and service; a newness within which simplicity, shallowness, and familiarity spring outward and beyond. These exceptions may or may not be in the big churches;

they may or may not be well known; they may or may not be identified with the traditional, contemporary, blended, emerging, millennial, or such like, because labels possess their own constrictive force. But these exceptions do make a difference; they exude what I like to call local authenticity, they find their driving force, not in the latest lick, but in a theology of artistic action that oozes the Savior, centers in the Cross, and glories in glorifying God. Wouldn't it be refreshing if all the worship books, all the how-tos—were resonating treatises on the countless ways the church is already on fire from within and embarked on a perpetual Spirit-authored sojourn? Wouldn't it be refreshing if the concerns of a Harold Best or a Marva Dawn or a Sally Morgenthaler were to be quieted by such a rush of the Spirit that all we could do is report on the glory rather than complain about its absence? God, help us all. God, help me first of all

III. Owning up to the Insufficiency of Liturgical Art.

So far, we've considered the nature of authentic worship and the nature of artistic action in its two inter-related arenas of church and culture, and the procedural characteristics of liturgical art in today's settings. I now want to spend the remaining time on the suggestion that we understand and own up to the insufficiency of liturgical art. Relax—I want first of all to defend this suggestion only then to lay serious question to it. To put it as succinctly as possible, there is more to artistic action than the church, even at her best, can provide.

Let's start here: The contemporary church can never expect to keep pace with culture. There are two good reasons for this. The first, a negative one, issues out of the mess of mass culture, the other a positive one, issuing out of the glories of world creativity—a theologically driven multiculturalism, let's call it. And remember, this kind of multiculturalism necessarily welcomes the high cultures of all civilizations or it is not multiculturalism. Also, at this point, note that I will be making my point using the term mass culture rather than popular culture. This is intentional because I fully believe that there is an explainable difference between popular culture and mass culture, and I hope you'll see why in just a minute. Personally, I am a fan of, and a participant in, a good deal of popular culture, and I see no disconnection whatsoever between this and my

ardent love for and participation in high culture. In fact, I am becoming more and more prone to ignore traditional taxonomies: popular, classical, high, low, pop, etc., in favor of what I call the creative spectrum of humankind: an organic delight that defies time-worn categories. I've tried to develop such in *Unceasing Worship* and hope that you might look into the thoughts found there. But in any case, I am, in no uncertain terms, no friend of mass culture.

A. The Mess of Mass Culture.

I can go only into merest detail here. Suffice it for now, I consider mass culture to be a darkened ethos, a pagan spirit, a choking smog, a worldview pertaining more to the *whys* and *hows* of culture than to its *whats*. This ethos cuts across stylistic and practical boundaries and infects the entire discourse of our civilization. Mass culture—massified culture—this dark and pervasive spirit, exhibits the following characteristics:

1. Massive experientialism, dominated by feelings and feelingfulness rather than an organic relationship between what is felt, what is thought through, and how we can understand the value of the thinking heart and the experiencing mind, and how truth unites these and calls it wisdom.
2. The loss of a truth center and moral compass and in their place, the intrusion of massive relativity, this sneaky new absolute.
3. The degradation—no, the trashing of language, on the one hand through the convolutions of post modern scholarship and bureaucracy-speak; on the other, the growing inelegance, hyper-exaggeration, overall imprecision, and an all-too-often reversion to labels and one-liners. We can certainly see this in our public discourse, but do we see it in ourselves? Do we see it in the church? Listen lovingly but frankly to public praying; listen to the warmed over hip-talk; yes, listen to the sermons. This language trouble is furthered by a flawed and all-too-common assumption that the visual and gestural are the equivalent of or superior to propositional speech in the articulation of Truth.
4. A reversion to power and empowerment, as opposed to authority and enabling. Whereas power at its worst subdues and vanquishes in economic, societal, domestic, economic, athletic, and geo-political realms, authority and enabling subsist on principled

work and issue in servanthood, a preferring others above ourselves, and biblical neighborliness.

5. A pervading preference for what I have come to call self-enclosed shallowness, to which I want to pay particular attention in a few moments.

But first this: We Christians must seriously ask if and how we have sidled up and begun to conform to these all-too-common evils. My own conviction is that, to one degree or another, we have. I believe that we spend too much time with sweeping sloganized statements that go something like this: “Our culture is degraded. We are in trouble. Civilization is in collapse. The media are corrupt and consumerist. Our children are being ravished and our values blown away. God help us.”

Statements like these are about as valuable as a meteorologist saying that we are having weather. But where is the analysis? Where are truth-tellers, those who prophetically and fearlessly take culture apart, piece by piece and subject it to ruthless inquiry? How are we cozying up, where we are throwing holy water on the valueless things that are hidden in these blanket statements? We’ve got to put ourselves on a severe storm watch, praying for the kind of discernment that will lead us to a renewal of the doctrine of separation unto God. Only then can we witness to the very culture that we so contradictorily condemn and join.

But this does not mean we excuse ourselves from culture. We are, each of us, culture creatures, for culture, at base, is a working combination of what we make, what we believe and how our believing informs our making. Christians should love the very idea of culture more than any one else. But they must forge culture christianly. We have to remember that God loves culture, so much so that He sent His Son to set it aright, not disregard it.

Now back to the arts and mass culture and the first reason why the church cannot be, should not be, expected to keep up. Mass culture moves exceeding fast and with little regard for the trail it leaves. It moves ruthlessly. It changes and shifts at near lightning

pace. Styles fuse; styles separate then fuse all the more. This one is in, another out. This artist is hip, that one other square and who know how long hip stays hip and who knows when square turns hip? And how long will “sweet” be sweet? The arts in mass culture have no obligation to connect up with or serve changeless values. Change is fashion-based and fashion is market-based. There are no stable moral verities to check this rhythm, nothing to conserve except change itself. And all this change is not nearly as voluntary as the consumer thinks. Like it or not, the consumer is dragged along—shaped—by a market so cunning as to give the impression that the consumer creates the market. In this way, the art of mass culture serves the liturgy of black hole consumerism but without any moral check on the liturgy. The rhythm of this liturgy is entirely at odds with that of authentic worship where there is no semblance of consumerism, no determinism, no vagrant fashion, and no superstars. There is only Jesus, worship, servanthood and sanctity, and of course, art surrendered to Him and His Gospel.

Now I don’t intend to fall into a baby/bath water trap. That is why earlier on I distinguished between the hows and whys of a culture and its whats. This means that while the ethos of mass culture may be dark and pagan, a goodly amount of its artifacts are not. Common grace alone assures of that. There are real popular artists and art works out there, Christian or no. They work pretty much the way popular artists have in the past, keeping things simple and accessible, but also keeping lively and informed conversation with the classical, folk and ethnic.

The same is true in the classical realm. There are the true classicists—minority citizens of a neglected, even maligned community. They work largely alone; they work with dignity, highly sensitive talent, and vivid intellect. We need to hear and see their works, but the maw of mass culture works against this. But there are also the classicists in name only who are open citizens of mass culture. They thrive on power, they care little for stable values; they pander their craft and manipulate their publics in obedience to the spirit of the times. Even while performing the great works, their goal is not the building of civilization or glorifying in God, but feeding a narrow set of consumerist habits. They

worship fame and politicize its continuity. They subdue countless numbers of fine upcoming artists by perpetuating the idea that fame is the only word for excellence.

Once more, let me summarize. In the section on the arts and worship I made the point that liturgical art is best kept simple, shallow, and familiar. I suggested further that while there is a modest historical precedent for this, there is stronger precedent today in that the church borrows more from popular culture than it used to. And popular art by nature thrives on simplicity, shallowness, and familiarity. Exceptions to the contrary only prove the rule. I then tried to make the point that the church will never be able to keep up with artistic action in general culture for two reasons, one negative and one positive. I have already dealt with the negative one and I now want to talk about the positive one in what I call the puzzle of world creativity, this bright, rich rainbow of artistic activity.

B. The Puzzle of World Creativity.

World creativity reaches across and takes in the whole of human artistic action. It encompasses uncounted artifactual languages and dialects from tribe to metropolis, from hearth to concert hall, from anonymity to notoriety, from birth to death, from simple to complex, shallow to deep, strange to familiar, entertaining to engaging, ornamental to metamorphic, new to old and classical to popular. Furthermore, this rainbow world inevitably culminates in the highest and best of humankind's artistic imagination, the work of the high cultures of all civilizations. This rainbow world is an increasingly huge world that demands an extraordinary commitment to intellectual engagement, cross-idiomatic fluency, a willingness to spend enormous amounts of time in perceiving art, in analyzing it, in being even somewhat fluent in it, so as to think and act *in* it rather than simply react to or philosophize *about* it. Any honest approach to ethnocreativity comprises far more than a few Western-like replacements for Kum Ba Yah. On the contrary, in this newest world of artistic explosion-beyond-cataloguing and comprehension; in this newest world of unprecedented stylistic fusion and unforeseen syntheses; in this newest of all worlds where procedural boundaries are blurred; in this newest of all worlds where the great monuments of fine art, past and present, are still being born yet still ignored even by those whose worldview should cherish them—I

speak here of the born again evangelical—in this newest of all worlds, it is easy to see why the church has more work to do than simply provide its liturgy with appropriate art works.

And this is where I cannot help but criticize. While the church can be excused for its insufficiency, for confining itself to a limited repertoire and working primarily within simplicity, shallowness, and familiarity, it shows a dismal regard for artistic life beyond its practices. In spending so much time on “worship art” and a “worship culture”, even a worship market, assuming these to be the be-all and end-all, and spending virtually none on a theology of art that obligates every believer to go beyond the arts-in-liturgy and engage deeply in the rainbow world of artistic action—this is where the church shows its real colors—its faded colors. By default it supports an incomplete artistic sojourn. This is where our most obvious link with mass culture shows, in what I earlier identified as self-enclosed shallowness and shallow experientialism. That is, satisfied with simplicity, shallowness, and familiarity, we bastardize them by closing them off from the artistic worlds of complexity, depth, and newness—we are artistically at ease in Zion, the Scriptures would say.

Even so, the church may be the only surviving institution that possesses the theological moxy both to defend, judge, and point beyond its own legitimate insufficiency. While its failure lies in its self-enclosed aesthetic, its honor may be revived by a theology of artistic action that says this: **“Whatever we are doing locally and ecclesiastically to honor God with our liturgical art, this is not enough. There is more and yet more. And with all our theological might we will press ourselves and our brothers and sisters—especially our children, onward and outward beyond the limits of our local practice in order to grow up into artistic action at its fullest and its best. There is more to artistic action than we are presently capable of and we will educate ourselves, stretch ourselves, bring ourselves to go out into the world with an new hunger for what we cannot yet be expected to undertake in our sanctuaries. Liturgical art is not all there is.”**

After all, the Gospel that we preach is a Gospel for all of our living. It is intended for each detail of our growing up into the stature and fullness of everything honorable, excellent, worthy, dignified, weighty, solemn, deep, and wide. We must not overlook the simple truth that because we are created in God's image, we are expected to act the way God does, especially now that we are Christ's body—He in us, we in him, all in each other—all of us going as deeply and widely as possible, irrespective of what we do in church. Thus the plenitude of artistic creativity, from simple to complex, shallow to deep, familiar to unfamiliar, entertaining to engaging, old to new, popular to classical, intellectually complex to wonderfully transparent—a plenitude for which Pentecost is the chief metaphor; this is to be the plenitude made ready for each simple-complex-shallow-deep born again human being. Anything short of this, anything that our theology shortchanges us about; anything that foreshortens the expanse and reduces it to a narrow entity—even if couched in the language of “glorifying God”; anything short of the mark is the reverse of the kind of action that unceasing worshipers should claim as their end. If we were to understand that a deep engagement in the arts takes in more than a given church is capable of; if we were to understand that a theology of the arts is more important than the arts themselves, we might then find ourselves making unprecedented art that strives to keep up with our theology. We might then see the bottled water of Christianity-lite transformed into the dark, rich, nuanced wine of an eternal wedding feast.

Two strategically important goals lie ahead for the leadership and the laity. The first is to be sure that within the potential of local authenticity, they seek the highest quality based on the giftedness, consecration, humility, and passion of the local assembly, and that they understand that the limits they must necessarily set are to be taken as sign posts rather than fixed boundaries.

The second goal is driven by a comprehensive, far-seeing theological passion that both includes and presses beyond local capability. It is the solemn obligation of every artistic leader both to understand and question the insufficiency of liturgical art and to become the lead mentor, the lead shepherd, living a life in quest of the full richness of artistic

action. The art of our worship must thus point beyond itself. It must freely and strongly say, *“There is more, far more. Be hungry. Be thirsty. Be curious. Be unsatisfied. Go deep. Engage your whole being. Live in the first days of creation when nothing had precedent; when everything was a surprise; when shattering reality, not sameness, ruled the day; when bafflement and surprise danced the dance. Go to the empty tomb and find out what resurrection means to the shriveled mind and the uncurious heart. Go to Pentecost and learn of a new, ingathering strangeness, a purification of Babel and a highway to glory: spiritual glory, societal glory, artistic glory. Seek and find; knock and it will be opened.”*

Then perhaps the tables will be turned, and the local provincialism of this or that parish, the understandable and questionable insufficiencies will be opened outward and a larger glory born. Then perhaps; no, then for sure, these old words from our brother Isaiah might ring out for the arts this way: “Arise, shine; for your artistic light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you. For even though cultural darkness cover the earth, and gross darkness the people, the Lord will arise over you and your work, and His glory will be seen upon you. The darkened ones will come to your light, even kings to the brightness of your rising.” And then the psalmist might say it this way to the servant-artist: “Those who sow their art, even in tears shall reap in joy. He who goes forth with artistic seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

Amen.