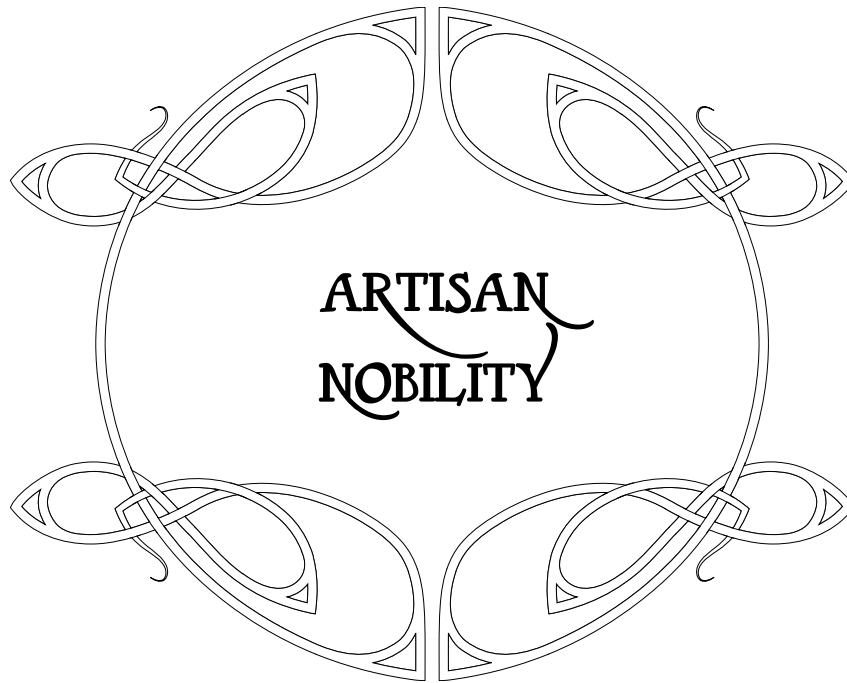


RECOVERING THE SANCTITY OF ART
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A STUDY ON THE REDEMPTION OF THE IMAGINATION
THROUGH THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CHRIST

THE CAPSTONE THOUGHTS OF A GRADUATING
MADISON TRAINING COMMUNITY STUDENT

J.R.MYSZKA

A Note from the Author:

In the past two years since I first wrote this essay I have had people ask for a copy for themselves when I mention it even in passing. I am always a bit surprised that people who I meet only very briefly want to read my thoughts on art. They have no experience on which to base any knowledge of whether or not I am a mediocre writer, let alone a writer who has anything of importance to say about Christianity and the arts. The more vain parts of me like to think that I would come across as that suave, insightful and intelligent sort of man but I have been told by a friend that when she first met me a few years ago she thought me a self-absorbed and pompous fool so I don't hold too tightly to that thought. The only real conclusion I have to explain why people would want to read what an unknown 24 year old boy who has worked in construction since High School has to say about a Christian perspective of art is that it is a novelty; in the general populace of Christian culture there is a general ignorance about what Christianity has to say about the creative capacity of man; it can be shown by simply taking a survey through your local churches asking people to name a Christian writer who has made a serious attempt to explore what Christ has to say about the arts. There is a general confusion about whether or not even Christ himself might have anything significant to say about art. Within the church there is a sense that it is good to make art but frankly we don't know why.

To say that I wrote this essay with the intent to remedy this silence—or in the very least to introduce us to a prescription—would be a lie; at no point of writing was I that clear-headed in my intent. As I neared the end of my third and final year in a Christian discipleship school, the Mad City Training Community, in the spring of 2007 I knew that my final project and presentation would be a writing but I didn't know what I was saying yet. So I traced back over my journal from that past year and began to write out of the progression of my thoughts through that year, I didn't know where I was heading and it all came out backwards because of that. The introduction was almost the last thing I wrote, while there are whole paragraphs that are pulled almost verbatim from journal entries seven months prior to when I first started writing. This is not so much an essay or a study on a theology about the arts or creativity as it is the recorded progression of one man's struggle with God over his own artistic identity. Is my artwork and music valuable to God? If so, why? How do I value my creativity? Can God really speak through my imagination? These are the sort of questions that drove me onward and even now I stand amazed at the way God led me to books and guided my journal entries along a path in order to speak into my life. At times it felt as though my journal was writing me, that it pulled the pen along where it wanted to go and I simply had the chance to see what the man in my journal thought. It was a conversation with my deeper self.

A note on the progression which led to this: though this paper is the culmination of a year long season of intense reading and contemplative reflection on story, art and the imagination the Lord had been preparing my spirit for a number of years prior. He had been calling attention to a hunger in my soul for which this became the filling sustenance. In the summer of 2004 I had the opportunity to go to Eastern Europe as a musician where our band toured with a locally native Christian band. It was the first time where I was able to see a group of Christians who were able to both adhere to a very high standard of artistic excellence and to a significant and impactful public ministry of the Gospel which was able to reach into areas of their culture that remained closed to more traditional methodologies of evangelism and ministry. Being able to travel along side of that group and observe and participate in the way they devoted their lives both to discipleship to Christ and to a professional quality of art—indeed even that they did not see an opposition between those two devotions but a very

intermingled whole—deeply shaped my perspectives on a healthy union of Church and Art. That time is one of my fondest memories and immediately afterwards I moved to Madison. The following summer of 2005 I again had the opportunity to travel overseas as a musician and this time I served as well as an assistant in a theatrical production. While the previous trip to Eastern Europe was a greatly inspirational and exciting time this trip fell on me in the midst of an extraordinarily painful romantic circumstance and I spent the trip completely overwhelmed by heartache and a heavy load of production tasks and performance demands, not to mention that during the trip I lost my passport and spent a day wandering—with the blessing of a wonderful friend to whom I am forever grateful for—a foreign country of which I had no knowledge of the language trying to find a temporary passport for my return while I was utterly depleted of energy. I returned home with a desire only to slink into a hole in the ground and hide while I nursed the wounds of my soul. I incidentally dug up the trilogy *The Song of Albion* by Steven Lawhead which I had read as a teenager and began to read it again. No book has before or since touched me the way that trilogy did in that time. Through that story God embalmed my soul in the tender wraps of myth and it was under the watchful care and inspiration of the Holy Spirit that these legends of honor and nobility between friends, rightful kingship and responsible stewardship, and the sacrifice of one's own life for love that I was healed. Because of that experience—and many others similar to it since—I became utterly convinced in the unique and sacred power of art and story in human life and it was during the year afterwards that God began the process of introducing me to literature, friends, experiences and materials which eventually became the season of study which produced this paper. I had caught a whiff of some foreign savory smoke and needed to follow the scent though I did not know what it was I craved.

So, to return to the writing of this: because this writing was less the purposed aim towards a goal than it was the journey after a deep longing—that it isn't a building of a monument but it is this Jacob's stairway one step upwards leading to another which inspires the monument of worship—has made it an unending nuisance to title it or describe it in short detail. Nearly every time someone asks to read it I go back and review what I said and I revise a paragraph here or there and rewrite the subtitle of the paper. I think there are at minimum eight revisions of this paper that have been sent to friends at one time or another. And each time it comes up in conversation I end up fumbling over how to sum this paper up in such a way that I won't detour the conversation forever. Even as I am writing this I am attempting to find a phrase to sum this up in. Perhaps the nearest I can come to is that this isn't even an essay or thesis or paper, it is an ideological autobiography of my imagination's experience with God.

No matter how many times I have approached this paper attempting to revise the arguments or refine the points I am making the paper has continued to defy any significant modifications to itself because it is not an argument or point to be made but rather it is a flagstone in the path of my life and it is useless to tread backwards for the attempt to pull it up and make another stone to fit in its place. There is no other slate-stone which will do to reveal what transpired in my soul during that year of my life, regardless of whether or not the stone is symmetrical, well crafted, or laid down properly. There are portions of this which the first edition simply makes me wince at its bluntness and incompleteness; especially the sections where I practice a very loose and amateur sociological study of 'Art and Materialism'. Thankfully since then, some of the brash ideas I churned out I have found verified in the writings of other far more capable men to speak into the cultural history of art in the Western World, which is a great relief: I may feel a tad insane at times but at least I have found myself in good company. The most notable verification I received about my sociological thoughts of

art was in Pitirim A. Sorokin's book, *The Crisis of Our Age*. I do not remember if I had read the chapter dealing with the modern context and crisis of the arts in the 20th and 21st century before writing my piece here or not but it brings me encouragement to see someone of good academic repute make the same diagnosis of modern art that I made—albeit Sorokin doing so in a far more thorough, intellectually responsible and generously wise manner. Another notable thing which plagues me to this day is the abominable phrase 'the Superfusion of Relationships', it is a horribly clumsy wad of language. Since I first wrote it, I have been desperately trying to find a better title for that relational phenomenon which I experienced.

It is things such as that which made me grimace about how clumsy I was about capturing certain aspects of these thoughts. I can agree with the end result, the final thoughts I came to, but the manner in which I got there seems to be one long, stumbling detour. In one letter to a friend whom I sent the paper to I remarked that reading over this essay felt "like watching a man trying to pass through a door by drilling a hole through the middle instead of using the knob. His foolishness is very puzzling, but you must admit that the persistent fool is a bit endearing and lovable for his indomitable faith that the damn door is so worth getting through."

It is an oddity, and probably an unwise way, to introduce an essay with an Author's Note talking so much about my dissatisfaction with it but I still present it because I do truly believe that this 'damn door is so worth getting through' and I hope that through my awkward grappling with these things that the doorway would be made clearer for others. I pray over these pages in the hopes that through their words that the same progression of joy and affirmation which God worked in me he would reproduce in others. I am now more convinced than ever that Jesus is the single most important person and his life is the single most influential event ever to speak into the function and fulfillment of human imagination and creativity. I am also more than ever convinced that God is in this day raising up a generation of Disciples after His own Heart who will so fully immerse their lives in His that His light will seep through every pore in their spiritual, creative, physical and intellectual being and that in the vapor of that radiance nothing will ever appear the same again; that we will then know in the Earth a new shade of beauty that previously was seen only in Heaven. I dearly hope that this essay is an aid towards that end.

j.r.myszka

19 April 2009

“For to the the clairvoyance of love all that is unseen takes on sweet shape, and all that we see we are shapen to. A new world emerges softly from the old: not imperceptibly and unreckoned, but by such divine graduations as we may note and rejoice in. Then the creator is manifest in his creation, and all in us.”

~ James Stephens, *Deirdre*. pg. 132

PREFACE

What I hope to do in this MI summary is to share with you a vision of what seems to me the shape of the family crest of an ancient household of long and noble lineage, and I have come to find that it is my household and that the lineage is the tracing line of my ancestors. This crest has long been lost and ruined and the process of it's recovery seems to me as mysterious as the cunning designs that make up it's shape. I did not set out searching for this, I did not embark on a quest of recovery; the discovery of it began as the accidental finding of a few scraps of canvas and parchment that shook my imagination and excitement enough for me to keep them close and my curiosity of those perfect coincidences turned gradually to an insatiable joy as these accidental scraps of antiquity pieced themselves together and begin to define the shape of a huge, elaborate design whose origins and artistry embodied the character of what I had thought was a admirable, but dead culture. But I found that it was not dead and that, indeed! I am one of its descendants! I could be no more surprised if I were to have collected for myself a wardrobe from second-hand clothing stores and then to have a stranger approach me on the streets to remark on how similar my dress was to that of my royal ancestors and then, in response to my confusion, give me papers proving that I was a descendant of the last czar of Russia.

Over the course of this year as I began to collect the fragments as they blossomed in my journal what drove me to write was a continual feeling that I was getting glimpses of something big and very beautiful, but I had no clue what it was or how to talk about it. Only in the past month have the pieces starting linking themselves together. As I paged through the last year of my journal I began to see a thread which ran through all of the thoughts, sometimes it was a central theme that drew me in while other times it barely rose to my attention at the frayed edges of my mental patchwork. But seeing this continually woven thread allowed the pieces of tattered thoughts to gather into enough coherency for me to attempt to do what I hope to do here: describe the nature and character of the design of this weave; a

design which has come to completely reshape my understanding and perspective on the nature and character of all things. I hope that I will be able to present to you the images that have been shaping in my heart as a taste of intoxicating joy so that I can share this beauty that compels me to engage the world in a hopeful and wonder-full manner which finds joy in all things.

Besides the fact that this thing has such an enveloping quality about it that it will dominate my writing here, I am making a choice to not focus much time on the activities I did as part of the developing Greenhouse Community – specifically the Greenhouse Arts Cooperative – during the last year even though those activities more directly correlate to the mission I set out to work on at the beginning of this year which I talked about in my MI Mission Proposal. I do not mean to say that I devalue those activities or that the quality of the Greenhouse is anything but beautiful and very exciting, but while I participated as much as I could in the Greenhouse this year, it is not my project. It seems silly to me to think of writing the summary of my Training Community experience on something who's pith and core is very much shaped around the ethos of Joe Steinke, not Jake Myszka. If you want to hear more about the Greenhouse, then pick up documented words of Joe, he will do a much better job than I ever could. And, seeing that one of the central tenants of the Greenhouse is to launch new young adult initiatives and not to remain in it's own cyclical eddies, it would seem sadly ironic if I were to leave the Training Community – especially being part of its last graduating class – and talk mostly about what Joe is doing and not what Jake is doing, or – in the very least – aiming at doing.

That said, I will mention the Greenhouse here because my involvement in it falls underneath and is guided by this growing envelope of thought that I will aim at describing, and my involvement in the Greenhouse is one of the primary ways that this envelope becomes an actuality in my life and not a mere abstraction. But it is the description of the heart and soul of this envelope that I aim to talk about here, not simply the active results it produces.

In the chapter 'Organizing the Revolution' of *The Shaping of Things to Come* that Joe highlighted in class authors Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch explain their conviction that the structure of the Church is most biblically ordered first by our **[i] Christology** (our understanding of the person and work of Christ), which informs our **[ii] Missiology** (the purposes of God and His People), which determines our **[iii] Ecclesiology** (the form and function of the Church).¹ The church then, in all discussions about the nature of its work and being, should function out of this grid. This worldview envelope I keep mentioning but never yet explaining is my – or the reshaping of my – Christology, so this MI summary will be my exercise to consciously explore and define the (iii) form and function of the Church so that it may champion and embody the (ii) purposes of God and His People as defined by my (i) understanding of the person and work of Christ specifically in looking at the significance he has in the place of human imagination and creativity. It is a tall order I place on myself and I know that I can only lay a foundation of belief to build on; I also will not explore part iii for reasons that will be made clear later. But, before all of that, I must also explore some of the experiences and thoughts (especially those about the qualities of art) that led me down this golden road, for it is through them that the road became cleared before me.

¹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, pg 209.

RECOVERING THE SANCTITY OF ART

I Historically, art has been appreciated for its abilities to capture and explore the nature of things that are beyond the common senses. Men loved art because it said those things that the voice of logic could not; theories of predestination and open theism will ever be at odds with each other but Oedipus is bound by neither philosophy and the quality of that artistic work is in no way impoverished for a lack of theoretical uniformity. However, in our current culture it is popular to minimize the importance of those things beyond what we can perceive through our five senses and we glorify Logic and empirical proof as the basis by which to understand reality; reality is defined by how men understand it and we have grown comfortable saying that if we cannot directly experience it then it does not exist, or in the very least that it doesn't impact our world enough to give it any thought. It is not an uncommon perspective—especially among the high academic environments—that religion and spiritual belief are constructs built to cage areas of ignorance and that they are inferior systems compared to the sciences; they served our ancestors well, but we have matured; that they no longer are relevant to such a refined and scientific and mature world as ours. I do not know if our culture is yet at the point where it actively seeks ways to wash its hands of the old mysticism of religion but we live in a culture where intellectual respect of a man and his contribution to society is greatly questioned if he holds to a Christian lifestyle. In a world that moves so wholly along the incessant march of Progress its materialism might propose (if it were not so plainly absurd) that human sight is an inferior sensory tool compared to the powers of a telescope or microscope, or that horses are obsolete creatures now that we have motor vehicles but a man would be hard pressed to function with microscopes imbedded in his skull, and a many a garden would be in dire straits if we used automobile waste as fertilization. Technology has found ways to excel in the specifics of life in amazing ways but that does not keep us from feeling that the mongol archers and apache warriors would lose something if they were to ride motorcycles instead of palomino steeds; something feels robbed from an image of Amish culture when a large triangle reflector is bolted to the back of a hand-built carriage. It is an echo of a feeling a man might get if he were to grasp hold Excalibur and find the engraving on the blade reads "Made in Taiwan" or if he were to find that Hermes winged boots were supplied by Nike.

ART AND MATERIALISM

While the cultural arts is one of the few places where the preservation of the verity of the experiential ancestry in iconic images such as the Apache warrior, the Redcoat, or the Roman Centurion is still a value, new art in our culture is losing its ability to appreciate art apart from its economic viability. In our pseudo-materialistic culture, the appreciation of art has had to turn away from the transcendent quality of art to its ability to invoke strong emotional reactions. These emotional reactions were our natural re-

sponses to our glimpses of the deeper truths expressed in art, but we now, having denied the deeper truths, have shortened our gaze and hold aloft the ability to arouse emotion as the prime good of art. This is a futile attempt since artistic critique is now focused not on the object itself but the appreciation of that object, and by doing so lose sight of the object that is capable of being appreciated. "The surest way of spoiling a pleasure [is] to start examining your satisfaction."² A man loves his wife properly when he loves his wife, not when he loves his love; if he were to focus on finding the pleasure of love, he would not be bound to his wife, he would pursue with energy any source that would produce in him the emotional response he has attached to love.

This appreciation of art based on the arousal of hysteria (dramatic emotional response) is a curious phenomenon produced in a pseudo-materialistic culture. A thoroughly materialistic culture would base its appreciation on technique and style and not on what is actually being created. Plato harshly criticized the Sophists for their pursuits to use language in such an exacting and nuanced way that it became a game of verbal cloak and dagger where anything can be said as long as it is said intricately. Language was considered well presented by the clever use of secondary meanings and subtle connotations of the words instead of the actual meaning being said. Hysterical Art is a Sophist's art, it loses the weight of meaning provided and it removes even that reduced meaning to an elite class (art snobbery), and as art loses its intrinsic worth apart from the technicalities of production it loses its ability to provide any insight on human life. The production of art in a materialistic world is merely the translation of reality into progressively more and more alien forms, and so it removes itself from applicability to that reality. If there is nothing more to existence than what already exists, then there is no need to re-present reality in another form. Art in that society can only be an exhibitionistic media, a visual gluttony: gorging our senses on the physical reality and growing bloated in our reactions to it. Under the reign of materialism pornography is the highest form of art because, if we are honest, there is no other source material that will consistently and more powerfully excite base emotions and sensation than perceived love and sexual intimacy. Now, I doubt that our culture will ever progress to a state where it will make that statement plainly (there is still too much of an intrinsic morality) but it is significant to note how predominant eroticism has become a utility of marketing and a central theme in all the arts; much of popular hip-hop music is one area that has already given up the pretense that it is after anything else deeper or more relationally significant than physical gratification. In that worldview which minimizes substance apart from physical reality a response to that reality in an artistic medium can only be a re-presentation that is inferior to the thing itself.

But, we do not live in a wholly materialistic culture; we appreciate the hysteria created by these alien things that are dubbed artistic because they stir something in us that feels deeper than our physical substance. But we are unwilling to admit that there may be an important transcendent reality because then we would be subject to its rules, just as we are subject to physical laws such as gravity. This is why we have turned our gaze to the enjoyment of emotion and not to the thing creating the emotion. While our generation still gives lip service to the beliefs of materialism and minimizes the importance of spiritual experiences we still seek the effects of spiritual awareness in our daily lives. In the early 20th century, Lewis and Tolkien were driven to write articles and essays defending the legitimacy of Fairy

² C.S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, pg 218.

Story and Romance, championing the literature of things fantastic, and fought to write these books that they wished to read and make that literary style accepted in adult circles. Today, the name of Potter is worth millions of dollars. We make movies of mystery and fantasy, we love to present our imaginative minds with entertainment that blatantly evokes our emotion through beasts, other dimensions, romance and otherworldly mystery. I went to Blockbuster.com and looked at their list of the top 100 movies rented, included among those 100 are movies like: Batman Begins, The Illusionist, Click, V for Vendetta, The Da Vinci Code, The Prestige, King Kong, Lemony Snicket's A Series Of Unfortunate Events, The Chronicles Of Narnia, The Village, Finding Neverland, Stranger Than Fiction, Constantine, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Troy, The Polar Express and I, Robot. With our modern culture spending millions of dollars on the new rash of superhero movies and films that beg a connection with something Other besides the raw humanity we observe our culture utterly betrays the common preaching of materialistic supremacy. Our world today echos the ages of Greek and Roman empires, on one hand sacrificing our crops and harvest to Apollo's universal logic and Aphrodite's' fickle eroticism in hope of prosperity and fulfillment and then applauding the agnostic philosophers in their endless systemization of the world and never batting an eye at the incongruities. It may be the great victory of the Enemy in our age, to blind our culture to the vast hypocrisy of its own religion – which it cleverly disguises as the -ism's or under the name of 'theory' – and to then shine a spotlight on the hypocrisy in the church for the object of ridicule.

We obviously cannot subscribe to a materialistic worldview, but neither can we revolt against it denying the importance of the physical reality and create a culture that is dominated by a belief in the supremacy of a transcendental reality. We cannot exchange the truth of the physical world for a transcendent ideal; it is through our physical beings that we commune with, understand, and live in a spiritual reality. The greatest fulfillment of human life, both individually and societal, comes not from denying a part of the human being but by learning how to reconcile all parts of the human experience together in their fullest forms. Even in the realms of society that need a precise and quarantined study, such as the sciences and medicine, at the completion of that segregated study the subject is once again placed into its larger context. The Human Genome Project might spend years isolating each of the thousands of building blocks of DNA, but these categorized samples are only useful when they are used in considering the whole body.

A great story or work of art would not be properly appreciated if you were only able to view it as a long series of fragments. We might spend money to buy puzzles but the point of the puzzle is to be put together: to see the piece as a whole. This does not mean that you ignore the details and shape of each little piece. We must handle and study each small piece in order to reconstruct the whole. We must both learn to see the beauty and goodness of things both as they are paraded in concert before all the world and as they are cherished in the still, quiet corners of our daily experience. It is being able to appreciate a blade of grass for its texture and the sweep of it's spinal vein as it is pinched between your fingers but then releasing it to sway with all it's thousand brethren in a wind that sweeps across the open fields, turning then to a green rolling sea.

In this kind of holistic worldview we need to redefine our understanding of the role and function of art if it is going to be considered a valid part of human society. How does fiction aid reality? How can the nature of an object be explored by an image of the thing and not the thing itself?

THE CONTEMPLATIVE NATURE OF ART

II

Josef Pieper, in one chapter, or essay contained within the book *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation*, points out a danger besetting our culture today. We are so bombarded by a plethora of visual stimulus, so living under a choking veil of visual noise that we are losing the ability to see the world with our own eyes. Our perception of reality has been segregated to the highest levels of philosophical thought and it should not be so. If we all exist in reality, why should only a few elite be able to see and understand the fabric of reality? By adopting these beliefs that only the specially trained and genius individuals are able to discover the nature of truth we willingly subject ourselves to a socialism of our intellect and only

digest truth or insight given to us by the mass medias. In these medias, even if the originating artist or thinker produced worthy and good revelation, his work is diluted to great degrees as it is pumped through the grinding systems of corporations who exist not for the exhibition of truth but economic profiteering. Our beliefs and conceptions of the world are dictated to us and we lose our ability to properly understand our lives as they become more and more smothered by the beliefs of others. We must each take responsibility to recognize and acknowledge truth as it is presented to us in our pursuit of living well in the world we inhabit. This is in no way saying that truth is subjective or relative to the individual who perceives it. A blind man will argue the existence of the dog based on the sound of barking, while the deaf man will define a dog by the shape of its body, but it is the lame man who will tell both the deaf and blind man to leave off arguing and simply take the dog out for an enjoyable run. It is then the man of relativity who resists the lame man's imposing beliefs and refuses to personally accept that the dog is a good companion during a run and condemns the lame man of judgmental imperialism. The reality of what a dog is is in no way modified by the singular perceptions of the men who behold it. "To see things is the first step towards that primordial and basic mental grasping of reality, which constitutes the essence of man as a spiritual being."³

Josef Pieper goes on to say that while an abstinence from mass media and fasting from public entertainment is a step towards regaining our ability to perceive reality for ourselves it is only a temporary interruption from the onslaught of inane visual extravagance.

A better and more immediately effective remedy is this: *to be active oneself in artistic creation, producing shapes and forms for the eye to see.* Nobody has to observe and study the visible mystery of a human face more than the one who sets out to sculpt it in a tangible medium. And this holds true not only for a manually formed image. The verbal 'image' as well can thrive only when it springs from a higher level of visual perception....

Before you can express anything in tangible form, you first need eyes to see. The mere attempt, therefore, to create an artistic form compels the artist to take a fresh look at the visible reality; it requires authentic and personal observation. Long before a creation is completed, the artist has gained for himself another and more intimate achievement: a deeper and more receptive vision, a more intense awareness, a sharper and more discerning understanding, a more patient openness for all things quiet and inconspicuous, an eye for things previ-

³ Josef Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation*, pg 34.

ously overlooked. In short: the artist will be able to perceive with new eyes the abundant wealth of all visible reality, and, thus challenged, additionally acquires the inner capacity to absorb into his mind such an exceedingly rich harvest. The capacity to *see* increases.”

Josef Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings*, 35

This is the most immediate and intimate benefit of art, the inner enriching of the individual's ability to relate to his environment out of a right understanding of it. This reveals a critical part of the artistic activity: its engaging, incarnational nature. The artistic mind-set requires a consistent inclusion and immersion within the world, a critical-thinking perspective that yields an insight or revelation, and the creation of art is the celebration of that revelation through talent in an emotional response. The contemplation that produces the type of discerning sight that Pieper talks about cannot be a detached observation. Indeed, no one who does not have a personal sense of curious enjoyment will even have the impulse to study the world in such an intimate way for it is in love that we seek to value and honor something as it is and so seek in joyful fervor to understand the intricate soul of the loved one. “Contemplation is visual perception prompted by loving acceptance.”⁴

III

THE SUPERFUSION OF RELATIONSHIP

There is an amazing thing that happens when artists come together and contemplative individuals combine their intimate perception of the world. Over the J-term of this MI year, I worked with the Greenhouse MI team to build a central prop for the J-Term Prayer Room; we built a tree. As we worked and I watched the tree grow and flesh itself out, I reflected on how it compared to the original picture in my mind when I first envisioned how it might be constructed and look when completed. I found that my mental picture felt like a distant cousin to this frankenstein hybrid of mossy wood and metal brackets that was shaping *itself* before my eyes. And the sensation I had was just that, it was growing as much out of its own will as out of the will of my friends and I. The branches found ways to put themselves together into shapes I had not seen before. If I am the artist and therefore the shaper and mine is the mind behind the creation of this object, how did it happen to differ so greatly from my original plan? The answer seemed obvious enough: I am not the only one bringing this thing into existence, more minds are at work at here. Now, a part of the curious phenomenon of artistic creation even in an individual project is that the medium will suggest different shapes and ideas through the artist actively engaging the media with his will. The wood, the clay, the metal, the brush all are of different natures and they dance with the artist's hands at different tempos and rhythms and thus the character of the dance shifts through the action of that dance. In this collaborative effort though, something else was at work apart from the self-active nature of the medium which occurs in every creative work and I began to contemplate how the partnership of creativity between us shaped the project apart from anyone's specific vision of it.

A good test of the quality of collaboration in an artistic group is the amount of humility and critique between all of the artists. The combination of a humble attitude toward one's own contribution to

⁴ Josef Pieper, *Only the Lover Sings: Art and Contemplation*, pg 75.

the group and a high level of critique combats two common problems artisans tend to face when in groups: (1)*Apotheosis*: an aggressive self-promotion and the idolization of their art that dominates the group and demeans each other member; or (2)*Inhibition*: a restraint of offering to the group any significant portion of their creative gifts and the group then lacks movement, inspiration, or enjoyment for the placid presence of these restrained members. Inhibition can be an expression of Apotheosis, where the artists considers their work too good to be sullied by the inferior talents of the others in the group, or it can be a result of personal insecurity; the artist is so frightened of suffering rejection that they refuse to offer any of their ideas. Perhaps the best descriptive word for the artistic stereotype is *Territorial* because it combines a high level of personal identification in the property of their creative gift which creates a fenced off area of art that the artist feels belongs to them; this produces a lack of ability to share—they only how to advance or retreat their borders, not mingle. A humble but critical approach to the work of an artistic group combines a high level of participation and contemplative evaluation with the ability to offer ideas and critique in an open-handed, generous manner. The result is that a creative suggestion can be appraised on how it advances the character of the artwork being created and not on a personal evaluation of the author of the idea. A whole essay could be written further exploring how to create a symbiotic relationship in an arts project but my purpose in this writing is not to present a prescription of how to create good collaboration—that is a large discussion of its own accord—but to describe what I learned from being in it. Our group functioned well and because of this collaboration the end result was more than a synthesis of smaller parts placed one on top of the other but an amalgam where each piece of the whole was painted by the character of everyone involved. I could not cordon off sections of it and label them as belonging to one person; the worth of the whole was more than the collection of the parts.

When I come to create a piece of art I bring the two dimensions of my Manifest Imagination; my body of mental imagery and my collection of practiced techniques. But when I work with another person, they also bring their own set of Manifest Imagination, and an extraordinary thing happens to multiply the creative potential between us. As I work, my body of mental imagery is supplemented with the mental imagery of my artistic companion and the blending of his imagery with mine becomes a source of inspiration and produces a third set of imagery that is neither mine nor his but now, through collaboration, has become a part of both of our artistic consciousness and is cycled through our minds and imagination to resurface later as fresh creative inspiration. But that is not the only result (that our creative tools have now a larger body of work to manifest); we both bring a different collection of production techniques and in working together we both learn and teach skills as we attempt to capture in physical form the reflection of our imagination. When two artists come together in a co-mutual work each artists gift is strengthened and invigorated by the presence of the other artist and so his gift to the work in community is larger than his gift to the work as an individual.

This principle is not an artistic phenomenon but a sociological one; it is a part of how humans interact with each other in all areas, from projects to conversation. Humans are social creatures and so the fullest expressions of humanity occur not in isolation but association. We readily see the desolation created in the soul of a child who grows up in isolation; we even use solitary confinement as a form of punishment. However we lose our sight on the importance of relational collaboration when it comes to the *advancement* of human existence instead of simply noting the negative effects when it is lacking. Our lead-

ership models are usually led by an individual and then in a subordinate second tier we find group leadership, but even this group exists primarily to serve the vision of the One.

We are also losing the vitality of this expansive relational quality in one of the primary places that it thrives in; conversation. For all of the benefits of the internet, the rash of blogs, e-articles, and internet resources have turned our ideas about language to a more dictative form than a discussion.⁵ In a true conversation your dialogue is a response to the other persons words, not an exposition of your own ideas. We are more familiar with a combative dialogue than a conversation, and the difference is in the territorial problems of apotheosis and inhibition. A true conversationalist seeks to combine his ideas with the other, not override. A conversation *asks* why, a debate *informs* why; in one knowledge is enlarged and in the other is bounded and considered already fully explored. Progress of human understanding and existence happens in discussion, not dictation.

“We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre: rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those two into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision. Even on the biological level life is not like a river but like a tree. It does not move towards unity but rather away from it and the creatures in it grow further apart as they increase in perfection. *Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other forms of good.*”

C.S. Lewis, viii, *The Great Divorce*

IV

THE DIVERGENCE OF GOOD

Through beginning to understand the contemplative benefits of art and through the experience of a community creative process I believe I participated with a phenomenon that lies at the very core of how human existence was designed to behave. This quote from the preface of Lewis' *The Great Divorce* was the tinder that these things sparked and when the fire was lit, it added a new dimension of sight to all of life. At first I thought this phrase of divergent good from Lewis was a curious and amusing thought about goodness, but when I came back to this quote after realizing the unique life created in human community – especially in the context of creative invention – it shed light on what was the impulse of the community of the Trinity that created all of existence. The first thing that came to light in my mind was a greater realization about the *momentum* of goodness. Goodness and love are active forces which both honor the past and look with hopeful vision to the future; Goodness is dynamic.

⁵ this is not to say the internet is incapable of a discussion, the web forum is one of the most open discussion spaces we have in culture, precisely because it is presented to us over the internet: instant worldwide networking available at all hours and the record of the conversation is saved for all viewers current and later.

In the beginning, God is Love. Love will not keep silent, it refuses to remain in the darkness and be content in passive existence. It must be shared. No loving parent hides his child, he presents his baby to the world in glowing pride and asks everyone to agree with them, 'it's she lovely?'. Rarely is a music aficionado content to merely listen to music; he must sing along, and will often attempt to learn an instrument to create more music. No fan who's prized sports team wins their final competition to be the crowned champion expresses his joy in quiet, somber approval. His joy and excitement drives him to jump up and bellow his proclamation of victory. We must express love or it will wither and fade. To express love is to share it, and love — when shared — is not diminished but enlarged. It spills out to overflowing, and as the wine overflows to shower upon those around us our cup bubbles forth in even more happiness in seeing others be filled with love. And here is the Trinity, perfect in love, and no world to shower love upon. And so, out of the community of love God opened his voice and called forth a presentation of his being, and then he kissed the earth and gave birth to a being of his own image with which to share his love and walk with in communion, then said that it was not good for him to be alone and made real a companion from his dreams, and his joyful command to these sovereigns of earth was to 'go forth, be fruitful, and *multiply*.'

Then, after men fell by seeking to disconnect themselves from the communion of love and achieve their own basis for the truth of good and evil, they gathered their whole race together in fear of being dispersed and plotted a territory of land to become a singular monument to the divinity of men. And God rebuked them and diversified their languages in order to spread them across the globe.

God then found one man in a metropolis of ancient society and told him to 'go forth, be fruitful, and multiply. You will be a mighty nation and bless the far reaches of the world.' God took his family out into the wilderness and, when his flocks and the flocks of his extended family grew too large, they split up and spread out into the lands. God turned that man into a tribe, and made from barren wombs two twins and turned the tribe into a nation. The nation grew and took a land for itself and made a country of prosperity, but it grew prideful in its glory and excluded themselves as the elite loved ones. God, dissatisfied not living amongst his loved ones, became a man as well as a god and rebuilt that which was torn down and brought with him the heraldry of the coming of the heavens to earth. He brought up the downcast and set them at a feast table and whispered a command to them to share the bounty of the feast with their neighbors, their country, their nation, and all the world.

God continually desires to see all of creation grow more and more abundant. He does not draw us towards a constricting center of all creation, for he Himself is all of reality and he is first known as a Creator, and when he becomes the Lord, the Lover and the Light of the world He does not lay down his previous names, he expands and reveals more dimensionality of himself for all the world to see and adore. He approaches the Israelites in a the temple as a pillar of fire and mist, then as a man in their homes, then as a spirit in their souls; and once again does not abandon his past expressions of love and goodness, but builds upon them and asks them to sit down in remembrance of the pillar and the man. And this is also central to the growing diversity of good, as good increases in diversity it also increases in intimacy. He is first God of Creation, then the God of a nation, then the Son of Man.

But there is more. The tree of goodness that Lewis paints does not merely grow up in one massive trunk through all of history. Like he remarks, it splits, and splits again. But this proliferation of goodness

is not so much like a generational path where the father generation grows old and passes away while the children strive ahead; it more closely resembles the life of those children as they grow older and mature. Each blossoming child of good love more fully expresses the unique qualities of himself that differentiate him from his siblings. And one child is not better for being a doctor than for being a musician, or a scientist, or a carpenter or engineer. Each being of the Trinity is fully good, and yet they are distinct from each other. When Jesus gives news that the Spirit will come to his disciples he describes it as a different task from his when he ascends to heaven. He has gone ahead of us as the Firstborn of all Creation to prepare a place for us, while the Holy Spirit lies in faithful residence in the hearts of men. The role of Jesus is different from the role of the Holy Spirit, similar yes, good yes, but different and that does not imply any greater or lesser quality of goodness.

In the act of creation, God made all manner of distinct creatures and things, and called them each good in turn, celebrating their peculiar natures. When Jesus called his disciples he did not choose twelve of the same kind of men, he called as his closest friends accountants, fishermen and religious warrior zealots. He did not tell Peter to become more like John, or Thomas more like Matthew. He changed the names of some and not others and when asked of them who was greater, he refused to value any one of them above anyone else. We can sympathize with Peter's flight from the Garden of Gethsemane, and then learn from his actions to brave the stormy waters in a step of faith. We can also sympathize with Thomas' demand for his logical doubt to be unequivocally satisfied; and then strive to cry aloud with him that statement of utter devotion to Jesus. "Let us also go, so that we may die with Him."⁶ We love Peter for his impetuous energy and responsiveness, as well as wince when we see our folly embodied in his foolish words and actions, but love Thomas as well for his commitment to Jesus with a very clear mental comprehension of the risk of discipleship and also see how that same logic can hinder our reaction to the movements of Jesus. Each man is one face of that many-faceted humanity that we are all apart of, and it would be a poorer world without both of them.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to that hand, 'I have no need of you!'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' But God so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

-from *I Corinthians 12*

These are the movements of God, to have goodness and love be dynamic and prolific, He is the champion of the divergence of good in His actions, and it is this motion that he calls us to join him in a intimate community. It is this spirit of invention and diversity that is the Image of God in mankind: the power to see and create things new and beautiful. And to then contemplate and again create and revel in the goodness both of the righteousness of antiquity and of the grace of the virgin. And when the virgin in

⁶ John 11:16

joy is wedded and leaves her parents house to create her own house we gather and celebrate it like nothing else in the human experience. In recognition that all things are made appropriate in their own time, and that there is a time for everything, we can fully appreciate and rejoice in the realities before us and not lament them for not being something else. It is a great and devastating wound to rebuke a thing for being itself.

I can think of nothing so invigorating as this, to say that human existence may resemble a cycle at times, and may pass many times through reoccurring experiences, but those cycles are not the orbit of a constricting funnel but the revolution of movement on an eternal voyage of communion and bright-eyed adoration of a Lover who appears reborn to us each day in beautifully fresh visions.

V SUB-CREATION

From this we come to another deeper and more mystical quality of art, it is one of the primary ways in which men can participate in the divine task of proliferating goodness and love in all reality. There is a divergence of good in the technologies of men: at first we had one light bulb, now many types and they are all useful. At first one kind of motor driven vehicle; now catalogs of breeds of these mechanical beasts who inhabit the earth, sea, and sky. Medicines and techniques of healing have become increasingly more complicated and specialized and capable to treat maladies of the physical condition that would have obliterated men of ages past.

The sciences are a crucial part of enriching the physical dimension of mankind, but they find themselves critically lacking in the ability to explore a greater spiritual dimensionality of human life. Art is uniquely capable to be the medium through which men can pioneer new forms of love and nobility in the communion of all men, because its expression is not bound by the rules of logic or structure that the sciences embrace and within which perform exceptional feats of invention and ingenuity. But the arts—especially literature since it's art is completely devoid of physical restraint—in exploring the spiritual nature sometimes present to us images of a world not bound as our is, and in viewing the qualities of imagined realms we see the the character and qualities of the human spirit acting in new ways, and in so gaining a different perspective we see a greater depth and life of love, peace, and joy. And in the gleaning of new appreciation of what love, joy and peace can be we both find more glory in the current expressions of goodness and seek to enact new forms of it.

If art is viewed as such a tool for sacred purposes, then we must seek to understand more about the qualities of artistic invention than it's contemplative nature. So let us attempt to shed light on how men create the artisan crafts. Earlier when I talked about the exponential growth of creativity I experienced in community I used the term Manifest Imagination (my body of mental imagery and collection of practiced techniques) to describe my artistic gift to the group. This, while close, is incomplete in capturing the essence of art. Let us start by talking about Imagination.

In J.R.R. Tolkien's essay *On Fairy-Stories* he presents one of the best expositions on the powers and quality of art, specifically literature. He defines Imagination as "The mental power of image making".⁷ This is larger than merely a collection of mental imagery, or even the ability to recombine imagery into new shapes. Within the depths of Imagination lies the most mysterious intuition of artistic invention. Sometimes ideas spring to the mind of the author or sculpture completely without any concerted effort of the artist to seek out a new idea. Intuition may only be an imaginative power at a subconscious level, but often when these intuitive ideas burst forth into the mind it comes like the ambassador of some alien land: strange and beautiful and requiring an immediate response in order to glean understanding from their foreign language. The impulse of men when taken by such strange intuitive imagination is to create a form around it, even if the form can only exist in a mental sub-reality. However, this process of Manifestation, giving form to the imagination, is not yet art. Art is "the inner consistency of reality"⁸ of this manifestation. Art is the power to give articulate expressions of that imagery, even if the context of those expressions is itself unreal. That is the quality of art, that it can create an unreal context, a sub-creative order that houses the forms of imagination. Essential to art is that consistency to itself, a sense of rationality. Art is a rational pursuit, the rational character of art is what makes the concepts of the imagination articulate. If there is no rationality, then there is no image, the working of the mind is nothing more than an indistinguishable mass. It is the difference between a garden and a compost heap. The vitality of the art is dependent upon focused energy to create space and order for the imagery to grow and thrive in; without it even the most fantastic and beautiful imagery will decay to dull, ashen waste fit only for the fertilizer of a plant that will grow in a carefully tended garden.

The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make. If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured. If they ever get into that state (it would not seem at all impossible), Fantasy would perish, and become Morbid Delusion.

For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it. So upon logic was founded the nonsense that displays itself in the tales and rhymes of Lewis Carroll. If men really could not distinguish between frogs and men, fairy-stories about frog-kings would not have arisen.

Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*

Here Tolkien uses the word 'Fantasy' in a very precise meaning, which he defines as a "Sub-Creative Art [that has a] quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image."⁹ While I would like to spend the time to, in my own language, explore the creation of Fantasy. I do not have the time, nor yet the skill to attempt such a task. In addition to this J.R.R. Tolkien does such a fantas-

⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics, On Fairy-Stories*, pg 138-9.

⁸ see footnote 7.

⁹ see footnote 7.

tic job that I find it hard to imagine a better way to say the things I want to say in such a concise and wonderful way, so I will simply honor his work here.

The human mind, endowed with the power of generalization and abstraction, sees not only *green-grass*, discriminating it from other things (and finding it fair to look upon), but sees that it is *green* as well as being *grass*...

The mind that thought of *light, heavy, grey, yellow, still, swift*, also conceived of magic that would make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead to yellow gold, and the still rock into swift water. If it could do the one, it could do the other, it inevitably did both. When we can take green from grass, blue from heaven, and red from blood, we have already an enchanter's power – upon one plane; and the desire to wield that power in the world external to our minds awakes. It does not follow that we shall use that power well upon any plane. We may put a deadly green upon a man's face and produce a horror; we may make the rare and terrible blue moon to shine; or we may cause woods to spring with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of the cold worm. But in such 'fantasy', as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator.

Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 122

The creation of Faërie, that land of Fantasy and Romance (an idealized form of fantasy embodying the positive qualities of morality) is as old as mankind. In the ever-growing realms of Faërie were born the figures of ancient myth; Zeus and Athena, Baal and Moloch, Thor and Odin, Achilles and King Arthur. And in these heroes they attempted to find the ideal images and beings that they could be guided by and give praise to. And these images gave the real world a greater depth because they reflected the unhindered images in Faërie. Out of the free willing creation of Faërie, we instilled value to the world around us through giving it the potential – even an imagined potential – to be grander and more beautiful than what was seen before our eyes. The horse is glorified through the birth of Pegasus, and the island gained a deep mystery when it became a distant survivor of that great island Atlantis. We climbed a mountain with a vigor because if we were only to pierce the cloud cover, it might reveal itself to be Mount Olympus.

It might be foolish for a man to sit quietly on the shore of a misty lake waiting to see if perhaps a silver-clad arm will raise from the glassy surface and dub him a king with an enchanted sword, but he commits that folly because he wants to be courageous and noble and that pursuit is one that should never be hindered. But, through the history of pagan civilizations, the great and high mythologies degenerated as the gods breded among themselves and the Hall of the gods became overcrowded and diluted with lesser beings. Faërie drifted from Reality, and so became corrupted for the lack of a fountain of truth to guide its procreation. The quality of faërie had a cap on it, but the desire of faërie did not and when its growth reached a limit it turned upon itself and whereas manifest reality was morphed into faërie as so gained honor, faërie morphed and had no guide to keep it from demonic visions. Fairy-Story and tale had the great quality of *eucaastrophe*, coined by Tolkien: the 'sudden joyous turn'.¹⁰ It is this unexpected ap-

¹⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics*, On Fairy-Stories, pg 153

pearance of hope unlooked for that is the eternal gift of fairy-story; its claim that dawn will come, the sun will rise, love will win and that no evil is an eternal prison for men. The poet of old began to see the tale of mankind progressing and they groaned for the *eucaastrophe* of man to appear, it was sorely due and all men felt the lack for it's presence. The dreamers who once exclaimed wide-eyed that faërie might be now cried that no force on earth seemed able to call Faërie any closer to reality than a distant and alien fiction.

VI

THE FULLFULMENT OF ART

Myth is the desire of true religion. Deep in the heart of men, sometimes so deep it is only retrieved through dreams and the unconscious image storehouse of imagination, dwells the image of He Who Is To Be Worshiped. And this image of the Praiseworthy froths up from the depths of man's soul and through the images of his life's experience — tainted or misleading though they may be — and then through his creative desires and through the gifts of artistry he creates the forms that come to his mind. He rarely takes time to ponder the origin of the images in his mind's eye because the emotion of this bubbling and the impulse of artistic creation excites not a desire to sit and contemplate more, but to act, to respond in vibrant and joyful invention to give substance to that thing that stirs in him as with it's own life. On this impulse, pagan men of old took the tools of storytelling and attempted to shape the images of these dreams and casted the forms of gods and so the gods took on the divine visions of the deep soul of man but they also carried the weight of man's depravity, and they could do no more than this. G.K. Chesterton sums this up in *The Everlasting Man* with his definition of Paganism: "It is an attempt to reach the divine reality through the imagination alone."

In the forest once lived a young pioneer, little more than a grown boy who lived his happy life among the gigantic oaks of his woodland home. One day as he wandered among the forest, chasing the squirrels or hunting deer he fell into a deep cave. He strained his gaze upward, craning his neck for a glimpse of the sky he was so used to dancing under but only the faintest glimmer of sunlight made the long journey down to his prison. He tried to climb back up, but could find no foothold on the slippery shale even for his strong hands and long legs. His hands became cut and sore, and his heart fell deep into his chest as he came to the crushing realization that he could not return the same way he had come. The cave was very large and in it he found withered mushrooms and a trickle of water and was able to sustain his life but unable to return home. Years passed in the cave and the boy grew old and bearded, he had long given up hope of escaping and spend his days merely cultivating the plots of mushrooms; life had descended to a mere continuation of existence. The only thing that gave him any semblance of pleasure was his attempt to draw on the cave walls the images of his home. He filled the cave with carvings and scratches of trees and elk and wolves and the sun. But over time his memory of life faded and he could no longer see the animals and plants clearly in his head and the pictures turned unknowingly into a gallery of distorted and corrupted forms; limbs shrunk and colors faded. The wolf's eyes disappeared as the wolf's head became wholly the pursuing ravenous gaping maw that dwelt in the dark of the forest. The skull of the owl suddenly sprouted a dozen watery eyes that stared in every direction; the spider's legs sprouted snake heads and the monkey grew a human head but a scorpion's tail. But for all the corruption of his art it was all

he had left of his former life and so he, in his feverish dreams, continued to etch the forms of a ruined world upon the cold and damp walls of the cave.

As he covered the walls of the cave with these static and lifeless images he began to realize that one day he would cover every surface with his memory and he grew frantic at the thought of losing the last acting touch of recovering his old life and each moment he wept over his art and yet was addicted to it. He could not release himself from his old life but neither could he peace in his frantic work. In the end, in the last dark corner of his cage, he grated into the rock his last image of ruined hope and suddenly the stone idol of lost life cracked. A piece of the wall fell before his feet. Behind it was an empty hole and from it he felt for the first time in years the caress of moving air that blew away the dead, clammy air that was all he knew anymore. He gasped, and his body shivered; he fell to his knees in tears before the hole left behind the stone. He could see light before him. He tore at the wall and it yielded to his new strength and revealed to him a tunnel that progressed upwards, twisting and bending inexorably back to the sun. With teeth clenched in scared hope he scrambled up the path.

He burst out of a small hole in the topsoil on the side of a hill and in a blindness before the light of the world he tumbled down the hill. He stumbled to his feet and as the blurry and burning world called his sight back to clearness he gasped in awe of the world un-sullied by long years of dark memory. No more did his mind dwell in the stained image of the world and he gladly cast aside the monstrosities of the cave world and reveled in the colors and grace in the world not as he vainly dreamt it, but as it truly was.

Paganism is the image of the God and the coming of Christ is the man of the Image. This is the glory of the Myth of Christianity, how the Image of God was shown clearly through the divinity in the Light to the World which restored and coloured men in that eternal and noble glow.

But did the Pagan not see that the inventions of his mind – no matter how closely they resembled the authentic Image in their soul – were disconnected from a secure truth, soiled through his own hapless weakness, and so to be cast aside? No, just as the eyes grow accustomed to dusk and the parched gladly drink even dirty water the pagan grasped even the little he could see that was worthy and good. But whether or not the Pagan had the discernment that his dreams were sullied by a weak flesh or knew the ultimate hopelessness of it makes little difference for a man who is hungry may chew a rubber band or suck on a rock. Not because he thinks his hunger will be satisfied by the rubber or the rock, but he knows that his mouth must chew, and if he cannot find satisfaction for his stomach he will at least try to find exercise for his mouth. And so the Pagan will give a portion of his crops to the idol or ask a blessing on his sword before battle or engrave the image of his household god on his armour and above his mantle. But I do not think any myth that inspired such actions was written with the seriousness of a doctrine that defined how to live and worship any more than the story of The Incredible Hulk was written as a teaching of the temperance of anger or of Spiderman as a doctrine on the stewardship of giftings. The Pagan very much treats his mythology with a form of seriousness and belief, but it is not the same seriousness or belief that men have in morality; violating that seriousness is the difference between a child opening his eyes during a game of hide-and-go-seek and a man who opens his eye upon an adulterous image.

In the life and death of Jesus Faërie became reality. All of that ancient, husk of depravity that trapped both gods and men was stripped away in the newness of the birth of the God-Man. No myth could compare with that of the mystical tale told by a small cult of Jews two thousand years ago, precisely because no other myth had actually occurred and could be told first hand. In the Incarnation, the mythical impulse of man was granted its crucial missing piece, an ideal reality to refer to. Prior to the life of Jesus, the *ideals* of myth were themselves imaginary and could bear little weight to actual life. So, while the ideals were desired, they stayed in the stories and the philosophers denied that they had any authentic addition to notions of truth because they were fundamentally unreal. No longer. Prometheus went and stole fire from the gods to warm men's bodies, but Jesus came sent from God as the Light of the World to clothe men in silver and gold to pass through the fires of judgment, and in that fire the chaff of our fallen depraved existence is to be burnt away and mankind will rise from the ashes as a phoenix, reborn as themselves; the noble and redeemed children of the Most High God.

The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels — peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving: 'mythical' in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. But this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfillment of Creation. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the 'inner consistence of reality'. There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art, that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath.... Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men — and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused.

But in God's Kingdom the presence of the greatest does not depress the small. Redeemed Man is still man. Story, fantasy, still go on, and should go on. The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the 'happy ending'. The Christian has still to work, with mind and well as body, to suffer, hope and die; but he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed. So great in the bounty with which he has been treated that he may now, perhaps, fairly dare to guess that in Fantasy he may actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation. All tales may come true; and yet, at the last, redeemed, they may be as like and as unlike the forms that we give them as Man, finally redeemed, will be like and unlike the fallen that we know.

Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 157

THE CHURCH: HERALDS OF MANKIND'S RESTORED SOVEREIGNTY

THE TASK OF THE CHURCH

I

Tolkien, being a linguist, focused his expositions about the redemption of the arts mostly on literature and found own of his primary sources of inspiration and communion with God within his pursuits of language and fantasy. While I have very much the same temperament as Tolkien regarding the creation of myth and the exploration of Faërie as a sacred act, the Incarnation of Christ resulted in more than a greater sense of truthfulness in only storytelling. As Tolkien briefly mentioned in the quote printed above, in the Incarnation 'Art has been verified.'

The pre-Christ man could not in any sincerity hope that the forms of his ideal imagination would ever be made possible. As I mentioned earlier, the story of humanity had not yet had a *euclatrophe*. Art was a joyous pursuit, but it was a pursuit of unreality and ultimately unable to elevate man out of his depravity. Pagan art has it's limits; it cannot heal the scars of humanity, it can only treat the swelling. The further it reaches outwards the more frail it's grasp of reality becomes, and as Tolkien commented, in that state 'art would languish...and become Morbid Delusion.' In a lack of a clear revelation of what ideal transcendent reality is, art loses a sense of authority. It is that authority that was reclaimed by the flesh and spirit of Jesus. In so binding heaven and earth together through his life and death Christ has given all creative works a validity that did not exist before. We now, through our communion and intimacy with the source of both Faërie and Reality – the King of Heaven and Earth – can, in our art, now call witness to and manifest an ever-growing reality of love, peace, joy, wonder, romance, and truth. In Eden, man was given sovereign power as stewards over the world¹¹ but we cut ourselves off from the breath that bestowed upon us that sovereignty and sought to claim a position of authority in creation out of our own merit. In doing so, we alienated ourselves from the ability to fully rule this physical realm well, having forfeited the scepter of authority given to us. The sovereignty of men is restored in their adoption into the community of the Trinity, not as servant-heralds, but as princely ambassadors, as sons and daughters of God. And because of this redemption of our communion with God, we have regained the greater capacity to steward this earth well, and a central part of that is the abounding of creative forms of spiritual reality expressed in physical things; art.

¹¹ Genesis 1:28 "...fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

In art, we learn the practice of Contemplation, seeing ‘with loving acceptance’¹² and in that contemplative act we gain an abounding revelation of beauty and truth. The task of the church is to [i] engage the whole world with that same contemplative energy the provokes the dynamic proliferation of goodness; to [ii] be heralds to that restored sovereignty of all mankind within the adoption into the Trinitarian Community; and to [iii] aid men, through acts of relational superfusion, to embrace the reality of their sovereign adoption in the unique expressions of their created and creative being.

The pre-Christ man, in art and all of life, was ultimately deprived of an eternal hope for the honor and fulfillment of men¹³. We no longer lack that eternal hope; it is now within us. That revelation of hope for men brightens our eyes as we gaze upon and live in human society. Just as the island is elevated by the sinking of Atlantis, and the horse by the wings of the Pegasus, men are elevated by the ancient heroes. But now the heroes of old are elevated by Christ. This is precisely because the elevation that Christ brought to the heroism of men was not an ascent to another more distant realm but the elevation from the darker realm of death to a new born life. Men now can joyfully aspire to become the hero of his greatest desire. It is one of the ways that we grasp hold of what the life of Christian Heroism looks like: the creation of super-heroes. What better artistic image can we approach men with to inspire our love of him than that of the archetypal hero: a hidden and growing power and responsibility and charity that lies just beneath a thin costume of mediocrity? Through the artistic images of men we ennoble his ability to be as brave as Sir George in combatting the dragon, and as pure and righteous as Sir Gawain honoring his commitment even to death through the trials of temptation. In these iconic heroes such as Robin Hood, Odysseus, or King Leonidas we commemorate the higher aspirations and reaches of mankind. In light of the life of Christ, chivalry and charity is reborn in new and greater forms; and in our contemplative artistic reinterpretations we resist the depraved impulse to bury them as ideals of only a fictional and antique world whose usefulness to mankind has long decayed. Love, Chivalry, Nobility, Honor are not decayed and they need not be forgotten; through our arts we once again claim the rebirth of all creation, both spiritual and physical, in the Incarnation of God, ultimate reality and ultimate Faërie.

And when I am told that belief in such a fantastical reality is illogical¹⁴ and only a nightmare of religious crutch, I resist. This kind of belief may be illogical, but the only logic I know is the fallible workings of this finite mind. It feels too arrogant to say that if I can't make sense of it, it can't possibly be real. So, I can't say faith in spiritual reality is illogical. It certainly is bigger than me, it certainly seems stranger and wilder than me, and it has a subtlety that confounds my intellect and a braveness that challenges my

¹² see footnote 4.

¹³ except in the promises of God to the Israelites for a future redemptive individual.

¹⁴ one complaint I expect to receive for such an idealized worldview is that it is Utopian, that I expect this earth to one day fulfill each and every fanciful dream of my imagination. I do not expect it to be so. The tale of this life is both war and salvation. It is both pain and redemption; it is the story of God's children in a savage world who must take up arms to defend the kingdom of heaven and to resist the powers of darkness. That struggle will not end in this age. There will come a great and terrible war which all men will take part in, and at its darkest hour the *eucaastrophe* of Christ's return will, with sudden and terrible love, turn dark to light and remake heaven and earth and banish Evil from it forever. On this side of the *eucaastrophe* of the Last Judgment Utopia will not be achieved, but that does not mean we should lay as catatonic doomsayers, but careful and hopeful watchmen in defense and readiness for that fateful hour.

timidity. It seems hard for me to believe that I could create, in my delusions, an image of reality that is so much more noble and beautiful than what I see before me. What would be the point of that? To make me despise the world because it is not heaven? To hate men because they are not angels? No, I dream these things because my waking mind is too boorish to let them be as big and wonderful as they are: that the earth is worth more than the way we treat it, and men and women are creatures of vast and growing nobility worthy of much more than the degrading selfishness I sometimes impose upon them in my weakness; worthy of love and acceptance and a warm welcome home to the place they belong: the seat of sonship and honor before the joyful feast of all creation.

II

THE MANIFESTATION OF FAËRIE

What does the action of this belief look like in my life and the church? I, having just gained enough clarity around these things, don't yet have a clear grasp of what the practicalities of this Faërie belief look and act like in the church. I am hesitant even to attempt to define those actions of a community in such an individual act as writing. If I am to uphold my beliefs in the nature of relationship, I will only find the good actions of the church in the actions of being within the community of the church. And I am confident that those forms will be far greater than the images I may see in my solitary thoughts. I want to make it clear that this should never be taken as an essay promoting the dominance of the arts: that every man should become an artist. I should not need to quote again Paul's imagery of the parts of the body. I glorify art because I see it has been sullied, and because I myself am an artist and so this is very near and dear to my heart and how I wish to live. I made mention that the arts are uniquely capable to enact a proliferation and exploration of the spiritual reality of humanity, there are other pursuits that are uniquely capable to enact proliferation and exploration in the physical universe; engineering sciences and medicine. Art can be applied in some areas, the housing structures for engines may be artistically designed, but that does not aid its engineering. I cannot operate surgery on aesthetic principles, disaster and death would result. Each man should contemplate himself in light of his sonship to the Father, and as a unique child live to the fullest degree his inspiration, whether it be in the arts, sciences, medicines, legal, governmental, familial, or educational realms.

As far as the actions in my life that do seek to manifest these beliefs, the one primary action is a greater effort to contemplate life and the people around me, and all of the resulting work that comes from contemplation. I hope I have stated the results of contemplative perception enough times to not have to re-examine what it means. I learn to love my co-workers more from the brief glimpses I gain of their heart to love their wives well, to be good fathers and workers who produce a good product; even if I must con-

template on them a long time before I see those things. I love the church more, with all of its follies and short-comings, through embracing it in that loving sight. And so, I make contemplation and abstinence from mass medias a regular schedule of my life; to refresh my vision and hope in humanity and every now and then I glean an artistic inspired moment and my hope and vision becomes acted out in sub-creation. The tree of the J-term event was one such manifested artistic vision. Perhaps this regularly scheduled time of contemplation and creation is the only activity I could currently suggest as a worthy shared activity in a community that desires to regain the gifts that the imagination and artistic creation can offer.

In addition to learning how to love those who are close to me, I love the artist even more. I love what he is capable of and lament that in this modern world the artists are either commercialized – which so often destroys the heart of their work – or are segregated off into sub-cultures. It is to these sub-cultures that my gaze is focused on; to bring them this new re-vision of art, to bring hope to their pagan arts and bear witness their sonship in God’s activities. The evangelical church has so attempted to modernize itself, as part of the common western culture, that it too creates an environment that is restrictive to the artist in the same ways secular culture is, and so the standard expression of church has alienated itself from the power of the arts and it must re-interpret it’s structure to regain that power. But that is a long process, and I will not wait for the church at large to be reshaped, I will go to those artistic subcultures where the princely arts of fantasy and proliferation lie dormant and I will work to breathe new life into them by bringing them word of the Word and a light of the Light.

Above all, the primary result of my belief in the sacred nature of art and the redemptive qualities of the land of Faërie and the eternally growing and differing nature of art, I seek to present myself as the incarnation of the effects of faërie. To be a character backlit by the glow of another world, a herald of that whispered sacred and beautiful reality that lies just below the surface of a world of dust and wind. And perhaps by shaping my life in mirrored forms of that Faërie realm of heaven men around me will see their world in a newly glorified and appreciated way, and be driven to find the source of all beauty and wonder and glory and honor and truth and so find Him, seated on the right hand of the Father gazing upon us in that vision that has redeemed all things of this realm and of that faërie realm.

These are books that I have either cited directly or books that while I don't quote them directly they have helped to form and clarify the things I have talked about here.

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- Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography.*
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