INCORPORATING ART AND CREATIVITY IN THE LIFE OF NEW HOPE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND STYLE CHOICES

Only two terms appear regularly enough to justify abbreviation:

NHCC	New Hope Christian Church
MCA	*The Meaning of the Creative Act*, Nicholas Berdyaev

Two other stylistic choices should be mention:

1. Rather than to insert Hebrew, Greek, or Russian into the text, I have chosen to transliterate. The few non-English references are straightforward enough that there should be no confusion.

2. How to render Russian names is always a problem. Most of the names I refer to can be found in various forms. There are multiple systems of transliteration from one might choose a standard. For my purposes, I think I will simply choose the form of the name I have encountered most frequently. Again here, I do not think my choices will cause any confusion.

To all who are family—
my mother and late father;
my best friend, Chris;
my wonderful daughters, Natalie and Nicole;
my good son-in-laws (but more like sons), Dan and Jon;
my perfect grandchildren, Addie, Hayden, and Quinn;
as well as my brothers and sisters and extended family;
church family and family of friends.
You are the gift I did not deserve.

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INTRODUCTION

The following pages document a Doctor of Ministry project that has aimed to encourage artistic endeavor and creative expression in the life of New Hope Christian Church in Columbus, Indiana. The primary period of activity was between August 2018 and April 2019, and there were four major parts to the undertaking: (1) a survey and analysis assessing congregational attitudes toward the arts, worshipers' perceptions of their own creative gifts, and congregational views on the role of creativity in the life of faith, (2) the development and articulation of reflections helpful to a theology of art and creativity, (3) the development, execution, and recording of a season of congregational life during which art and creativity were highlighted, and (4) a forward-looking component that identified habits and practices that might help sustain congregational openness to art and creativity through the methods of Appreciative Inquiry. The basic question was: *can a concentrated period of teaching, conversation, and activity inspire creative endeavor and appreciation of the arts within the congregation?*

Context. New Hope Christian Church is an independent congregation in the branch of the Stone-Campbell tradition typically referred to as the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. New Hope is located in south-central Indiana, on the north side of the City of Columbus. The congregation was chartered in 1823 and has worshiped regularly since. Current Sunday morning worship attendance tends to be somewhere in the range of 150, although the full range of weekly and monthly activities includes a significantly higher number of people. Practical membership—which is not an official category but would be my way of including those who worship at New Hope at least seasonly and consider New Hope home or, increasingly today,

one of their spiritual homes—is closer to 350. The congregation is mixed in terms of age and is primarily white, middle-class, and fairly well educated, the latter fact largely due to a significant number of engineers and public school teachers.

The City of Columbus, which had a population of 44,061 in the 2010 census, is a particularly interesting environment for the execution of this project. Columbus has sometimes been referred to as "The Athens of the Prairie," due in large part to its quality architecture. In 1991, the American Institute of Architects ranked Columbus sixth nationally for its architectural design and innovation, behind major metropolitan areas like Chicago, New York City, Boston, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. Columbus boasts buildings designed by I.M. Pei, Eliel Saarinen, Eero Saarinen, Richard Meier, Harry Weese, Gunnar Birkerts, Cesar Pelly, and Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. A number of these buildings have interiors, furnishings, and textiles created by Alexander Girard. Additionally, the city has outdoor spaces designed by landscape architects Dan Kiley and Michael Van Valkenburgh.

The presence of more than seventy architecturally significant buildings in Columbus is due in large part to the foresight of industrialist and philanthropist J. Irwin Miller, who worked in the diesel manufacturing business that today is known as Cummins, Inc. Miller was instrumental in establishing the non-profit Cummins Foundation, which, beginning in 1957, promised to pay architectural fees for the city's public buildings. Miller was not only a proponent of good architecture but a patron of all the arts, especially modern art. He was also a competent theologian, who served as the first lay president of the National Council of Churches (1960-63) and was active in the civil rights movement.

Miller's legacy and the architectural setting have helped inspire considerable community interest in the arts. There are several important pieces of public art in Columbus, including glasswork by Dale Chihuly and sculptures by Henry Moore (Large Arch), Jean Tinguely (Chaos I), and Dana Kirk (Eos). Columbus is home to the Columbus Indiana Philharmonic, a

Philharmonic Chorus, a community theater (The Mill Race Players), and the Columbus Area Council of Arts which sponsors many concerts, exhibitions, and teaching programs. In 2011, the Indiana University Center for Art and Design was dedicated in downtown Columbus. It is a joint venture between Indiana University and the Community Education Coalition of Columbus. The Center attempts to connect academy and community by offering a residential school of art and design (through Indiana University), continuing education classes for adults, education events for the community, and regular exhibits.

Project Rationale. This project grows out of my twenty-eight years of pastoral experience with the New Hope congregation. Despite being part of a community known for the arts, life at New Hope would not be characterized as especially creative—apart from the wonderfully poetic sermons that are delivered from the pulpit! Aside from the occasional Christmas drama, Vacation Bible School craft, or presentation of special music in worship, artistic expression is somewhat rare. The relative absence of art in the life of the church is not due to a lack of competent artists. Recent regular worshipers at New Hope include two retired public school art teachers (both of whom are gifted in abstract and design, one of whom publishes poetry in online journals on a regular basis); an English PhD who writes poetry, prose, and criticism; a young man who studied theater in New York and spent the last decade doing off Broadway work; a former major in Ballet from Butler University who continues to teach dance; two musicians with undergraduate degrees in the Fine Arts; amateur painters who delight in their art; and an Associate Minister who performs poetry and lectures on Harlem Renaissance poetry. Despite the creativity of these individuals, their art is rarely exhibited in any church forum. The burning question—which perhaps I should have asked earlier in ministry—is, Why is there such a disconnect between the highly developed expressive gifts that are obviously important to these individuals and how we live as a church?

Part of the answer is no doubt based on the communication gap that exists between the artist and the non-artists of any given community. Many of the fine arts require special skills of appreciation and a community at least partially schooled in new ways of perceiving and understanding. Is the local church a community that can handle, for instance, complex symbolism and abstraction? What artist wants to expose her creative work to a community that rejects out of hand that offering or does not know what to make of that offering?

Even in local civic life there is sometimes vocal resistance to the arts by those who deem the arts to be showy, elitist, or a drain on public resources. That concern may even be expressed theologically by the church. Why focus on art that can divide the community into insiders and outsiders, that at times seems to glorify human achievement at God's expense, that might distract from the main mission of the church, and that uses resources and energy which could be used for the evangelical mission of the church? Like many other good things in life, art can become idolatry.

The issue of art may be especially problematic within the Stone-Campbell tradition, particularly the Christian Churches/Churches of Christ branch of that movement. Among the Christian Churches there has been a heavy emphasis on rationality, simple truth, and practicality. Although notable exceptions can be found, there is probably a general accuracy to Kenneth Read's assessment of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ in Robert Webber's magisterial survey of worship: Christian Churches "have historically avoided the [functional] arts, devoting their energies instead to evangelism and seeking biblical simplicity."[1]

Of course what makes the question of art so interesting and important is that it necessarily goes quickly to the question of culture. What is the relationship of the church to the wider culture, especially high culture? Or, as was as was asked in antiquity, What do Jerusalem

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[1] Kenneth Read, "The Christian Churches/Churches of Christ," in *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, ed. Robert Webber, Volume 4, Book 1 (Star Song Publishing, 1994), 28. For more detailed analysis of the problem, see Dale A. Jorgenson's *Theological and Aesthetic Roots in the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Kirksville, Missouri: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1989).

and Athens have to do with each other? Church fathers may have had a point in steering believers away from the theater, given what it tended to represent. But as other theologians have noted, including H. Richard Niebuhr in his important *Christ and Culture*,[2] absolute rejection of culture is not the church's only option. This project assumes that the arts and creative expression can contribute to the life of the church and that it is possible to navigate the intersections of church and culture faithfully. Furthermore, I would suggest that the insights gleaned from this project have the potential of benefiting many other congregations; because, although Columbus is in some ways a unique community with its particular story, issues of culture, art, and faith are similarly faced by congregations everywhere.

Definitions

A proper prolegomena might at this point include clear definitions for key terms, which in the case of this project would make the words "art" and "creativity" candidates for clarification. I am inclined to be satisfied with something short of actual definition, especially as philosophers continue to debate not only what definitions for these terms might look like but also whether definition is even possible. But here is the longer route to that end.

Art. A real definition of art should be able to name the criteria by which an object or performance could be judged to be art or rejected as such. Recent attempts at definition have tended to be of three types, all of which touch on what would seem to be vital considerations but all of which are problematic too. (1) Institutional theories define art not in terms of the intrinsic qualities of an object of art, but in terms of whether that object is recognizable within an institutional framework —what Arthur Danto coined "the artworld."[3] The institutional theory's most famous representative is George Dickie, for whom art is essentially what an art-defining community says

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[2] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

[3] Cf. Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 61, No. 19 (October 1964): 571-584.

is art.[4] Critics point out that while institutional definitions account for art's social context, one should expect a proper definition to say something about the piece of art itself, which the institutional theory does not do. Plus, a private piece of art obviously does not require a discerning community. (2) Historical definitions attempt to locate art as recognizable in a tradition of artistic development. Jerrold Levinson, the most famous proponent of this approach, argues that in order for something to qualify as art it must, first of all, be intended as art and, secondly, bear a relationship to what has previously been regarded as art.[5] Critics of Levinson have questioned whether intentionality is a necessary condition for all art. Plus, what does one do with art that seems to be without historical precedent? (3) Finally, there are aesthetic definitions of art, such as that of Monroe Beardsley,[6] which base evaluation on objective categories of aesthetic experience, like unity, delicacy, symmetry, completeness, coherence, and intensity of experience. He defines art as "something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy aesthetic interest."[7] Beardsley's definition is one that again requires intentionality, a limitation not conceded by all aestheticians. Plus the supposed objectivity of aesthetic qualities would seem to be overstated, given the fact that people respond in different ways to the same piece of art.

So where to turn? Well, the aesthetician might turn to whom theologians often turn when in a quandary—Ludwig Wittgenstein. In a very important two-part essay in 1956, Morris Wietz

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[4] Dickie's institutional definition of art was introduced in an essay, "Defining Art," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (July, 1969): 253-256. A revised version was published later published in his *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Cornell University Press, 1974).

[5] Jerrold Levinson's formal definition of art: "x is an artwork if and only if x is an object that a person or persons, having the proprietary right over x, non-passingly intend for regard-as-a-work-of-art, i.e., regard in any way (or ways) in which prior artworks are or were standardly regarded." "Defining Art Historically," *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern,* ed. Alex Neill and Aaron Ridley (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1995), 227.

[6] Monroe Beardsley, "An Aesthetic Definition of Art," *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: The Analytic Tradition,* ed. Peter Lamarque and Stein Haugom Olsen (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 55-82.

[7] Ibid., p. 58.

does exactly that, bringing the great Cambridge philosopher to the matter of art definition.[8] Wietz's conclusion is that a real definition of art is both impossible and unnecessary. It is possible to talk meaningfully about art apart from a proper definition. He bases his argument largely on Wittgenstein's discussion of "games" and "family resemblances" in *Philosophical Investigations*, especially Sections 65-76. There Wittgenstein discusses the wide variety of activities that are called "games" and concludes that there are no universal criteria that make a game a game. Some are competitive, some not; some are physical, some mental; some involve skill, some not. What we have in games is "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometime similarities of detail."[9] Wittgenstein concludes:

> I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than "family resemblances"; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. —And I shall say: "games" form a family.[10]

Even without well defined boundaries, the word "game" seems to function well enough in everyday speech. To draw a boundary around the word might serve a narrow purpose, but to do so would only serve that limited function and do little to increase actual understanding.

Weitz applies the same to art. When we say "art" we are actually speaking of a complicated network of "family resemblances" that defies definition. As is the case of games, the absence of real definition does not make the word "art" meaningless or unproductive. In fact, any proper definition of art would quickly need to be renegotiated based on its inadequacy to common usage (as previous attempts at definition would seem to suggest) and also based on the fact that art is ever-changing and progressive.

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[8] Morris Wietz, "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no.1 (1956): 27-35.

[9] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1958), 32.

[10] Ibid.

Weitz's definition of art is sometimes referred to as the "open definition." More accurately, it is a non-definition. But it does provide a helpfully inclusive way of thinking about art. While the institutional, historical, and aesthetic theories of art certainly do help identify some of the strong and common features of what we call art, none of those theories is perfectly satisfying. Weitz's broader view gives a better way of holding everything together, and it is basically the understanding of art that is assumed in this project.

Such openness would even seem to be a particularly necessary quality for any congregational project on art, since much of what is produced by non-professional artists would be disregarded in professional circles as elementary, sentimental, derivative, and…just plain bad. But within a congregation setting—and many settings in everyday life, as well—we might say (to a child for instance) something like, "That's a nice work of crayon art you just made." In ordinary settings, that statement makes perfect sense and can be regarded as true. It can be regarded as true both because we commonly speak of such crayon creations as art but also because that crayon work bears a family resemblance—surely in some way or another—to some objects in a museum.

This more relaxed understanding of art also helps to include the wide variety of creative activities that have come to be partioned off so-called fine arts in the modern era. In the early 1950s, Renaissance scholar Paul Kristeller's two-part essay, "The System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics," appeared in *The Journal of the History of Ideas,*[11] reminding aestheticians that the contemporary understanding of fine art was, in fact, a fairly recent development. Kristeller argues that the modern notion of art—with the five primary arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry (sometimes with dance and prose literature added)—only began to develop in the 18th century. In antiquity, the Greek and Latin words that

[11] Paul Kristeller, "The Modern System of the Arts: A Study in the History of Aesthetics," *Journal of the History of Ideas*. Part One is in vol. 12, no. 4 (October, 1951): 496-527; and Part Two is in vol. 13, no. 1 (January, 1952): 17-46.

are translated “art” (*techne* and Latin *ars)* were inclusive of crafts and sciences. Kristeller maintains that

> classical antiquity left no systems or elaborate concepts of an aesthetic nature, but merely a number of scattered notions and suggestions that exercised a lasting influence down to modern times but had to be carefully selected, taken out of their context, rearranged, reemphasized and reinterpreted or misinterpreted before they could be utilized as building materials for aesthetic systems. We have to admit the conclusion, distasteful to many historians of aesthetics but grudgingly admitted by most of them, that ancient writers and thinkers, though confronted with excellent works of art and quite susceptible to their charm, were neither able nor eager to detach the aesthetic quality of these works of art from their intellectual, moral, religious and practical function or content, or to use such an aesthetic quality as a standard for grouping the fine arts together or for making them the subject of a comprehensive philosophical interpretation.[12]

Likewise medieval thinkers had a broad view of artistic activity. “For Aquinas shoemaking, cooking and juggling, grammar and arithmetic are no less and in no other sense *artes* than painting and sculpture, poetry and music.”[13] Renaissance humanism reorganized the liberal arts but still left them scattered among the other disciplines. But in the 17th century, advances in science help sever technological creativity from fine art, the former regarded as necessary for the progress of civilization and the latter as activity more superfluous. The distinction begins to codify in the 18th century, leaving the West with one set of creative endeavors identified as the sciences and another recognized as the arts (and with the fine arts in a hierarchy over the crafts). While aspects of Kristeller’s account are challenged,[14] two points remain: (1) the notion that art is ever-changing and (2) the fact that the development of fine arts tends to separate out and neglect crafts and other creative endeavors.

Creativity. By pairing the term “creativity” with the term “arts,” I am consciously leaving room for the pre-modern sense of art, which includes the fine arts but also the wide variety of activities

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[12] Kristeller, Part One, 506.

[13] Ibid., 509.

[14] Cf. James Porter, “Is Art Modern? Kristeller’s ‘Modern System of the Arts’ Reconsidered,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 49, no. 1 (January 2009): 1-24.

that were before modernity considered equally important and valuable—namely, crafts, woodworking, construction, needlework, etc. At the same time, I also keep the sciences in view, at least on the periphery, since creativity is recognizable there too. Some of the most creative people at New Hope are engineers, whose skills include not just plugging numbers into formulas, but using insight and imagination to invent and bring about conditions that were not present before some kind of creative act.

A simple internet search of "creativity" indicates what a topic of interest it is in numerous fields of inquiry. Education, business, public policy, engineering, and psychology are all investing considerable energy into research on creativity. But the primary disciplines in view for this project are theology and philosophy/aesthetics. In Christian theology, the notion of creativity has been a regular matter of discussion from Christianity's inception because all creativity has a reference point—the creative work of God, in the beginning and ongoing. All human creative action, therefore, can be viewed in relationship to God's. Some of the theological issues regarding creativity will be touched upon in Chapter One, which examines Nicholas Berdyaev's *The Meaning of the Creative Act,* an early 20th century work that focuses on creative action, and even more so in Chapter Two, which considers how one might begin to think theologically about of art and creativity.

The other field whose view of creativity bears directly on this project is Aesthetics. In his 1981 article in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Ignacio Goetz surveys some of the major attempts at aesthetic definition and then "set[s] limits" to how "the term *creativity* can be meaningfully used."[15] Goetz goes first to etymology; "to create" in Latin, Hebrew, Greek, and Sanskrit "means *to make, to produce…*in a physical sense." The cognate *to generate, to give*

[15] Ignacio Goetz, "On Defining Creativity," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 297-310.

birth also suggests an "activity having physical, observable results."[16] He then points out Catherine Patrick's[17] widely accepted summary of stages in "the creative process."

> [Those stages] are (1) preparation, (2) incubation, (3) insight (or discovery, illumination), and (4) verification or concretization. I should add that this last stage often eventuates in (5) a product (in a broad sense of the term). The appearance of the project may then be followed by (6) a complex process of evaluation involving criteria of morality, of usefulness, of scientific accuracy, of originality, and of beauty.[18]

His conclusion is that "creativity *per se* clearly fits the facts as described in stage (4)," and so "*creativity is the process or activity of deliberately concretizing insight.*"[19] In distinguishing creative activity from insight, discovery, and incubation, Goetz undermines what is commonly thought of as the "creative process." In fact, in his view only production (*making, doing, birthing*) is creative.

As in the case with art, attempts at definition are not without merit. Definition helps to clarify what is at stake and reveals nuance of the term considered. But how satisfying are definitions ultimately? In his definition Goetz disqualifies much ordinary use of the term "creative." We commonly refer to insights and discoveries as "creative," for instance. To speak of creativity as a process seems to make sense in ordinary speech, too; it is not clear that within a process that seems to be creative, actual creativity should confined to the moment of production.[20] Once again, a rigorous definition may not be necessary or helpful, and it certainly does not seem to be necessary for this (quite amorphous) project. I will assume in these pages that "creativity" can be handled similarly to "art," as a network of "family resemblances" that

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[16] Ibid., 298.

[17] Catherine Patrick, "Creative Thought in Artists," *Journal of Psychology*. 4 (1937): 35-73.

[18] Ibid., 299.

[19] Ibid., 300.

[20] And within such a complex process, where would one draw the lines between stages? Scientists, for instance, observe activity they describe as "creative thought" even during the production stages of art. Cf. Ian Sample, "Creative Thought Has a Pattern of Its Own, Brain Activity Scans Reveal," *The Guardian Weekly* (January 15, 2018), accessed May 1, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/jan/15/creative-thought-has-a-pattern-of-its-own-brain-activity-scans-reveal.

overlap and criss-cross, resemblances that are in general related to the process of making something new.

Chapter Divisions

This project will be reported in two main parts with a total of five chapter divisions, followed by a brief Conclusion.

Part One consists of two chapters that are philosophical and theological. Chapter One is an evaluation of Nicholas Berdyaev's *The Meaning of the Creative Act*, a book that deals, as the title suggests, with the matter of creativity. This hundred year old work, written by a now rather obscure Russian philosopher, is a wonderful endorsement of human creativity. Chapter Two aims to present some reflections on the Trinity that might prove helpful to a theology of art and creativity. Which is to say, the chapter arranges some building blocks that might prove useful for theology that has aesthetics in view.

Part Two of this presentation focuses on research and activities at New Hope Christian Church related to my project. Chapter Three reports and analyzes the results of a congregational survey that was distributed at the front end of the project. That survey aimed to discern congregational attitudes and practices with regard to the arts and creative endeavor. Chapter Four Four reports a three month long period of congregational life at New Hope Christian Church, during which the bulk of teaching and activity was related to the arts and encouraged creative activity. Chapter Five reports the results of an exercise in Appreciative Inquiry, undertaken after the period of congregational activity, that aimed to identify some habits and practices that might help nurture New Hope's creative gifts.

Chapter 1

NICHOLAS BERDYAEV AND THE CREATIVE ACT

This chapter features the Russian philosopher Nicholas Berdyaev and his early work, *The Meaning of the Creative Act,* written in 1914 and published in 1916. I selected him as a travel partner for this project early on, and he has served me well both as provocateur and spiritual guide.

One could make the case that this chapter is superfluous, that a project of this sort could easily be undertaken without the distraction of a Russian intellectual. To paraphrase Tertullian's famous question: "What does St. Petersburg, Russia have to do with Columbus, Indiana?" (although I am not sure exactly where to position those cities in the sentence). However, the better viewpoint would be that intellectual inquiry is, like art, a kind of excess; *what can be done* is usually more interesting than *what has to be done*.[21] I bring Berdyaev to the table precisely because he is a good agitator and an unlikely choice for travel partner. His presence proves helpful in at least three ways: (1) Berdyaev and his historical context are of personal interest to me and have proved capable of sustaining my (sometimes wandering) attention. (2) The most original feature of Berdyaev's anthropology is his insistence that to be made in the image of God means, first and foremost, to be made to create. And (3) to bring Berdyaev to the mix is to include the religious framework from which he works, Eastern Orthodoxy and its unique aesthetic.

The organization of this chapter will be as follows: As Berdyaev is a lesser known character to Western philosophy and theology, at least in this century, I will begin with a brief

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[21] In Chapter Two, the section on pneumatology, superfluity will be considered not just as characteristic of art but as characteristic of God.

overview of his life, historical setting, and philosophy. The bulk of the chapter will then deal with the main features of *The Meaning of the Creative Act,* as they pertain to this project. Finally, there will be a brief summary of what ground has been gained, or at least opened up, by Berdyaev's thought.

Life and Times. Nicholas Berdyaev (1874-1948) was born in Kiev to aristocratic parents. His father was a Russian military officer, and his mother was of French-Polish nobility. Berdyaev learned German and French at an early age and grew up in a westernized home. He spent much of his childhood alone and entertained himself by reading the philosophical works in his father's library. His formal education began at a cadet academy, but he despised the regimen of military life and early on chose not to follow his father's footsteps. He entered the University of Kiev when he was twenty, first to study the natural sciences but then turned to law. While at the university he became involved in the Marxist movement. In 1898 Berdyaev participated in an anti-government demonstration, after which he was arrested, expelled from the university, and exiled to Vologda in northern Russia.

During exile (1898-1901) Berdyaev, who had always questioned the materialistic determinism of Marxism, began to distance himself even more from that philosophy and adopt ideas more in line with existentialism and personalism. After exile, he returned to Kiev, where his intellectual conversion continued in the company of two new friends. The first was Lydia Trusheff (1871-1945), whom he married in 1904. She was a capable intellectual who assisted his work and tolerated his general crankiness. The other was Sergei Bulgakov, an economics professor at the University. Like Berdyaev, Bulgakov was a recovering Marxist. But Bulgakov's turn from Marxism had been more profoundly in the direction of Eastern Orthodoxy. Bulgakov eventually became a priest, and his friendship helped bring Berdyaev back to the Church of his

baptism. Although their relationship would be tested many times through the years, Bulgakov remained Berdyaev's most consistent friend.

After marriage, Berdyaev and Lydia settled in Russia's capital, St. Petersburg. There, Berdyaev joined Bulgakov in editing a very important literary, political, and philosophical journal, *Novi Put'* (*The New Way*). In 1907, he and Lydia moved to Moscow, where Berdyaev joined the religio-philosophical society and was a leader in intellectual ferment that Nicholas Zernov famously labeled *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century,*.[22] That renaissance was a loose association of intellectuals who worked to bring philosophical and religious revival to Russia. Like most in that movement, Berdyaev had much criticism both for the Russian church and the tsarist state. In 1914, Berdyaev was brought to trial on blasphemy charges for an article that criticized the Holy Synod, Russian Orthodoxy's ruling body. Fortunately, World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution interrupted the sentencing process. For some time after the 1917 Revolution, the Bolsheviks permitted Berdyaev to continue his work and even to oversee the Free Academy of Spiritual Culture in Moscow.

Although Berdyaev had reservations about the Revolution, he initially held out some hope that it might lead to a positive stage in Russian history. But as Lenin's government became increasingly totalitarian, Berdyaev became more vocal. Authorities eventually limited distribution of his articles and lectures. He continued his criticism and, in 1921, was charged with treason.[23] Given the range of possible penalties, it was fortuitous for Berdyaev—and for intellectual history—that in 1922 he was placed on one of the famous philosophers' ships bound for Europe. Berdyaev spent the rest of his life in Europe, first and briefly in Germany and then the bulk of his

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[22] Nicholas Zernov, *The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963.)

[23] Berdyaev, whose political views are often characterized as an example "Christian anarchism," tended to be a thorn in the flesh to all power, as is evident in his police record. During his early years, he was arrested by all three competing authorities in Russia—Russia—the Tsarist government, the Holy Synod of the Russian Church, and the Communist government.

exile in France. In Europe, he had access to the vibrant community of Russian expatriates. Although he never fully embraced life in the West, his liberal upbringing and familiarity with European philosophy gave him unique access to intellectual circles in Germany and France, so that he became one of the best known of the Russian emigres.

Berdyaev's Philosophy and *The Creative Act*. Berdyaev's philosophy is notoriously difficult to encapsulate. In fact, the label "philosopher" does not always seem like the best description for him. He worked quite freely in the intersection of philosophy and theology, especially the more metaphysical varieties of both, so that terms like "theosopher," "sophiologist," and "theurgist" often seem more appropriate than the label philosopher. In terms of general philosophical categorization, however, he is typically labeled as an existentialist thinker.[24] He begins philosophical reflection with the human subject, not ideas. That subject does not relate to the world on a subject-object basis but by living engagement, much as in the "I-thou" scheme of Martin Buber, whom Berdyaev knew and admired.[25] But beyond these generalities, he is harder to classify. He weaves in and out of arguments with little regard for Doctor of Ministry students who might one day want to write about him. At times he writes more like an evangelist, more impassioned than organized. At the heart of the ambiguity is the fact that he consciously rejects systematization,[26] deeming it as a philosophical dead end. The world, as he sees it, cannot be perfectly known and described. When Berdyaev was accused of contradiction by his peers—

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[24] Will Herberg, *Four Existentialist Theologians* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1958). In this book, Herberg highlights philosophers from four religious traditions: Jacques Maritain (Catholic), Nicholas Berdyaev (Orthodox), Martin Buber (Jewish), and Paul Tillich (Protestant). He uses a Kierkegaardian definition of existentialism: "…the thinking of the existing subject about his existence as he 'exists' his existence. Its notes are experiential concreteness, personal concern and commitment, the uniqueness of the individual, the primacy of enacted being (existence) over the mere concept of being," 3, which certainly applies to Berdyaev.

[25] Andrew Louth, *Modern Orthodox Thinkers* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015), 67.

[26] Nicholas Berdyaev, *Meaning of the Creative Act* (California: Semantron Press, 2008). Berdyaev emphasizes that "system is the opposite to creative intuition," 53.

and that happened regularly—he embraced the charge and argued that genuine creative thinking is not opposed to tension and paradox.

But his thinking is marked by regular themes that surface in virtually all of his major writings, reordered for whatever is the emphasis at the moment. As Andrew Louth observes: "There is…a certain consistency…about his works; sometimes the titles seem almost interchangeable—*Spirit and Reality, Freedom and the Spirit, Slavery and Freedom, Dream and reality*."[27] To continue Louth's insight: "Despite that, it is really not easy to present his thought in any systematic way, or at least any attempt to present his thought as a system runs the risk of losing its aphoristic quality, which seems to me central, not just a matter of style."[28]

Having said that, please indulge me as I attempt to do what I just suggested is impossible—I will try to collect and present, more or less systematically, some important directions in his book, *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (hereafter referred to as *MCA*). I intend this characterization to serve the double purpose of providing a helpful overview of Beryaev's thought and, at the same time, demonstrating why Berdyaev and this work might be useful to the project at hand. Although Berdyaev wrote prolifically, I limit my focus to this singular work. I justify this limitation both (1) on the basis of what was suggested above, that all of his books tend to cover similar terrain, albeit with different points of emphasis, and (2) because this work deals in a direct and sustained way with matters of creativity and art.

Between the unsuccessful Revolt of 1905 and the outbreak of World War I, Berdyaev traveled with his family to Florence, Italy. In the shadows of Italian Renaissance art and architecture, he began writing what would become *The Meaning of the Creative Act*. This is the work that introduced Berdyaev widely to philosophical circles in Russia and Europe, presenting the basic emphases that would recur in his subsequent teaching and publication. As the title

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[27] Louth, 64.

[28] Ibid.

suggests, this book focuses on the "creative act." Because of that, it has seemed to me to be the rather obvious selection for this project. But as it is an early work, one might fairly ask the question, Does this represent the best of his thought? I would appeal to Berdyaev's own Preface to the 1926 German edition of the book. In that short piece, written from Paris well after Berdyaev's experience of World War I and the Russian Revolution, he confesses that while his "faith in the imminent dawn of a creative religious epoch was too great" and is now "inclined to greater pessimism, …the bases of [his] thinking remain unaltered"; he continues to "believe that God calls men to creative activity and to a creative answer to His love."[29] Although later works may represent maturer developments in his thinking, the youthful optimism of *The Meaning of the Creative Act* makes it the obvious choice for the matter at hand.

The following are among the featured arguments in *The Meaning of the Creative Act* and also characteristic of Berdyaev's thinking.

Out Go the Bad Guys. *MCA* opens with a virulent and at times entertaining repudiation of Enlightenment philosophy. Berdyaev's critique aims primarily at the modern tendency toward scientism:

> The dream of modern philosophy is to become scientific, or something like the scientific. Not one of the official philosophers has any serious doubts as to the rightness and propriety of this effort to turn philosophy into a scientific discipline, no matter what the cost. In this they all agree—positivists and metaphysicists, materialists and "criticists," Kant and Hegel, Comte and Spencer, Cohen and Rickert, Wundt and Avenarius—all desire that philosophy should be either science or something shaped like science. Philosophy always envies science.[30]

While acknowledging that scientific thinking is appropriate to matters of natural science, he rejects the expansion of "the scientific" into other spheres of inquiry and endeavor. "Art, morals,

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[29] *MCA*, 9.

[30] Ibid., 21.

religion, do not have to be sciences—why should philosophy? It would seem as clear as day that nothing in the world should be scientific except science itself."[31]

The problem problem with science, according to Berdyaev, is that it "is a highly perfected means of adaptation to the given world and to the necessity forced upon it."[32] The word "necessity" [Russian, *neobkhodimost'*] is repeated often in *MCA* and expresses what he takes to be the fundamental problem.[33] "The world," which is not the "cosmos" but a fallen version of creation, is adaptation to the prison of necessity. "Science is obedience to necessity."[34] It "has no vision of freedom in the world"; its truth "is significant only for partial conditions of being and for partial orientations with it."[35] At points, Berdyaev's assessment of the Enlightenment almost sounds like a conspiracy theory: "Scientific universal validity, like that of law, is a mutual agreement among enemies to accept minimal truth which maintains the unity of the human race."[36] (The rationalists are flying into our neighborhoods in their black helicopters!)

Berdayev is at his most eloquent when he proclaims philosophy's better task: "Philosophy is the art of knowing in freedom by creating ideas which resist the given world and necessity and penetrate into the ultimate essence of the world."[37] Over against the measured rationalism of modernity, Berdyaev offers what is essentially an intuitive, even aesthetic view of philosophy—philosophy as resistance, superfluity, and imagination. He writes:

> Philosophy is art rather than science. Philosophy is a special art, differing in principle from poetry, music, or painting—it is the art of knowing. Philosophy is an art because it is

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[31] Ibid., 23.

[32] Ibid., 25.

[33] Berdayev follows Nietzsche in that regard; Nietzsche said, "The fact that something happens regularly and predictably does not mean that it happens necessarily." From Notebook 9 (Autumn 1887), as quoted by Sue Prideaux, *I Am Dynamite! A Life of Nietzsche* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018), 393.

[34] *MCA*, 26.

[35] Ibid., 27

[36] Ibid., 33

[37] Ibid., 29

> creation. Philosophy is an art because it predicates a calling and a special gift from above because the personality of its creator is immersed upon it, no less than on music or poetry. But philosophy creates existential ideas rather than images…. The nature of philosophy is not at all economic. Philosophy is more often a squandering than an economy of thinking. There is something of the holiday in philosophy and for the utilitarians of every day, something just as idle as in art. Philosophy was never as necessary for preservation of life in this world as is science; it was needed for passing beyond the limits of the given world. Science leaves man in the senselessness of the given world of necessity but gives him weapons for his protection in this senseless world. Philosophy always strives to comprehend the meaning of the world, is ever resisting the senselessness of the world's necessity. The basic assumption of every true philosophy is that there is a meaning and that this meaning is attainable—the assumption that meaning can break through meaninglessness.[38]

Of the philosophers of modernity, three do stay in view in *MCA*, two marginally and one in a significant way. As one might expect, given the politics in Russia and Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, Karl Marx (1818-1883) gets frequent mention in *MCA*. While Berdyaev is resistant to Marx's determinism from the beginning, the revolutionary and socialist features of Marxism continue to command his attention. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) appears frequently, too, although primarily as a foil. Berdyaev takes Kant to be the Enlightenment's most sophisticated representative, the philosopher who produced "the most perfect and refined philosophy of obedience…obedience to necessity by way of obedience to categories."[39] Although Kant knew the limits of pure reason, he is, like the rest of the rational tradition, "palsied by a frightful disease—the disease of reflection and disassociation."[40] The aim of true philosophy is neither reflection nor doubt, but creative action. Which brings to the fore the modern philosopher most regularly praised by Berdyaev, not only in MCA but going forward—Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). In Nietzsche, Berdyaev finds "*the forerunner of a new religious anthropology*" [italics his][41] whose emphases parallel his own: (1) attention to the corrective importance of the Dionysian spirit (irrationality) over against the Apollinarian spirit (rationality);

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[38] Ibid., 29-30.

[39] Ibid., 41.

[40] Ibid., 45.

[41] Ibid., 90.

(2) a refusal to be contained by social, religious, or philosophical boundaries (necessity); and (3) the call to willful action. In a newspaper article, "Nietzsche and the Modern Germany," written right at the same time as *MCA*, Berdyaev concludes: "And out of love for my native land I would wish, that within Russia people might be certain of the virtues of Zarathustra: a bestowing virtue, a creative exuberance, nobility, manliness, a solar quality, a proudly ascendant spirit."[42] In terms of modernity, for Berdyaev these three remain: Marx, Kant, and Nietzsche. But the greatest of these is Nietzsche.

In Come the Good Guys. Having rather summarily dismissed out the back door what amounts to the entire pantheon of Enlightenment rationalists, Berdyaev invites in the front door a mixed crew of literary figures, artists, ascetics, neo-platonists, and even esoterists. First among those —and always leaking out of Berdyaev's pen—is Fyodor Dostoyevsky, whose name appears often in *MCA* and is even in the shadows of the pages where his name does not appear.[43] Like Berdyaev, Dostoevsky sees the world as created by human choice and counts both tragedy and beauty as possibilities of that freedom. Berdyaev also looks favorably on the young painter, Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), whose work illustrates "the world's coming apart"[44] and anticipates, for Berdyaev, the epoch of creativity. Berdyaev at times gives positive consideration to the heirs of Plato, especially Plotinus (204/5-270). While claiming not to be a dualist, Berdyaev seems at times to be only inches away from platonism. He sees Plato as working, like him, "towards the art of passing beyond the limit of the given world."[45] Berdyaev works selectively through patristic sources, dismissing all the writings that represent a "negative anthropology"—that is, those

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[42] Nicholas Berdyaev, "Nietzsche and the Modern Germany," trans. S. Janos (2011), originally published in the newspaper *Birzhevye vedomosti*, no. 14650 (February 4, 1915), accessed May 1, 2019, http://www.berdyaev.com/berdiaev/berd_lib/1915_189.html.

[43] Berdyaev would write a biography, *Dostoevsky: An Interpretation* (Russian edition 1932), which Louth suggests "is as much a book on Berdyaev's own thought as it is a story of Dostoyevsky," *Orthodox Thinkers*, 72

[44] *MCA*, 242.

[45] Ibid., 32.

fathers who emphasize human sinfulness—in favor of writers and texts that are "conscious of man's royal calling." So, for instance, he gathers supporting quotations from Gregory of Nyssa (335-395), St. Simeon the New Theologian (949-1022), Macarius of Egypt (300-390), and Isaac the Syrian (613-700).[46] Those who emphasize *theosis* (deification) get approval; self-deprecators get the cold shoulder.

The German mystical tradition—represented by Meister Eckhardt (1260-1328), Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), and Angelus Silesius (1624-1677)—is instrumental in shaping Berdyaev's view of the world. Among these three, Boehme, "the greatest mystic-gnostic of all time," has center stage.[47] In fact, it would be hard to overestimate Boehme's position in *MCA*. He is mentioned often and approvingly. Boehme was a Lutheran pastor and visionary, whose mystical writings caused some scandal during his day. It is exactly at the points of scandal that Berdyaev most identifies with Boehme. Three major areas of agreement between Berdyaev and Boehme are worth highlighting here: First, Berdyaev adopts and then builds on Boehme's notion of the *Ungrund*, the "groundless ground." *Ungrund* is the eternal abyss that was before creation, that remains outside of creation, and that is therefore the context of all creation. That abyss is unfathomable and contains all antinomies and potentialities. By linking the *Ungrund* to the "Divine Nothing" of Dionysius the Areopagite (late 5th or early 6th century), Berdyaev establishes the framework for his own theology of negation and grounds for irrationality. Secondly, Berdyaev locates freedom in the *Ungrund,* thus making theodicy possible. Since freedom precedes even the creative act of God, it is the primordial condition for both Creator and human creation. The story of the world is not one of the Creator exposing humans to freedom and its sometimes tragic consequences; rather, it is the story of God calling human

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[46] Ibid., 82-85.

[47] *MCA*, 66. In a journal article a quarter of a century after MCA, Berdyaev repeats that "Boehme has to be termed the greatest of Christian gnostics," not in the classical heretical sense "but in the sense of knowledge basic to revelation and dealing not with concepts, but with symbols and myths; contemplative knowledge, and not discursive knowledge." *Put'* 20 (February 1930), trans. S. Janos: 47, accessed March 24, 201.

creation to join God in using given freedom for good and beautiful purposes. Which leads to a third feature of Boehme's thought employed by Berdyaev: he draws heavily on the German mystic's high anthropology. Humans are in the image of God; "human nature must be preserved."[48] Christ is Absolute Man, the validation of humanity.[49] Christology is therefore simultaneously anthropology.[50] The work of Christ in the world for both Berdyaev and Boehme ends up being more exemplary than redemptive. Christ comes to lead humanity back to its humanness, which, at least in Berdyaev's view, is through creative action.[51]

One more class of unlikely interlocutors appears in *MCA*—the heretics! Although Berdyaev regularly qualifies their appropriation, he frequently gives favorable attention to gnostic ideas, the Kabbalah, astrology, the occult, and cosmists. In the Introduction to *MCA he* describes his paradoxical fascination with both dualism and pantheism. Regarding the latter, he explains:

> …I also confess an almost pantheistic monism. The world is divine in its nature. Man is, by his nature, divine. The world-process is self-revelation of Divinity, it is taking place within Divinity. God is immanent in the world and in man. The world and man are immanent in God. Everything which happens to man happens with God."[52]

Berdyaev parts ways with pantheism because of its tendency to focus on emanation over creation: "A purely pantheistic consciousness of God is for emanation and against creativity."[53] Still, his flirtation with esoteric ideas will seem too close for comfort for many orthodox Christian readers. Two considerations should help guide one's reading of these sections of *MCA*, one of

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[48] *MCA*, 68.

[49] Ibid., 79.

[50] Ibid., 81.

[51] Like his favored mystic, Berdyaev faced considerable criticism, especially for his high anthropology. Konstantin Leontyev assessed Berdyaev's view as "anthropolatry," the idolization of humans. V. V. Zenkhovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy*, Volume 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 767.

[52] *MCA*, 16.

[53] Ibid., 131.

them historical and one polemical. First, Berdyaev's interactions with esoteric thought would have seemed less unusual in Russian circles at the turn of the century, since at that time there was considerable interest, even among mainstream intellectuals, in the occult, numerology, futurism, magic, and all manner of paganism.[54] Secondly, Berdyaev's modest accommodation of esotericists helps accentuate his rejection of rationalism. Rationalists are like misguided pharisees, self-righteous and wrong in their self-righteousness. Meanwhile, Berdyaev dines with the heretics, who, by virtue of their intuition, are not far from the kingdom.

Berdyaev's openness to this diverse collection of thinkers reflects in a general way what he was experiencing as part of the Russian Religious Renaissance, a movement which involved not just philosophers but "writers, poets, literary critics, journalists, artists, philosophers, theologians, economists, political scientists, legal scholars, and historians."[55] The general ethos of that movement was suspicion of empiricism and the belief that the best understanding of the world comes through openness to a variety of ways of knowing.

Unlimited Freedom…and Its Limits. Not much is advanced by noting that Berdyaev emphasized human freedom, since an emphasis on freedom is characteristic of existentialism. In this section and the next, I will try to represent his unique and radical view of the nature of that view of freedom, plus the paradoxical qualifiers to that understanding of freedom.

For historical perspective, I will begin with Paul Gavrilyuk's excellent 2014 book, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance*, which is a reappraisal of that renaissance, using Georges Florovsky (1949-1979) as the centerpiece. The standard account of that movement tends to be along the lines of a generational transition between Russian fathers and sons—the generation of speculative philosophers, led by Bulgakov and Berdyaev,

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[54] Two books are worth mentioning in this regard: George M. Young, *The Russian Cosmists: The Esoteric Futurism of Nikolai Fedorov and His Followers* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2012); and a collection of essays, edited by Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *The Occult and Russian Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1997).

[55] Paul Gavrilyuk, *Georges Florovsky and the Russian Religious Renaissance* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 13.

eventually giving way to the traditionalism of the neo-patristic synthesis, championed by Georges Florovsky and his associates. Gavrilyuk revises that account both by demonstrating how the speculative fathers were more Orthodox than is sometimes presented and, then, how Florovsky and his partners were more innovative than is usually allowed. But there definitely were dividing points within the Russian Religious Renaissance, particularly regarding how thinkers lined up on the tradition-versus-freedom spectrum. Gavrilyuk quotes the Russian historian Zenkhovsy regarding that continuum and then follows it up with his own analysis:

> "Our way…lies through combining sound traditionalism with creative activity, which are essentially not two, but one and the same path, since sound traditionalism calls us not to merely repeat the recent past, but to return to the first centuries, to the patristic mindset (*myshlenie*) creatively." In these words, we hear a leitmotif of the Russian Religious Renaissance, namely, the integration of two principles that were in tension with each other: the faithfulness to tradition on the one hand, and the cultivation of spiritual freedom and creativity on the other hand. These two principles were emphasized with great variation by different Renaissance figures. For some, like Berdyaev and Vyshelslavtsev, adherence to tradition was optional and even constraining, whereas freedom and creativity mattered most. For others, like Florovsky and V. Lossky, freedom without faithfulness to the tradition was a rebellion, rather than genuine spiritual freedom within tradition."[56]

Berdyaev is clearly on the side of freedom. In fact, it would be fair to make him freedom's most radical adherent among the Russian Renaissance thinkers. As indicated earlier, his notion of freedom is derives from Boehme's *Ungrund*, which makes freedom foundational. Freedom is summed up by Berdyaev thusly:

> Freedom is the ultimate: it cannot be derived from anything: it cannot be made the equivalent of anything. Freedom is the baseless foundation of being: it is deeper than all being. We cannot penetrate to a rationally-perceived base for freedom. Freedom is a well of immeasurable depth—its bottom is the final mystery.[57]

If there is any consistency in Berdyaev, it is that he consistently prefers freedom to obedience at every turn. That is true, first of all, in his basic, existential approach to philosophy. Obedience is service to necessity; it is Old Testament religion. Freedom is also at the heart of his political anarchism. And, without delving too deeply into psychology, it is easy to see liberty as the

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[56] Gavrilyuk, 125.

[57] *MCA*, 145.

mantra of his daily affairs. He did not like to take orders. He avoided systematization of thought. His adversaries would claim that he did not even like to be held to what he had said previously in a conversation.

But readers who are tempted to see Berdyaev as an advocate of western style individualism and autonomy should know that his existentialism is rightly labeled as personalist. Persons are not isolated individuals but are connected to the cosmos and, not least, to other persons. Berdyaev has little that is good to say about the development of individualism in the West.

> Individualism is a devastation of individuality, its impoverishment, a diminution of its universal content, i.e. a tendency toward non-being. If individuality should attain absolute separation and alienation from the universe, from the hierarchy of living beings, it would turn into non-being—it would destroy itself completely. Individuality and individualism are opposites. Individuality is the the enemy of individuality. Man is an organic member of the universal cosmic hierarchy, and the richness of his content is in direct proportion to his union with the cosmos.[58]

Like many other figures in the Renaissance, Berdyaev makes regular use of the Russian word *sobornost'* (conciliarity).[59] The term was popularized decades before Berdyaev by the leader of the Slavophile movement, Aleksey Khomyakov (1804-1860). Khomyakov contended that Russia was uniquely positioned to save the world from the excesses of the West. Catholicism was unity at the expense of freedom; Protestantism was freedom at the expense of unity; but Eastern Orthodoxy, with its traditions of consensus, offered a way out of competition and into cooperation. For Berdyaev, genuinely creative acts are in the spirit of *sobornost'* and for the collective good.

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[58] *MCA*, 153.

[59]Also sometimes translated “catholicity,” “ecumenicity,” “communality,” and “togetherness.” It is based on the Russian word *sobor*, which means “council.”

***Creativity and Eschatology*.** "Creativity is inseparable from freedom," writes Berdyaev.[60] With that we arrive at the most unique aspect of his thought—his attention to the creative act. Most of his ideas are shared in one way or another by others in the Russian Religious Renaissance, but no one emphasizes creative action like Berdyaev. *MCA* is an early and strong attestation to that theme.

In the opening lines of the book, Berdyaev states the problem: "The human spirit is in prison. Prison is what I call this world, the given world of necessity."[61] He distinguishes the world, which is captive to sin and therefore "phantom," from the cosmos, which is "true being." Echoing the theme of Dostoyevsky's "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," Berdyaev argues that most humans are content to live in slavery to the given world. As noted earlier, Berdyaev even believes that philosophy tends toward slavery, toward adaptation to necessity. Likewise, Christian doctrine has tended toward slavery, focusing attention on human sinfulness and then burdening people with rules. There been a "depressive concentration on man's own sinfulness [which] gives birth to double thinking: the constant danger of confusing God with the devil, Christ with Antichrist."[62] The Church ends up tending to individual souls, but does nothing to change the world.

What is the way out? Rather than resting in a theology of salvation, Berdyaev proposes a theology of creativity which recognizes humans as co-creators with God in new creation. The truth of human nature has been revealed in Christ, who is Absolute Man, and that nature is divine. Berdyaev, therefore, presents *MCA* as his justification of man: "This book of mine is an essay on anthropodicy by means of creativeness."[63] To be made in the image of God is to be

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[60] *MCA*, 144.

[61] Ibid., 11.

[62] Ibid., 12.

[63] Ibid., 19.

made a creator. Christ's coming is a reminder of that original revelation and a call to the creative acts that will usher in the age of spirit. As always Berdyaev is vague on the details but confident that the exercise of genuine creativity is the way forward.

Berdyaev builds on the Orthodox notion of the eighth day of creation, although, as with most symbols that he borrows from Eastern theology, the idea undergoes a makeover. In Orthodoxy, the eighth day of creation is the Lord's Day, the day on which Christ was raised from the dead and began new creation. For Berdyaev the eighth day of creation is the final stage of the universe. He maintains that the Trinity is revealed in three world epochs: "the revelation of the law (the Father), the revelation of redemption (the Son) and the revelation of creativity (the Spirit)."[64] The epochs coexist eternally and are therefore simultaneously present in every stage of history. And yet there has also been a kind of progression in history—from Old Testament to New Testament and finally to the imminent age of Spirit, which Berdyaev sensed to be unfolding in pre-revolutionary Russia). This unfolding of epochs is not just about God but about human beings.

> In the first epoch man's sin is brought to light and natural divine force is revealed; in the second epoch man is made a song of God and redemption from sin appears; in the third epoch the divinity of man's creative nature is finally revealed and divine human power becomes human power. The revelation about man is the final divine revelation about the Trinity. The final mystery is hidden in this, that the divine mystery and the human mystery are one, that in God there is hidden the mystery of man and in man the mystery of God. God is born in man and man is born to God. …The whole meaning of our epoch is in the fact that it is passing over to the revelation of man.[65]

Theosis—that most Orthodox notions about humanity—has a special flavor in Berdyaev's scheme. First, the extent to which divinity is realized in humans has a heightened sense. And, secondly, it will be through cooperation of creative persons that God will bring about the transfiguration of all things.

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[64] Ibid., 320

[65] Ibid., 320-21

The Artist-Saint. One more argument in MCA deserves attention, one that bears directly on the project at hand. It is the argument made in Chapter VII, "Creativity and Asceticism: The Genius and the Saint." Early in his book, Berdyaev makes the case the case that human understanding is more easily attained through art than scientific inquiry. He suggests that "truth may reveal itself through the art of Dante and Dostoyevsky, or through the gnostic mysticism of Jakob Boehme, in far greater degree than through Cohen and Husserl."[66] But in this section he takes that idea a step further, comparing and contrasting two figures—Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) and St Seraphim of Sarov (1754-1833)—in order to make the case that the artist is a kind of saint. Pushkin is widely regarded as Russia's greatest poet and the father of modern Russian literature. Seraphim is unrivaled among the 19th century elders (*startsy*) of Russia, an ascetic and miracle-worker. Berdyaev says of the two:

> Pushkin and St. Seraphim live in different worlds; they did not know each other, and never had contact of any kind. Two equally noble majesties of holiness and of genius—they are incomparable, impossible of measurement by one standard—it is as though they belonged to two different sorts of being. The Russian soul may be equally proud of Pushkin's genius and of the saintliness of Seraphim. And it would be equally impoverished if either Pushkin or St. Seraphim should be taken away from it. And here I pose the question: For the destiny of Russia, for the destiny of the world, for the purposes of God's providence, would it have been better if in the Russia of the early nineteenth century there had lived not the great St. Seraphim and the great genius Pushkin, but two Seraphims—two saints—St. Seraphim in the Tampov Government and St. Alexander in Pskov?[67]

If salvation is cosmic as well as personal, then the artist may serve God's purposes as much as the saint. Despite Pushkin's overt lack of piety, the poet was as spiritually important to Russia as St. Seraphim. In Berdyaev's estimation: "I deeply believe that before God the genius of Pushkin, who in the eyes of men seemed to lose his own soul, is equal to the sainthood of Seraphim, who was busy saving his life."[68]

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[66] Ibid., 32.

[67] Ibid., 170-171.

[68] Ibid., 172

Berdyaev therefore suggests that "the cult of saintliness should be complemented by the cult of genius," that the work of the artistic genius is not "worldly" but of God, and that both saint and genius do their work by God's election.[69] Like the saint, the genius renounces the world as it is and treads a path of sacrifice. Such genius is always tragic and, in the view of the world, unsuccessful because "it does not classify under any of the world's differentiated categories of human activity."[70] But the creative genius serves God in renewing the world.

The word that Berdyaev regularly uses with regard to the creative act is the word "theurgy" (from the Greek, *theourgia*), which means something like, "working with god." Theurgy was a favored term in neoplatonism, indicating human participation in the work of God. Like so much of Berdyaev's vocabulary, it nods toward mysticism.[71] The creative act is always theurgic, and art itself is theurgic. Chapter 10, "Creativity and Beauty: Art and Theurgy," opens with Berdyaev proclaiming: "Artistic creativeness best reveals the meaning of the creative act. Art is primarily a creative sphere. It is even an accepted expression to the call the creative element in all spheres of spiritual activity 'artistic.'"[72] The section continues with Berdyaev expressing his conviction that history moves toward the era of the artist:

> The expectation of the creative epoch is the expectation of an artistic epoch, in which art will have the leading place in life. The artist is always a creator. Art is always a victory over the heaviness of "the world"—never adaptation to "the world." The act of art is directly opposed to every sort of added burden—in art there is liberation. The essential in artistic creativity is victory over the burden of necessity. In art man lives outside himself, outside his burdens, the burdens of life. Every creative artistic act is a partial transfiguration of life…a glimpse of another world. To receive the world unto oneself in beauty is to break through the deformity of "this world" into another. The world which is forced upon us, "this world" is deformed, it is not cosmic, beauty is not in it."[73]

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[69] Ibid., 176

[70] Ibid., 174

[71] So, for instance, Berdyaev prefers "gnoseology" to "epistemology" in MCA. Epistemology points more narrowly toward the science of knowing, while gnoseology allows that human understanding is more intuitive.

[72] Ibid., 225.

[73] Ibid.

The cosmos that began with God's creative act will be transfigured by the various artistic endeavors of humans, who have joined themselves to the ongoing work of God and are making all things new.

Conclusion. Why *MCA*? (Yes, I know, it is a horrible, Village People sort of pun.) How can these ideas over one hundred years old and from the other side of the world relate to NHCC? I suggest that Berdyaev pushes in several directions pertinent to American churches. (1) His critique of scientism is worthy hearing over and over again. Although Berdyaev might be a little too dismissive of the empirical tradition, it remains that the prevailing culture is extremely confident in the sufficiency of supposedly hard, empirical *fact* and far too quick to dismiss or relegate to the fringes other ways of knowing, especially aesthetic and religious knowledge. The arts and religion—along with creative endeavors that go outside the boundaries (of scientific necessity)—all offer resources to bring fullness to knowledge. (2) Berdyaev's openness to alternative ways of knowing is worth considering, too. As a mostly orthodox pastor, I am more than happy to burn heretics at the stake. But Berdyaev's example of hearing what opponents and freethinkers have to say, seeing the new thing that they bring to the table, and then being challenged by them is preferable to simple dismissal. Often ideas outside of established orthodoxies do have value and pose healthy challenges, which, when considered fairly, might help refine our understanding of the world. One can surely explore broadly without compromising faith. (3) Berdayev's radical view of freedom can be entertained at a church like New Hope without much fear of falling off the edge. My experience during this project has been that there is a self-policing impulse built into traditions of piety like those at NHCC that keep us from even getting close to the line. In such an environment, artists tend to choose safety over expression, which is not art. Churches should encourage their artists to express themselves rather freely, trusting that the *sobor* (to return to the Russian word from "community") will know

both how to appropriate the gifts of its artists and keep in check what is dangerous. (4) I think Berdyaev's anthropology—that we are in the image of the Creator and are, therefore, creators ourselves—should be preached. To see ourselves as co-creators caught up with God in the work of making all things new is a transformative vision. (5) Finally, I even think the notion of the artist-saint is worth presenting to the church. The notion that there is salvation through creativity will not fly very high in traditions that put the emphasis on personal salvation, of course. Nor in those in which all effort is on God's side and none on humans. But if God's plan of redemption has cosmic dimensions, as seems clear in scripture, and if God's invitation is for us to join God in helping to renew the earth, as seems clear too, then creative genius might be imagined as having a part in the transformation of the world. Even impious artists might be regarded as bringing gifts to the world and its Creator, even when they have not learned to reverence God.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE TRINITY, CREATIVITY AND ART

A superfluous chapter should always be followed up with an impossibly general one, a chapter that lacks adequate parameters. This chapter, which *limits* the range of investigation to "Art and Creativity," rises to the challenge. The addition of "Trinity" makes it all the more unreasonable. So I qualify everything I do with the label "Theological Reflections," as a way to acknowledge that what I do here is not exhaustive (except perhaps to the reader) but only covers certain streams of thought that I have entertained during the course of this project. This chapter also engages some of the texts that have emerged for me as primary. It presents how I have come to organize some rather diverse themes in a way that helps make sense to me.

I can preface what follows in four ways: (1) What I present below leans heavily toward foundational matters rather than practical concerns. I believe that practical insights can be gleaned from what I present here, but that is not my primary aim. I am interested here in talking about a theological framework for creativity and art. Why is art important? Where does creativity come from? How do we talk in a Christian way about artistic and creative activities? (2) For whatever reason, my theological reflections over the past few months have consistently flowed in the direction of the Trinity. They probably could have flowed in an easier direction, to be quite honest. However, they did not. I spent considerable time pondering how creativity and art might be connected to God in Three Persons. (3) My expectation has been that if we think in a genuinely trinitarian way about creativity and art, we will be able to determine both differentiation between Persons as well as consistency and unity. Their work is divided; God's purpose is singular. In Robert Jenson's words: "The Persons are differentiated by their actions

among themselves, not their actions toward us."[74] (4) For reasons that I will explain momentarily, I have elected to adjust the usual trinitarian order of Father, Son, and Spirit and work backwards, it might seem. My point will be that approaching through Son, Spirit, and then Father is acceptable, more Christian, and perhaps more productive.

Christology

An obvious place to start any theological discussion on art and creativity is with the biblical accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. After all, what could be better than starting at the start of the Canon, especially when the opening chapters of the Bible have so much to say about creativity? God the Father, First Person of the Trinity, creates. So in the Bible's opening verse, the Source is established. After that, the reader will begin to notice, as early as verse 2, the presence of a divine energy, regularly referred to as "spirit," which at critical moments blows new life into the plot and its characters. Savvy Christian readers will know to identify this Inspirer as the Third Person of the Trinity and may even be aware of how the Spirit's proximity to creative endeavor is well established grammatically in the idea of "inspiration." So we are only a few pages in, and two of the Three are accounted for. One to go. So what of the Son?

Early in my reading, I noticed how—especially with regard to popular theology, but also to a degree even in more formal theology—Christ's relationship to creativity and art is often the most difficult connection to make. The Father creates. The Spirit inspires. But what can we say about Jesus Christ when it comes to art and creativity? That he must have been a really good carpenter? Following Karl Barth (1886-1968), we might want to require that, if there are genuinely "Christian" statements to be made about creativity and art, we should be able to make them through the one whose gives his title to the adjective, "Christian." If Jesus Christ is *icon* of God (Colossians 1:15), the agent of the world's creation (Colossians 1:16; John 1:1-3), and the One in whom all God's fullness (*pleroma*) dwells (Colossians 1:19), then it seems we should be able to begin whatever we have to say with him, the epicenter of Christian theology

[74] Eugene Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 11.

or, at least, the entry point for human understanding. Contributing significantly to this line of thought has been Rowan Williams, whose 2016 Hulsean Lectures were serendipitously (for me) published during the course of my project. Those lectures were revised, expanded, and published in 2018 under the title, *Christ the Heart of Creation.*[75] As the title suggests, Williams puts Christ at the center of creation and "argues that a very great deal of what has been said about Jesus across the centuries is shaped by a very particular concern, which has to do with how we think about the relation between God and what God has made."[76] Although Williams' concern is not primarily human creativity and art, he does lay out a Christ-centered theology in which all other acts of creating might be seen to participate. I return to Williams below.

I will now consider Christ's relationship to creativity and art headings: Incarnation, New Creation, and Everything in Between.

Incarnation. I will begin this sub-section by highlighting the iconoclastic controversies in 8th and 9th century Byzantium, which led to to important theological insights regarding the relationship between the incarnation and artistic depiction.[77] The iconoclasts (from the Greek for "image-breakers") opposed the widespread practice of venerating religious images. Both the rise of veneration and the story of opposition to such practices are complex histories. At its most basic level, however, iconoclasm was embraced as a resistance to idolatry, based on biblical prohibitions against image-making. To these puritans, the practice of veneration seemed to be an unhealthy mimicking of pagan idolatry. The iconoclasts, therefore, rejected religious art and, wherever they exercised authority, actively destroyed it.

On the other side were the iconodules (pro-icon theologians), who maintained that the accusation of idolatry was too simplistic. They offered alternative ways to think about veneration. The most important of icon advocates was John of Damascus (675-749), who

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[75] Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018).

[76] Ibid., xii.

[77] John Anthony McGuckin, *The Path of Christianity: The First Thousand Years* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017). McGuckin gives a good short introduction to earliest developments in Christian art, 1123-1134.

argued both for a more sophisticated understanding of who God is and a more complete view of what it means to be human. Regarding the latter, John notes that humans are multi-sensory beings and that one of the ways embodied people come to know things is through literal "seeing."[78] The eyes are instruments of understanding. The other side of John's argument has to do with how God has chosen to be revealed—through incarnation. As Robert Wilken writes: "For John the controversy over icons was a dispute about how God is made known to human beings, not a debate about religious art."[79] God's enfleshment points positively toward the icon. In "Treatise Two" of *On the Divine Images,* John of Damascus argues that—while it would be completely inappropriate to depict the invisible, incorporeal God or venerate a human being as a god—it makes perfect sense to depict the One who has appeared.

> For if we make an image of God who in his ineffable goodness became incarnate and was seen upon the earth in the flesh, and lived among human beings, and assumed the nature and density and form and color of flesh, we do not go astray. For we long to see his form; as the divine apostle says, "now we see puzzling reflections in a mirror." For the image is a mirror and a puzzle, suitable to the density of our body.[80]

Later in the same Treatise, John of Damascus writes: "I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake, and in matter made his abode, and through matter worked my salvation."[81]

With fifteen hundred years in the rear view mirror, John McGuckin summarizes the Orthodox position as follows:

> For [theologians favorable to iconography] the icon says something about fundamental theological attitudes towards the Incarnation of God in the flesh. For them God made humanity as his 'icon and likeness.' Reverence for humans beings is thus a holy thing when they are understood to be icons of God (so it is the Orthodox Church incenses the faithful during the course of the Eucharist, and incenses the dead body during its funeral rituals.) But this generic image of God is in man is taken to a new pitch in the mystery of the Incarnation. In Christ, God literally became man. And in Christ mankind was mystically caught up into the Godhead by grace, What took place in Christ uniquely, by his

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[78] Robert Wilken, The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity (New Haven: Yale University, 2012), 303.

[79] Ibid.

[80] John Damascus, *Three Treatises on the Divine Images* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 2003), 61-62.

[81] Ibid., 70

> assumption of flesh, is the prototype of what is offered to the saved and redeemed believer: communion with the Lord by grace."[82]

That "salvation…is in and through the flesh" demonstrates how "God uses materiality as the medium of his salvific power."[83] The principle applies in obvious way to the sacraments, where water, bread, and wine, as well as water, are appropriated by God for divine purposes. Similarly, icons are a "a smaller form of the principle of the Incarnation."[84] These artistic depictions are useful "markers," as Leonid Ouspensky writes, teaching pilgrims "on our path to new creation, so that, according to Paul, in contemplating 'the glory of the Lord, [we] are being changed into his likeness' (2 Cor. 3:18)."[85]

I return to Rowan Williams and *Christ the Heart of* Creation, the aim of which is to demonstrate how christological speech through the centuries has aimed to articulate Christ as the *logic*[86] to understanding both Creator and creation, a centrality "summed up in our belief in a Christ who is uninterruptedly living a creaturely, finite life on earth and at the same time living out of the depths of divine life and uninterruptedly enjoying the relation that eternally subsists between the divine Source or Father and the divine Word of Son."[87] The tensions between the infinity and finite, which in the history of philosophy tend to play out as a case of "never the twain shall meet," have their theological resolution in the Christ who, in a sense, demonstrates what is really real—that the God of faith works comfortably in both spheres and, as is the case in Christ, can overlap them. Matter does not exclude God. Williams' assesses the importance of John of Damascus, then, as follows:

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[82] John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 358.

[83] Ibid., 358.

[84] Ibid., 358.

[85] Leonid Ouspensky, "The Meaning and Content of the Icon," *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, edited by Donald Clendenin (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 63.

[86] Interestingly, the Hulsean Lectures that became in book form *Christ the Heart of Creation* were, when originally delivered entitled, "Christ the Logic of Creation," obviously a similar track and with logos in view.

[87] Williams, xiii.

> John of Damascus's defense of icons also reminds us that Chalcedonian and post-Chalcedonian theology provides the foundation for an understanding of material reality as capable of bearing meaning—that is, of being a vehicle for loving and intelligent relation, between God and creation and between one created subject and another. When the created subject is in communion with the relational life that is God, it is free to communicate dimensions of that relational life in ways that go beyond words and ideas: the communicative energy of the things of this world, once brought within the scope of Christ-centred relation, is expanded and transfigured. The sacramental practice of the Christian community is the place where we see this worked out most fully; but what is made plain there casts light on the entire world of our systems of meaning and the way in which human culture makes signs out of the raw material of the world. As various theologians have argued, the semantically full reality of sacramental practice, itself deriving from the semantically 'saturated' materiality that is the historical body of Jesus, allows us to see our material environment as pregnant with significance which we may or may not immediately grasp. In this light, we can say that Christology conceived along these lines decisively rules out the reduction of the physical world to a mechanistic system whose meanings are established only in relation to human utility.[88]

Not willing that any good block quote should go to waste, I add in John Meyendorff similar assessment:

> The victory of Orthodoxy meant…that religious faith could be expressed, not only in propositions, in books, or in personal experience, but also through man's power over matter, through aesthetic experience, and through gestures and bodily attitudes before holy images. All this implied a philosophy of religion and an anthropology; worship, the liturgy, religious consciousness involved the whole man, without despising any functions of the should or the body, and without leaving any of them to the realm of the secular.[89]

Although Orthodoxy's response to iconoclasm aimed primarily to justify a particular kind of depiction—namely, icons—it produced theological insights that gesture positively toward human creativity and art in general. First of all, the goodness of material creation is upheld. The world that the Creator called "good" in the beginning indeed still is good. Even though impacted by the Fall, material flesh is still a suitable temple for the Son of God. Secondly, Christ's incarnation says good things about our embodiment. We are not to seek escape from our flesh or the material world but are to try to find ways to nourish both for the glory of God. Finally, and specifically related to art, the response to iconoclasm suggests that the "raw material" of creation is suited to lofty aims—communication, expression, art, and worship. All art has a material aspect, of course. It involves either the creative arrangement of various kinds of media, or the production of symbols on a page to make a text, or the vibration of air over

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[88] Ibid., 121-122.

[89] John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham Press), 52.

vocal chords to make sound, or the expressive movement of physical bodies. The creative exercise of bodies and interplay with matter becomes an important part of human "systems of meaning."

***New Creation*.** If incarnation is one bookend for a christology that is sensitive to art and creativity, then we should place the other bookend at the resurrection. The resurrection is God's creative act that fulfills God's covenant with Israel and launches new creation. No New Testament historian works that terrain better than N. T. Wright, so I will lean on him for the next few paragraphs. Although resurrection and new creation themes play out regularly in his writings, I will use as my primary reference here a 2018 lecture delivered at the Lanier Theological Library entitled, "Resurrection and the Renewal of Creation." The lecture is available online and represents a nice distillation of his years of reflection on the matter.[90] The point of this subsection will be to highlight Christ's mission as fundamentally creative or, more specifically, re-creative.

Wright regularly uses the Gospel of John to highlight the significance of Christ's resurrection and its relationship to creation. That John has creation always in view is clear from his Prologue, which uses Genesis 1 as its model. "In the beginning," John begins. But where the reader/hearer would expect God to be named, John has instead "the Word," the Word which "was with God and was God" (John 1:1). John's Jewish audience would have already known how God spoke creation into existence. But a few verses down in the Prologue that Voice is identified as the Word that "was made flesh and dwelt among us" (1:14). So the Word of creation became human being. The Second Person of the Trinity is that agent.

Although only hinted at in the Prologue, John's audience would have also known full story of the fall (Genesis 3), how: "He was in the world [*kosmos*], and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him." F. F. Bruce's writes: "By 'the world' the

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[90] N. T. Wright, "Resurrection and the Renewal of Creation," a lecture delivered on November 16, 2018 at the Lanier Theological Library and co-sponsored by Baylor's Truett Seminary, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GenlGUkZ-6Q, accessed May 1, 2019.

Evangelist understands in particular the world of mankind, alienated from God."[91] So the Prologue moves between the wonder of creation and humanity's rejection of—or at least apathy toward—the Creator. That rejection ultimately ends at the cross, which poses the crisis for both God and creation.

The resurrection, in John 20, is the answer. Wright makes much of John's two references in verses 1 and 19 to "the first day of the week." John's audience would have connected that phrase to Genesis, where creation began on a "day one." The double-mention in John 20, according to Wright, signals that there is some kind of connection between the first creation and what is taking place in the garden. That John highlights the setting as a garden (John 20:15) is not to be missed, either. The old world began as a garden. A new world is born in another garden. These hints in John 20 suggest that the resurrection begins a new world.

If the theme of new creation is in subtle literary hints in John's Gospel, it is overt and central in Paul's theology. Additionally, the fallenness of the world, briefly mentioned in John's Prologue, gets considerable emphasis in Paul. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and "the wages of [that] sin is death" (Romans 6:23). For Paul, the consequences of sin are more generally spread out through everything that has been made. All of creation is caught up in suffering and, along with humanity, awaits redemption (Romans 8:19-24). For Paul, as in John, the resurrection is the beginning of a new creation. That theme plays out especially in three Pauline metaphors in 1 Corinthians 15. The first is Christ as the Second Adam: "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead" (15:21). Adam brought down first creation; Christ raises up new creation. The New Adam metaphor is paired up with the notion of Christ as "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (15:20). Christ's resurrection signifies the beginning of a new creation; his resurrection is the first grape on a vine that promises to be a cluster. Later in the chapter, Paul uses the analogy of a seed "sown in weakness [and] raised in power" as an illustration of new life (15:43). As Wright sees it:

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[91] F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 36.

> These pictures fill out the incidental (and otherwise tantalizing) references to 'new creation' we find in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 6:15. Paul would have endorsed the vision at the close of the book of Revelation: the creator will, at the last, remake the entire cosmos, eliminating decay and death and all that causes them. That will be the triumphant reaffirmation fo the original creation, achieved through the long and hard story of the covenant which was shockingly fulfilled in the Messiah.[92]

In summary, both the narrative flow of the Gospels and theological reflection on the life, death, and resurrection establish Jesus as creator and agent of new creation. From his throne he proclaims, "See, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). In his re-creative role he is a restorer, bringing what is broken back to its original beauty, working, like human artists, with existing materials to make something that is nevertheless genuinely new.

***Artful Moves*.** With incarnation and resurrection as the outside brackets,[93] I will turn my attention now, basically, to "everything that is in between"—that is, the life and ministry of Jesus. N. T. Wright often points out how the historical creeds of the church develop the birth and death of Jesus, but tend to go silent on Jesus' earthly life. The perfectly good reason for that is because the christological controversies were fought primarily over the nature of incarnation and resurrection. What will do for the creeds will not be enough here. To leave out the middle is to bypass a lot. The earthly work of Jesus features words and episodes that should be seen as "pictures" (I will say, because we are speaking of art) of the new creation that he comes to bring. What I wish to offer in this section are some ways that we might speak of the primary elements of Jesus as having artistic dimensions. I should add that I consider some of what is to follow as experimental theology. I am not sure how committed I am to it or how far I would push some of it. But I think it these are topics worth opening up.

The focus of Jesus ministry, at least in the canonical Gospels, is rather clear; it is the kingdom of God. The first words of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark (1:15) represent a summary statement of him ministry: "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" Jesus comes to restore God's reign over creation, to bring it to

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[92] N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), Part 3, 1093.

[93] The preexistence of the Word at the front end and life eternal at the other show that my "brackets" of incarnation and resurrection are porous, but those are nevertheless useful ways to frame christology, I think.

new creation. The decisive moment in the process is resurrection and ascension, but the entirety of Jesus' ministry works in that direction. His work is to reveal the kingdom in both word and act. His preserved teachings, composed largely of parables, aim to convey what the kingdom of God is like. His healings and exorcisms are—as John, in his Gospel, tends to call them—"signs" (Greek, *semeion,* from which we get "semantics"). That they are signs indicates how the miracles symbolically speak to something beyond the acts themselves. The ministry of Jesus, therefore, points toward new creation, the fullness of which is to come eventually. At the same time, his work demonstrates how that kingdom presently breaks in on the world through Jesus. The Synoptic Gospels tend to sum up that day-to-day, village-to-village work of Jesus in terms of (1) verbal announcement of the good news of the kingdom and accompanying teachings, (2) acts of physical healing, and (3) exorcisms (cf. Matthew 4:23; Mark 3:14,15; 6:6b, 7; Luke 4:36, 43; 9:1-6; the Gospel of John obviously records teaching, healings, and exorcisms but has no formulaic summary of Jesus' activity). What I want to consider is how one might apply to all of those activities the label "art."

The easiest place to make the connection between Jesus' ministry and art is with regard to his teaching. Jesus is widely recognized, even among his detractors, as a master storyteller. His use of word pictures has captured peoples' imaginations for two thousand years. Simple enough in form, his stories (and teachings in general) defy easy interpretation. They subvert the status quo and "pull us into a narrative world where there is development, plot, and resolution."[94] Parables, in particular, act as a kind of creative "indirect communication" that gets past the hearer's defenses by "find[ing] a way in a back window and confront[ing] what one thinks is reality."[95] These masterpieces allow the hearer to imagine something that is not yet. The "not yet" of Jesus' parables is the fullness of kingdom, which, although not yet present, begins to be present when listeners embrace the story and its teller. Since the artistry of Jesus' teaching is rather widely accepted, I will not dwell on it here, but will

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[94] Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 2.

[95] Ibid., 8.

only note how preaching is, by the best of preachers, regularly regarded as "craft"[96] and "art."[97]

I will suggest further that we might dare to describe Jesus' ministry of healing as having an artful dimension, as when we speak of "the healing arts." One should recognize that notions of healing do not translate evenly from culture to culture, least of all between the modern West and the ancient Mediterranean world. From a modern Western perspective, healing aims to address biological or psychological diseases and their causes, aiming finally for a cure, which is the complete eradication of the disease. In the ancient Mediterranean world, however, healing had as much to do with restoration of social status and "the restoration of meaning in life" (*shalom*).[98] My daughter, who is a Nurse Practitioner/Midwife, has on numerous occasions discussed with me "the art" of her work. At times her nursing perspective seems more ancient than modern. Or, perhaps it would be better to say that some of the wisdom of the past continues to be embraced in nursing. The best doctors, of course, know that they ultimately treat people not diseases; but time and resource constraints in an age of consumption often make medicine an impersonal science. Nurses, on the other hand, are trained *primarily* to treat people. Treatment may include, along with the dispersal of medicines and therapies, the following: spending time with the patient, attentive listening, comforting speech, and interaction with the patient's network of family and friends. The work of the nurse is often as intuitive as it is scientific. It calls for creative engagement.[99] In a similar way, Gospel

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[96] Cf. Fred Craddock, *Craddock on the Craft of Preaching* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2011).

[97] Cf. Elizabeth Achtemeier, Preaching As Theology and Art (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984). Achtemeier says of preaching what is true of parables: In artful preaching "language is framed in such a way that the congregation is allowed to enter into a new experience —to exchange their old perceptions of themselves, their world, and God for new perceptions, to step outside an old manner of life and see the possibility of a new one," 51-52.

[98] "Healing," *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, edited by John Pilch and Bruce Malina (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 102-103.

[99] Sheria Grice Robinson, "True Presence: Practicing the Art of Nursing." *Nursing*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (April, 2014): 44-45, accessed at https://journals.lww.com/nursing/FullText/2014/04000/True_presence__Practicing_the_art_of_nursing.11.aspx. Robinson writes: "Like the photographer prepared to experiment with various types of lighting to produce a beautiful picture, nurses come prepared to meet patients with wide-ranging skill sets that cover all aspects of the person: physical, mental, spiritual, cultural, and emotional. By adding some imagination to these skills, nurses can develop a sense of what quality of life means to the individual, group, or community and develop innovative approaches to care. When at their best, nurses create environments that make patients feel that they have value," 44.

descriptions of Jesus' healing practices seem to mirror best nurse practices. He observes and, at times, takes the initiative to intercede on behalf of a person in need, even before they ask. He asks questions and listens. He uses touch. As the father of a nurse, I would have no trouble calling Jesus the Great Nurse.

If notions of healing translate poorly between cultures, how much less transferable is exorcism! In post-Enlightenment societies, exorcism is typically subsumed under psychology. But in the ancient Mediterranean world it was a commonplace. Today, even those who critically quest for the historical Jesus tend to agree that he likely was known in his day as a healer/exorcist. I will risk heresy at this point by asking: Are there ways to think of Christ's ministry of exorcism in terms of an "art," perhaps even loosely a magical art? (I will blame this paragraph on Berdyaev, who never quite closes the door on esotericism.) The seemingly obvious response would be that the Bible is rather consistent in its condemnation of the magical arts. Yet, *magoi* play a part in the infancy narratives, and calling them "kings" simply will not do. John McGuckin points out that anyone not taught that there is no magic in Christianity would think that the case of Paul making Elymas go blind (Acts 13:8-12) is a matter of Paul having the "better magic."[100] The kinds of signs and wonders that Jesus carried out include activities often associated with special kinds of skilled practitioners, including sorcerers, witches, and magicians. It is sometimes suggested that Jesus performed his miracles in a unique manner: he worked through prayer and not incantation, and he went about his work in public and not in private, as most did.[101] The bigger point in the Gospels is that he did what he did in obedience to the Father and by the power of the Spirit. He was authoritative and accomplished in what he did. Nothing fully *explains* miracles. Is there room for distinguishing him from all the others who dealt with the "principalities and powers" by saying, he did it with "better magic."

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[100] McGuckin, *The Path of Christianity*, 1008.

[101] Christian Strecker, "Jesus and the Demoniacs," *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce Malina, and Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002),125. However, I would point out that Jesus does use a potion of saliva and dirt on a blind man's eyes and sends him to wash in the waters of Siloam (John 9). How are we to interpret that action in terms of medicine or magic?

Before leaving christology, I should mention that many of Christ's basic actions might also be interpreted (loosely) as performance art. Performance art is, roughly speaking, the genre of art in which the artist herself performs or becomes a piece of artistic expression. The problem with identifying "performed art" in Jesus' ministry is that every action is a potential example. On the other hand, if intentionality is a criterion for such art, then maybe nothing qualifies. I will suggest that there is some room in the middle, at least enough room to open the discussion. There are some actions of Jesus that are so rich and powerful in their expression that they might be thought of in terms of performance. That they were intended as art is doubtful. But they were intended gestures, to be sure. That they continue to be powerful in the church's memory is certain, as well. I think, for instance, of storied images of Jesus receiving the children, taking a cup of water from the woman at the well, touching lepers, and dining among sinners. These would have been suggestive, powerful scenes in their original performance and still are.

Pneumatology

For beauty's sake, if nothing else, I should open this section with the words of Ephrem the Syrian, who saw in the brooding Wind of Genesis 1:2 the Holy Spirit and also Christian baptism:

> [The Holy Spirit warmed the waters with a kind of vital warmth, even bringing them to a boil through intense heat in order to make them fertile. The action of a hen is similar. It sits on its eggs, making them fertile through the warmth of incubation. Here then, the Holy Spirit foreshadows the sacrament of holy baptism, prefiguring its arrival, so that the waters made fertile by the hovering of that same divine Spirit might give birth to the children of God.[102]

I will consider the activity of the Holy Spirit under the sub-headings "Descent," "Superfluity," and "Inspiration." I will rely heavily on Eugene Rogers' 2005 book, *After the Spirit*. That might seem like an odd choice for a primary text, since the book has little, if anything, to say directly about art. But several of Rogers' arguments prove helpful to my consideration of the Spirit. Plus, as is indicated by the subtitle of his book, *A Constructive Pneumatology from*

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[102] Thomas Oden, *The Living God, Systematic Theology: Volume 1* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 6.

Resources outside the Modern West, Rogers looks, as I have tried to do, toward the East for wisdom.

***Descent*.** Rogers begins his book by highlighting a paradox in modern theological discourse—that there is, on the one hand, increased lip service to matters of the Spirit; but, on the other hand, the increase in conversation has tended to be airy and vague. By way of contrast, he notes how, in most early Christian Syriac and Greek texts, "talk of the Holy Spirit seemed… almost always strictly tied to talk of holy places, holy people, and holy things. It did not float free of bodily existence as it does in modern North Atlantic Christian discourse and worship. Indeed, it was embodied."[103] He later adds: "The Spirit, who in classical Christian discourse 'pours out on all flesh,' had, in modern Christian discourse, floated free of bodies altogether."[104]

Rogers observes how in scripture and early Christian thinking, the way the Spirit moved tended to be toward and upon material bodies. That is the case in Jesus' baptism, where the Spirit descends on his body. It is true of the Eucharist, where the Spirit is present in bread and wine. In unction, the Spirit is present in oil; and Rogers recites Ephrem the Syrian's statement that "oil is the dear friend of the Holy Spirit." Similarly, the Spirit moves on the waters at creation, reaches Mary's womb, animates the church, and appeals to human senses as light, fire, incense, wine, and song.[105] He writes:

> Oil, water, bread, wine, the bodies of human beings to be baptized, married, or ordained: in many and various ways the matter of the world becomes the element of a sacrament. To think about the Spirit it will not do to think "spiritually": to think about the Spirit you have to think materially.[106]

Following on Rogers' observations, the first point that I would make regarding the Spirit is a simple, but important one—that the Holy Spirit is regularly portrayed as a descending

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[103] Rogers, 1.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., 2.

[106] Ibid., 56.

Person who moves toward matter. Arguments about the Spirit's procession have often focused on the "from whom" of that movement, as is the case in the Filioque controversy, which, at least ostensibly, has had to do with whether the Spirit proceeds from Father alone or Father and Son. But just as important to the present discussion is the "to what" of that movement. Both Son and Spirit seem to have a common direction—they move matter-ward and body-ward. Christ's self-emptying and the Spirit's descent bring Son and Spirit toward the earth, into and onto material things. The additional point would be that this common direction once again indicates the acceptability and usefulness of matter for God's purposes. Just as Christ's incarnation indicates the goodness of flesh, the descent of the Spirit suggests God's joy in being present to matter and in appropriating matter for the good. I will not push the connection to art too far at this point, but will only say that artistic endeavor imitates the movement of Spirit and Son toward material and bodily expression and assumes the sufficiency of their material media to communicate, enliven, and transform the world.

***Superfluity*.** In making his case about the neglect of the Spirit in modern discourse, Rogers goes straight the preeminent theologian of the twentieth century, Barth. Although "Spirit" does appear with some regularity in Barth's titles, there is fairly broad "consensus that his doctrine of the Spirit subsides into christology," says Rogers. He offers Robert Jenson's critique of Barth, as a case of, "There's nothing the Spirit can do that Christ can't do better."[107] Theology in both the East and West has traditionally emphasized the sufficiency of Christ; the "repeated nineteenth and twentieth-century specification" has been that the Son always does it "better." So, then, does this make the Holy Spirit dispensable? What, if anything, can the Spirit do better? Rogers makes a couple of moves from that point on that serve this present discussion, and I will summarize those moves as emphasizing (1) superfluity and (2) rest.

First, it is a small step from "Christ can always do it better" to "The Holy Spirit is superfluous." But what Rogers does is turn superfluity into a positive. "[L]et's say the Holy Spirit *is* superfluous," he writes. Rogers then proceeds to highlight two kinds of superfluity:

[107] Ibid., 20.

first, superfluity that is "crossing a distance" (helping to cover ground that has not been gained) and, secondly, superfluity that is "gratuitous incorporation" (a gift of divine life).[108] The first can be ruled out. Since Christ is sufficient, there is no ground to be made up. In the second case, there are longstanding prejudices to overcome, since "excess" and "gratuity" are regular targets in church teaching. Gratuitousness, in most cases, is to be avoided. But what of gracious excess? Rogers reminds the reader that God's economy is one of abundance. I quote Rogers at length:

> From Paul to Augustine through the fourteenth century and into the present, the counterattack has been the gratuity of grace, the superfluity of riches by which God overturns calculations of human desert. God does not need human beings or their justice, but God grants what God demands; they are God's own gifts that God crowns. God transports, transfers, or transfigures the human being from an economy of scarcity to an economy of abundance—the peaceable kingdom, the new Jerusalem, the heavenly feast. In this fourteenth-century thinking, a second superfluous element (the gratuitous grace of God) elevates human nature, and leads to glory, uplifting the whole economy of daily life. In some twentieth-century thinking, the gratuitous element (pneumatology in excess of christology) excites human humility, and overwhelms Feuerbach, reclaiming the *oikonomia* of deification. If Feuerbach claims that "*Man is was er isst*," the Eucharist proclaims that this is surpassingly true of the bread of heaven. The superfluity is a grace that humans are saved *by*.[109]

From gracious superfluity, Rogers moves to the notion of rest. There is, then, something the Spirit does better. The Spirit "rests." Rogers adds: "The logic of the Spirit is not the logic of productivity, but the logic of superfluity, not the logic of work but the logic of Sabbath. The Spirit like the Sabbath sanctifies."[110] Basil the Great says that this gratuity seeks the perfection of that upon which it rests:

> For the source of being is one, which makes through the Son, and which perfects in the Spirit. And the Fathers, "who works all in all" is not imperfect in energy; neither is it the case that the Son is defective in creative power, unless it be perfected by the Spirit. Thus the Father, who creates by his will alone, would not need the Son, but nevertheless he wills through the Son. The Son, who works according to the likeness of the Father, would not need a co-worker, but the Son wills that perfection should come about through the Spirit.[111]

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[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., 39.

[110] Ibid., 71.

[111] Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 2011), 71.

For humans, the Spirit becomes the agent of *theosis*. Human beings, redeemed by their Lord, are perfected by the Spirit, who helps bring them into unity with the God who is a unity of Father, Son, and Spirit.

I would make the case now that a creation, which is based on the "logic of Sabbath" and is energized by a Spirit who superfluously rests on people and things, is exactly the kind of environment that makes art possible. Art is excess. Although one could (and should) argue that art is not dispensable, at least for the best kind of life, art is not absolutely necessary for mere human subsistence. Making art requires time for reflection, organization, production, trial-and-error. It is born out of leisure. Art is born out of our restlessness (our desire to do or make or say something new) but requires space to do so (Sabbath space, one might say…time to brood and imagine). And where art is given time and space, the world can be transformed.

I live in a small southern Indiana town known for its gratuitous architectural beauty. Years ago, Irwin Miller—businessman, philanthropist, and patron of the arts—arranged to have the architectural fees for any public building covered by a trust, as long as a renowned architect did the design. There are occasional criticisms in town about this kind of excess. But I step outside my front door and am looking at a church and steeple designed by Gunnar Birkerts, and within 300 yards are at least four other structures on the National Register of Historic Places. My own opinion is, superfluity is often good.

Inspiration. The one mild criticism I might make regarding Roger's otherwise insightful book is one of proportion: I wonder if superfluity and rest are adequate substitutes for what seems to be the Spirit's primary way of being known in scripture—"wind" and "breath." Of course Rogers knows and acknowledges these traditional ways of naming the the Holy Spirit, but the *heavy-lifting* activities of the Spirit are not highlighted in Rogers the way that they tend to be highlighted in either Testament. The Hebrew and Greek way of naming the "Spirit" is precisely in terms of "wind" or "breath" (*ruah* in Hebrew, *pneuma* in Greek). What is more, associating Spirit too much with rest seems to underplay the active, transformative, sometimes sudden power of the Spirit displayed in scripture. Rogers' interests are primarily intra-trinitarian, by the

way, and the Son may not need any motivation to join in what the Father wants done. But the Spirit's activity on humans, as well as upon a fallen world, is often to stir things up and blow life back into matter gone dead.

Consider the inspirational presence of the Spirit in the following Old Testament examples. (1) At creation, the Spirit moves over the face of the deep prior to God calling for light (Genesis 1:2). (2) God forms the first human from the ground (*adam*) and breathes into its nostrils the breath of life; only at this "in-spiriting" does the clay statue become a living soul (Genesis 2:7). (3) Joel famously anticipates an age of the Spirit, when men and women, young and old together, will, through the Spirit, prophesy (Joel 2:17). (4) Isaiah awaits something similar, a time when an outpouring of the Spirit will change deserts into forests (Isaiah 32:15). (5) The book of Ezekiel refers often to the Spirit, the Spirit who comes upon the prophet and sets him on his feet (2:2). (6) Ezekiel's most famous story of inspiration is chapter 37's Valley of Dry Bones: "Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live" (v. 5). (7) The Spirit even comes upon Balaam's donkey, causing it to speak (Numbers 24:2). (8) The Spirit comes upon kings like Saul (1 Samuel 10:6, 10) and David (1 Samuel 16:13). (9) David fears that his sin will cause an absence of the Spirit (Psalm 51:11), and Isaiah fears that national sins will do the same to his people (Isaiah 63:10). (10) Finally, I highlight a this particular moment of inspiration, in Exodus 31:1011, which is significant to the project at hand. Here Bezalel is given artistic oversight of the tabernacles construction:

> The Lord spoke to Moses: See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: and I have filled him with *divine spirit* [italics mine], with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, *to devise artistic designs* [italics mine], to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. Moreover, I have appointed with him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the covenant, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand, and the finely worked vestments, the holy vestments for the priest Aaron and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the holy place. They shall do just as I have commanded you.

The Spirit appears with great regularity in the New Testament, but I will highlight just two decisive plot shifts that are set in motion by the Spirit. (1) In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit comes

upon the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, where they are gathered, along with Jews from all nations, for Pentecost. The Spirit enters the scene as a "sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting" (2:2). The Spirit gives the disciples the ability to speak in other languages (2:4), they proclaim the good news of Jesus, and many come to believe. The beginning of the church—newly-formed and Spirit-filled body of Jesus—is by the Spirit's energy. (2) Later in the book of Acts, Peter preaches to a gentile named Cornelius and his household. As Peter preaches, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word" (9:44). This new moment in history was not Peter's idea. In fact there is data to suggest that Peter's preference might have been for it not to go that way at all. But, once again, God's Holy Wind blows the story in a new direction.

In each of these Old and New Testament instances, the Spirit is power. The Spirit is a force that drives individuals to do new and seemingly impossible tasks, turns dry deserts into gardens, works to change the course of events, and pushes toward a new historical reality. The Spirit brings breathes life where there is only death. The Spirit inspires. In the case of Bezalel, the Spirit provides artistic inspiration. The connection between art and inspiration is well established in ordinary speech, although it is not always clear that the Holy Spirit of Christian theology is in view. That anxiety should not prevent the church from expecting and noticing the Holy Spirit's movement in art.[112]

Theology

Orthodox Christian theology identifies the Son as the Word of creation (John 1:1) and sees the Spirit present at creation as the Wind (*ruah*) moving on the surfaces of the abyss (Genesis 1:3); but creation is first of all an act of the Father's will. The Apostles' Creed begins: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth." The Father desires there be a world and therefore creates through the Word and in the Holy Spirit. In the words of Hilarion Alfeyev:

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[112] Cf. Jeremy Begbie, *A Peculiar Orthodoxy: Reflections on Theology and the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018). Begbie has a good chapter on George Herbert (113-128) in which he shows how Herbert, who was extremely grounded in scripture, nevertheless "refuse[d] to regard the poet or poetry as inherently antagonistic to the motions of the Spirit," 128.

> The Christian idea of the creation is founded on the Old Testament revelation of God as the Creator of the world and on the New Testament teaching that God made the world through the mediation of his Son, supplemented by the notion that the Holy Spirit also participated in creation. The formation of the world, therefore, is perceived in the Christian tradition as a creative act of the Triune God, an act in which all three Persons of the Holy Trinity took part.[113]

***Creator*.** We finally circle around to the beginning where much Christian theology starts, and "in [that] beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The first line in the Canon establishes God as Creator. Before we are told anything else about God, we are told God makes. The creative activity of God is spelled out in the first two chapters of Genesis in somewhat contrasting stories. The first is Genesis 1:1-2:4a, which "moves in dramatic fashion from God's basic confrontation with chaos (1:2) to the serene and joyous rule of God over a universe able to be at rest (2:1-4a)."[114] The second is Genesis 2:4b-25, which "focuses on human persons as the glory…of creation," only to become by chapter 3 the "central problem of creation."[115] These are not the only creation texts of the Old Testament. Job 38 is a beautiful piece of poetry on creation, and there are several Psalms classified Creation Psalms (8, 19, 29, 65, 104, and 139). There are also shorter creation passages in the prophets (Isaiah 37:16; 40:26; 44:24; 45:12, 18; Jeremiah 10:12; 32:17; 51:15; and Amos 5:8). But theological controversies seem to coalesce around the first two chapters of Genesis.

The very first phrase of Genesis 1 raises interesting questions about what kind of creative act is in view. A consensus of Old Testament scholars today would reject the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1.[116] The traditional reading considers is as portraying "a beginning that is foundational and absolute"[117]—that is, creation *ex nihilo* (from nothing). "In

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[113] Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Christianity, Volume 2: Doctrine and Teaching of the Orthodox Church* (New Yord: St. Vladimir's Press, 2012), 183.

[114] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox,1982), 22.

[115] Ibid., 40.

[116] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 529.

[117] R. R. Reno, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 29.

the beginning God created" *everything* that comes into view. Most Old Testament scholars, however, say that the grammar does not necessarily move in that direction, that the better reading is more like, "In the beginning when God began creating…" (NRSV). The less-traditional reading suggests that the "creation" of Genesis 1:1 is more a matter of differentiation than fiat, a matter of bringing order to original chaos.[118] Walter Brueggemann, for instance, says that verse 2 makes clear that it was *not* "out of nothing," although he points out that *ex nihilo* is basically affirmed in the New Testament (cf. Romans 4:17; Hebrews 11:3).[119] At stake in *creatio ex materia* (creation out of [existing] stuff) is the sovereignty of God over all things. If God worked from some kind of preexistent chaos, where did it come from?

In his theological commentary on Genesis, R. R. Reno proposes that there are insights to be gleaned in both ways of translating; however, he strongly defends the importance of the traditional reading: "In the main, traditional readers formulated and gave credence to patterns of interpretation and translation because they discerned any number of intellectual and spiritual advantages that are as relevant today as they were thousands of years ago."[120] Indeed the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is more based in good theology than accurate translation of the text. When Old Testament writers speak of creation, it is to make a theological, rather than scientific or "natural" point. The point of Genesis 1 is to show God's mastery of creation. One linguistic signal to that sovereignty may be the Hebrew word for "create" that is in vs. 1—*bara'*. That word appears approximately fifty times in the Old Testament, and the expressed or implied subject is always God, perhaps suggesting that there is a kind of creating that only God can do. Additional support for the foundational nature of God's creative activity might be determined from the sheer accumulation of terms that connote God's actions. In his *Old*

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[118] The late Toyozo Nakarai, Hebrew professor at Emmanuel Christian Seminary, viewed Genesis 1:1-2 as dependent clauses that give background information to the independent clause that is verse 3. So something like: "When in the beginning God began creating the heavens and earth, the earth formless and empty, darkness on the surface of the deep and God's Spirit hovering over the surface, God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

[119] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 29. He adds: "The very ambiguity of creation from nothing and creation from chaos is a rich expository possibility. We need not choose between them."

[120] Reno, 32.

Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel, John Goldingay devotes a hefty chapter to creation, entitled "He Began." That chapter is subdivided into more particular actions of creation, and the verbs associated with God's activity are many: God Thought, Spoke, Birthed, Prevailed, Created, Built, Arranged, Shaped, Delegated, Planted, and Relaxed.[121] However one assesses the the nature of things prior to Genesis, the cumulative effect of this list of activities attributed to God is, in Goldingay's words, to show that "what was distinctive about the Beginning was the fact that it was the beginning"[122] and that what is being highlighted is "the sovereignty of what God achieves rather than…the nothingness from which God starts."[123]

But the more interesting question might be: But by establishing God's sovereignty, do we end up with something we will necessarily like? In his very influential book, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*,[124] Jon Levinson demonstrates rather convincingly that alongside the Old Testament accounts of God's omnipotence at creation (which portray God as rather comfortably in control of the universe) there are compelling counter-accounts that portray God as in a constant struggle to maintain order (often pictured as a struggle with Leviathan). In those alternative accounts, the outcome seems assured—that God will win. But God's full mastery is *not yet*. While that orientation downplays God's sovereignty (at least for the moment), it does go a long way in helping to explain the presence of evil. If, in fact, God presently runs a tight ship, how does one explain the evening news?

Berdyaev, I think, would have enjoyed Levinson's book. He was drawn to Boehme in large part because the mystic's understanding of the *Ungrund* meant that there was an Abyss unattributable to the Creator, an Abyss with which God had to (and continues to) contend. Several early Christian theologians, like Theophilus of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and Origen,

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[121] John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume 1: Israel's Gospel* (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 42-130.

[122] Ibid., 77.

[123] Ibid., 78.

[124] Jon Levinson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (New Jersey: Princeton Press, 1988).

rejected the notion of creation from nothing. Rather, "it was to be seen as an act of construction, on the basis of material which was already at hand"; furthermore, "the presence of evil or defects within the world are thus not to be ascribed to God, but to deficiencies in the material from which the world was constructed."[125] That much might have been acceptable to Berdayev. But he finally comes out on espousing a variation of creation *ex nihilo.* He does so by taking the preexistent "nothingness" the Abyss to be no real "thing." *Ex nihilo* was important for Berdyaev to maintain, because he wanted to uphold creation as a decisive act rather than a kind of emanation. As expressed by Athanasius, creation does not proceed eternally from God; creation is an act of *will* on God's part.[126] So in the end, Berdyaev lines up with the consensus of faith, which moves in the direction of creation *ex nihilo* both to secure God as Maker of everything—"Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible" in the Nicene Creed—and also to save matter from Platonic notions of inherent imperfection.

Love. Concerning the creation, John of Damascus writes:

> Since, then, God, Who is good and more than good, did not find satisfaction in self-contemplation, but in His exceeding goodness wished certain things to come into existence which would enjoy His benefits and share in His goodness, He brought all things out of nothing into being and created them, both what is invisible and what is visible. Yea, even man, who is a compound out of the visible and invisible.[127]

Why does the self-sufficient God create? Presuming to understand divine motivations is risky business, but there are clues in the very act. As Thomas Oden puts it,

> God could have refrained altogether from creating, had it not been that God's goodness irrepressibly takes joy in being shared. Hence there is no absolute necessity that any world exist, although there is a consequent necessity, that is, consequent to the purpose of God to love and be loved fittingly.[128]

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[125] Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology* (Blackwell Publishing, 2007) 226. Note also how the notion of pre-existent matter is somewhat akin to Berdyaev's understanding of Boehme's *Ungrund,* the primordial abyss from which God must create.

[126] Meyendorff, 129.

[127] John of Damascus, "Exposition of the Orthodox Faith," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2, Vol. 9, 18.

[128] Oden, 255.

Jonathan Edward's works toward the answer in terms of God's glory. In *A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, he proposes that God creates in order to extend God's own glory.[129] Creation is how God makes his goodness visible so that, in the end, God's attributes will be recognized and worshiped. All creation—led by human beings in fellowship with their Creator—will declare the glory of the Lord (Psalm 19:1).

A somewhat more satisfying (to me) explanation is offered by Brueggemann "theology of blessing" in Genesis 1, that plays out in three cycles: a blessing of living creatures (1:22), a blessing of humans (1:28), and a blessing of the Sabbath (2:3). He says, "Blessing theology defines reality in an artistic and aesthetic way." God repeatedly assesses the work of creation as "good" (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), and, finally in verse 31, declares it all "very good" (v. 31).

> The "good" used here does not refer primarily to a moral quality, but to an aesthetic quality. It might better be translated "lovely, pleasing, beautiful" (cf. Eccles. 3:11). The shift from the sixth day to the seventh is perhaps, then, not just that time has run its course, but that God knows satisfaction and delight in what he has wrought. He rests not because the week ends, but because there is a satisfying, finished quality in his creation.[130]

Brueggemann detects in the creation accounts aesthetic interests and evidence of the Artist's joy in what has been made. The overall theme of creation in Genesis is to show that "God and God's creation are bound together in a distinctive and delicate way."[131]

Only a slight nudge moves Brueggemann's aesthetic take on creation to the more intimate explanation—that creation is an act of love. In his 2015 short book, *Creation: The Apple of God's Eye*, church historian Justo Gonzalez identifies love as the guiding motivation of creation.[132] As Gregory of Nyssa saw it, the preparation of the world prior to human creation was an act of great care, similar to one's getting their house reading for a special guest:

> [For] as a good host does not bring his guest to his house before the preparation of the feast, but, when he has made all due preparation, and decked with their proper adornments

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[129] Jonathan Edwards, "A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World" (published after his death in 1765), available online, accessed May 1, 2019 at https://www.monergism.com/dissertation-concerning-end-which-god-created-world-jonathan-edwards.

[130] Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 37.

[131] Ibid., 22.

[132] Justo Gonzales, *Creation: The Apple of God's Eye* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015).

> his house, his couches, his table, brings his guest home when things suitable for his refreshment are in readiness,—in the same manner the rich and munificent Entertainer of our nature, when he had decked the habitation with beauties of every kind, and had prepared this great and varied banquet, then he introduced man.[133]

Gregory's view looks a little beyond the notion of creation as mere self-glorification to creation as an act of divine love. The admittance of a character onto the scene who is "in the image and likeness" of its Creator lends support to this direction, as does the inflation of that character with God's own breath in Genesis 2. Gonzalez notes Thomas Aquinas' contention that Christ might have become flesh even if there was no sin.

> On this matter there are different opinions. Some say that the Son of God would have become incarnate even if humans had not sinned. Others hold to the opposite. The latter opinion seems most reasonable…. The incarnation was ordained by God as a remedy to sin, and therefore, were there no sin to redeem, there would be no incarnation. Yet the power of God is such that it is not limited by this, and therefore God could have become incarnate even had there been no sin.[134]

Gonzalez adds:

> In more recent times, Jesuit theologian and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin spoke of Christ as the "omega point" toward which all creation is evolving. According to Teilhard, all evolution is "an ascent towards consciousness," and it culmination is the joining of all things at the omega point toward which evolution moves, God incarnate in Jesus Christ.[135]

Goldingay argues that, while love may not be expressly stated as the motivation for creation in Genesis, just such a connection is indicated elsewhere in the Old Testament, particularly Psalm 33. That Hebrew song is both a meditation on creation and a reflection on *hesed* (the Hebrew equivalent of agape in the New Testament and usually translated "steadfast love" or "lovingkindnes"). *Hesed* is God's "divine commitment in connection with creation and fills a space left open by Genesis, which does not tell us why God created the world." Goldingay makes the case that the motivation for creation only becomes a real issue with sin and what God plans to do with what has been made:

> [Genesis] may assume that creation was an instinctive act of God's generosity and God's instinct to share life, but in the Torah the first references to divine love come in describing

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[133] Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Making of Man," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2, Vol. 5, 390.

[134] Gonzalez, loc. 497, quoting *Summa theological* 3, q. 1, art. 3, translated by Gonzalez.

[135] Ibid., loc. 509.

> God's commitment to Israel (e.g., Deut. 4:37; 7:8). Love (or talk in terms of love) becomes necessary only after sin has become a problem in the world. Psalm 33 fills this gap as it sees creation as a great act of hesed on God's part.[136]

Do creation and/or art belong, in some ways, to love? Contemporary author Chuck Klosterman has said, "Art and love are the same thing: It's the process of seeing yourself in things that are not you." The capacity to create something new, something *other*, and then take joy in what has been made seems to belong only to God and humans. Art is a form of communication, a way for people to express things, often in a highly nuanced way. Poetry is the language of love. Art is frequently a gratuitous gift that the artist gives to the world. Even creative thinking can be an act of love. While the inventor may have some commercial interests in mind when she goes about her work, she may also have the philanthropic goal of making things better for the people around her. There seem to be multiple ways to explore the intersection of love and creativity.

Co-creativity. It should be no surprise that the human creature, who was made in God's image and inspirited by God, is given a special vocation in the world. Humankind is commanded "to fill" the earth (1:28), which simultaneously expands the human's significance in space, gives humanity an expanded future (in progeny), and exposes humanity to the risks inherent in creating things (Who knows how children will turn out?).[137] To the human is "given" the plants and animals (1:29), a kind of giving that is qualified in terms of stewardship in the next chapter: the human is "to work (*abad*) it and take care of (*shamar*) it" (2:15). The ecological tone of the command is worth noting: "The verbs suggest not exploitative, self-aggrandizing use of the earth, but gentle care for and enhancement of the earth and all its creatures."[138]

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[136] Goldingay, 57.

[137] Reno, 57.

[138] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 461.

The location of human oversight is identified as a "garden" (2:8), *gan* in Hebrew, which typically signifies "an enclosed area for cultivation."[139] In the garden, there is minimal prohibition (2:17) and considerable freedom (2:16). One might imagine moving into a new home and inheriting a garden in the back. The basic plan is established; but, of course, gardens grow and change. The new resident will creative work to do. The image of the garden suggests that humans have been called into creative partnership with God. Their co-creative license is further indicated in 2:19-20, where the human is given the task of naming animals. The human will not only be gifted with language but is given a role in its development. The human has a hand in the very mystery (language) that helps humanity process creation and gain understanding of the Creator.

Most every chapter of the Old Testament after the fall (Genesis 3) has elements that can be interpreted as examples of co-creativity—God determines to restore broken creation and employs human beings to that end. But some episodes in the narrative more plainly show humans as creative agents. The previously mentioned story of Bazelel in Exodus 31 is one such account. Bezalel is filled with God's own Spirit in order to construct the tabernacle. Bezalel's artistry is sometimes downplayed by pointing out that the instructions for the tabernacle are quite specific. Is Bezalel only following directions? But emphasis in the Hebrew text is on the creative nature of what he will do: He is inspired by God literally "to design designs" (*lachshov machashavot* in 31:4). Furthermore, Old Testament scholars frequently highlight the parallels between the stories of creation and tabernacle. Levinson writes that the

> correspondences [between tabernacle and creation] underscore the depiction of the sanctuary as a world, that is, an ordered, supportive, and obedient environment, and the depiction of the world as a sanctuary, that is, a place in which the reign of God is visible and unchallenged, and his holiness is palpable, unthreatened, and pervasive.[140]

Seen from this angle, Bezalel, Oholiab, and their associates are to join God in replicating first creation!

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[139] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 61.

[140] Levinson, 86.

The architects of the tabernacle are not the only Old Testament characters whose artistry is highlighted. Jubal is "the father of all who play the harp and flute" (Genesis 4:21). Often the craftspeople are called in to work on the Lord's house (1 Chronicles 22:2, 29:5; 2 Chronicles 24:12; The wedding poet's "tongue is the pen of a skillful writer" (Psalm 45:1), and "skill" is an appreciated quality of Levite musicians (2 Chronicles 34:12). In Zechariah, the metalworkers are called in to cut away on the four horns of the evil empires (1:21). Importantly, the student who searches scripture for such instances holds in hand literary art of a co-creative nature—scripture itself. Inspired by God, but bearing evidence of its human writers, the Bible is literature, composed primarily of stories, songs/poems, and visions.

We have discussed the work of Christ, which can be seen in terms of restoration and new creation. Although not necessarily art in the narrow sense, his life helps effect re-creation. In the New Testament there is a very specific inclusion of Jesus' followers into his mission. Prior to his resurrection, it is in the sending out of the apostles, who are brought into the same work as their Rabbi; "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons" (Matthew 10:7-8a; cf. also Luke 10:1-12). In Paul, believers are described as "ambassadors for Christ," who represent on his behalf (2 Corinthians 5:20) and "work together with him" (2 Corinthians 6:1). In the letter to the Hebrews, "we have become partners of Christ" (Hebrews 3:14). In John 14:12, Jesus goes so far as to promise that the work of his followers will go beyond what he did.

N. T. Wright regularly emphases how believers have been called to action in new creation. Humans are to reconciling agents in a world that is broken. He also frequently emphasizes that, for those so gifted and called, "part of that agency will be *creativity,*" including works of art, writing, drama, and music.[141] At the end of his book, *Simply Christian*, Wright points the church back (or maybe forward!) to creation:

> What I want to propose…is that the church should reawaken its hunger for beauty at every level. This is essential and urgent. It is central to Christian living that we should celebrate

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[141] N. T. Wright, "The Bible and Christian Imagination," an online transcript of a lecture delivered May 18, 2005 at . Seattle Pacific University, *Response*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer 2005), last accessed on May 1, 2019 at https://spu.edu/depts/uc/response/summer2k5/features/imagination.asp.

> the goodness of creation, ponder its present brokenness, and, insofar as we can, celebrate in advance the healing of the world, the new creation itself. Art, music, literature, dance, theater, and many other expressions of human delight and wisdom, can all be explored in new ways.[142]

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, Berdyaev helps establish human beings fundamentally as creators made in the image of God. In this chapter my aim has been to present some added perspective on the God who creates, in order to highlight the nature of creativity. However it happens, God creates. He creates through the Son and by the power of the Holy Spirit. The intensity of God's commitment to creation is seen in the movements of both Son and Spirit. The Son comes to earth in the flesh. The Spirit descends on things. At every turn, God's relates lovingly to creation. That love is typically in excess of what is required. Indeed love it not required; it is God's gift. God is constant inspiration to his world, breathing life into it at every moment and completely new life into it at needed intervals. And the invitation of the Trinity is for humankind to be so in fellowship with the Maker that they will be caught up in the perfect fellowship of the Trinity.

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[142] N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 235.

CHAPTER 3

PRELIMINARY CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY AND FINDINGS

This survey was conducted at the front end of the project, and it aimed to assess practices and attitudes at NHCC regarding art and creativity.

Process. With the assistance of New Hope's Office Manager, I put together a mailing list consisting of what we determined to be adult "regular worshipers," generously defined as those who attended Sunday morning worship at least once a month the previous year. We do not take attendance at New Hope, but the congregation is small enough to make a fairly accurate judgment of that kind. The list consisted of 212 people. I judged that I would get the best response by mailing paper surveys to each individual and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return. Those surveys, each with a cover letter, were mailed on September 6, 2018 to all 212 recipients. One hundred forty-two surveys were completed and returned, a fairly decent return rate of 67%. Most of those came back within a week of the mailing. None came back after two weeks. My wife, Chris Sichting, served as my spreadsheet expert, entering all the information in a sortable data file.

The Questionnaire.[143] The survey (see Appendix 2) consisted of thirty-six items of inquiry, a few of which asked for multiple responses. My goal was to create a survey with approximately fifty questions that could be completed in 20-30 minutes. Afterwards, I asked several people how long it took to complete the survey, and most of them estimated they completed it in 20

[143] The following survey was helpful for formulating questions: Wuthnow, Robert. Arts and Religion Survey 1999 [United States]. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2016-01-28. https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR35192.v1.

minutes. It is humbling to think that, even figuring at the 20-minute low estimate, the congregation devoted over forty-seven hours of time to the survey.

Before proceeding to the data, I will mention that I detected at least two weaknesses in the survey. First of all, in the many questions that have the five options ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," the middle option in this survey is "not sure." I am *not sure* now that "not sure" is best way to designate the middle, most neutral position, since "not sure" could indicate something other than the middle. As poor as that choice was, when factored out "not sure" answers, we ended up with nearly identical outcomes. Secondly, Question 32, which had to do with ranking vocations, was probably very poorly written (by me) and equally poorly executed (by the respondents), so that it yielded little helpful information. I have elected not to attempt any interpretation of that question.

There are basically four lines of inquiry in the survey: (1) questions seeking background and demographic data, (2) questions seeking information on personal habits regarding the arts and self-assessment regarding the same, (3) questions regarding general views of culture and art, and (4) questions relating specifically to art and the life of the church. The original survey, as well as cover letter, appear in the Appendix.[144]

Review of Data

Demographic Data. The responses to questions 1, 3, and 4 are presented in the charts below. As to gender, Question 2, the respondents were 54% female and 46% male, which fairly represents out congregational makeup.

For age divisions I followed a fairly typical generational breakdown (see Chart 1 below). The results accurately reflect the high percentage of senior-aged people at NHCC—70.4% of the respondents were 54 or over. There is a noticeably low percentage of respondents in the 38-53 age range (typically labeled Generation X), and a slightly better showing of 15.5% in the 18-37 range (typically labeled Millennials).

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[144] See Appendix 2, page 121.

Chart 1: Age

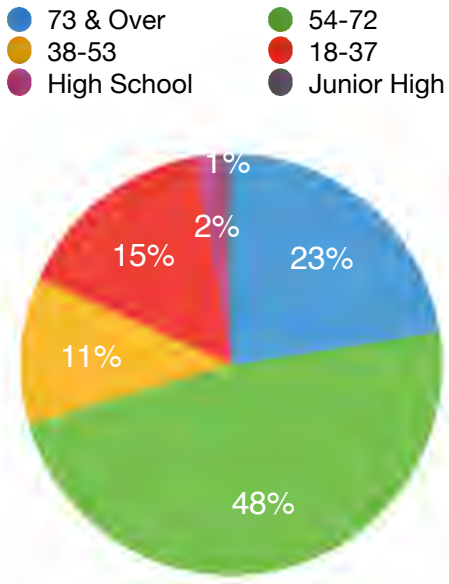
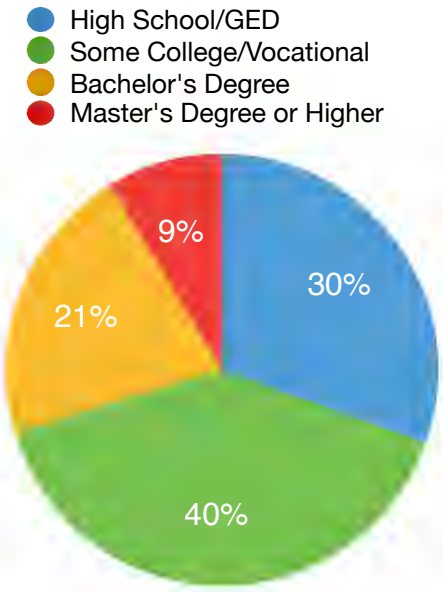
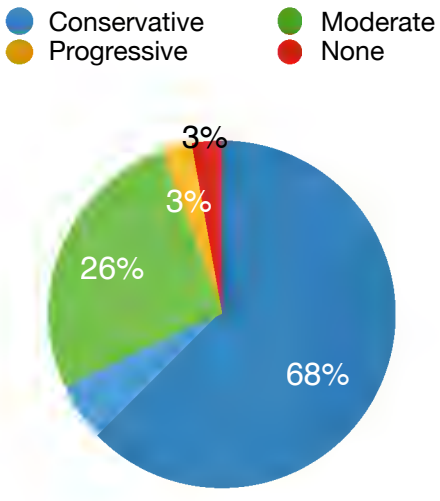


Chart 2: Education



Education results (see Chart 2 above) show 40% of respondents having some college or vocational training, with equal parts of 30% showing high school equivalency and 30% showing Bachelor's Degree or higher. Those with a Bachelor's Degree (20.3%) and Master's Degree or higher (8.4%) add up to a total of 28.7% college graduates, about 5% higher than the Indiana average for persons 25+ years of age.[145]

Chart 3: Politics



The data concerning political leanings (see Chart 3) was not surprising. Over two thirds of those surveyed identified as politically conservative, and less than one third identified as moderate. Progressives and those with no political preference added to just over 5%. I anticipated that sorting by age might show significant political difference, but when the two oldest age groups (54 and above) were factored

[145] United States Census Bureau, *Quick Facts, Indiana*, accessed April 1, 2019 at https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/in.

out, those identifying conservative dropped slightly to 62.5%, and those identifying moderate picked up to 32.5%, a 5% shift but still approaching two thirds conservative.

***Habits and Creative Self-Perception*.** I will begin evaluation of the set of questions by noting the distribution of artistic interests among respondents as reflected in Question 5 (see Chart 4 below). Technology in the form of radio and cell phones gives high percentages to music listening (89.5% of those surveyed participate) and photography (81.1% had engaged in photography in the previous year). At the low end, only 6 people (4.2%) had written poetry and only 5 (3.5%) had attended the ballet.

Chart 4: Art Participation

Question 5: Which of the following have you done this past year?	Affirmative Responses
Attended a concert/opera	23
Been to a movie theater	13
Gone dancing	26
Made a work of art or a craft	65
Attended a ballet	5
Played a musical instrument	24
Purchased music	54
Read a novel	68
Taken a photograph	116
Read poetry	35
Been to a school play or concert	61
Visited an art museum or gallery	36
Listened to radio music	128
Written poetry	6

Questions 6 and 7 are comparative. The first asking for the respondent to compare herself/himself with others. A large majority (68%) of the respondents saw themselves as of average creativity, 21.3% as less creativity than others, and 10.7% viewed themselves as more creative than average. For those 53 years of age and under, the percentage that believed they

were more creative than average jumped significantly to 21.4%. Those who identified as having high school education or GED had answers that paralleled the total respondent averages.

Question 7 asks the person surveyed to compare their present creativity to their creativity as a child. In this question, respondents did not link creativity to their childhood, as I had anticipated they might (however, see comparison of Charts 12 and 13 below). The least number (24.6%) believed they had been more creative as a child, 36.2% thought equally creative to their childhood, and 39.1% thought they were more creative than they were as a child.

Question 31 asked, "Which of the following brings you more joy?" A majority (57.6%) chose "Making or reproducing something that I know how to do well" over "Creating or inventing something new and original (42.5%).

The responses to Questions 8-11, composed of data highlighting areas of creative interest, are in Charts 5-8 below.

Chart 5: Hands-on Art

Question 8: What arts do you engage in?	Affirmative Responses
Painting	12
Sculpture	1
Pottery	5
Photography	44
Fabric Arts (Sewing, Quilting, Needlepoint, Cross Stitch, etc.)	34
Woodworking	21
Jewelry-Making	13
Stained Glass	7
None of the above	61

Chart 6: Reading

Question 9. What do you regularly read? (Check all that apply)	Affirmative Responses
Newspapers/Magazines	103
Books, Fiction	64
Books, Non-Fiction	59
Plays	3
Short Stories	37
Poetry	13
I do not read often.	21

Chart 7: Movies

10. What types of movies do you enjoy seeing? (Check all that apply)	Affirmative Responses
Comedies	111
Drama	86
Action	83
Horror	12
Science Fiction	32
I rarely watch movies.	13

Chart 8: Musical Tastes

11. What styles of music do you listen to at home or in the car?	Affirmative Responses
Rock/Pop	91
Hip Hop/Rap	19
Folk	33
Classical	36
Country	90
Jazz	15
I rarely listen to music.	9

There are several questions in the survey seeking responses in degree, ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree.” I gave numeric status from 1-5 to the answers, 1 signifying “Strongly Agree” and 5 signifying “Strongly Disagree.” Chart 9 shows the average response to Questions 12-16.

Chart 9: Attitudes toward Personal Creativity

Strongly Agree 1 - Agree 2 - Not Sure 3 - Disagree 4 - Strongly Disagree 5	Average
12. I wish I had more time to engage in arts and crafts.	3.25
13. I like to do things my way, even if it means breaking the rules.	2.28
14. I grew up in a home that considered the arts important.	2.92
15. I often get my best ideas when daydreaming or doing nothing in particular.	3.35
16. I do not like it when things are uncertain and unpredictable.	4.00

General Views Regarding Art and Culture. Chart 10 below shows the averages to questions pertaining to art and culture.

Chart 10: Attitudes toward Art

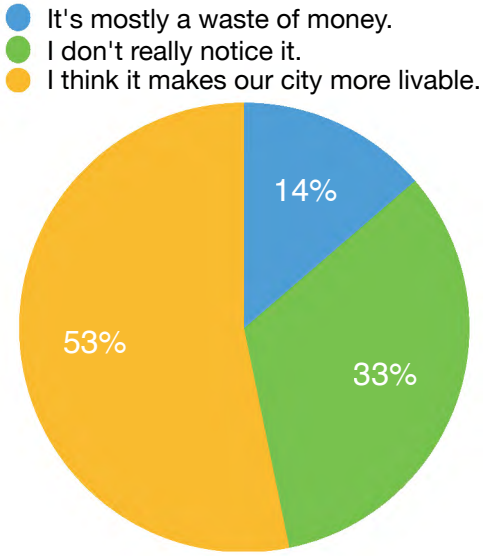
Strongly Agree 1 - Agree 2 - Not Sure 3 - Disagree 4 - Strongly Disagree 5	Average
18. I feel like I don’t really understand a lot of what is called “art.”	3.2
19. I feel like a lot of art in public galleries dishonors God.	2.9
20. Art, literature, and music are vital for having a meaningful life.	3.79
21. Most of the music I hear on the radio these days is harmful to our young people.	3.22

My prediction would have been that the less formally educated half of those surveyed might have been more inclined to think that much art is nonsense. In fact, those with high school/ GED educations disagreed more with the statement and averaged out at 3.2. The difference was even more pronounced on Question 18, where the total answer was 3.2 and the response of just high school/GED responders was 3.6, four tenths in the direction of disagreement. Also I might have expected those who labeled themselves conservatives to have been been more

distrusting of art galleries (Question 16) and the radio (Question 21). But when only conservative answers were considered and averaged, however, the responses were both less critical of art galleries (3.04) and less worried about the effects of the radio (3.25).

Question 30 was a question I asked specifically because Columbus, Indiana has numerous examples of great architecture and public art. The question asked, “Which of the following statements best expresses your attitude toward the public art and architecture in the City of Columbus?” Chart 11 shows the results, a majority believing that art makes the city more livable.

Chart 11: Art and Architecture of Columbus



There were two questions that asked respondents to evaluate whether childhood or gender are seen as advantages when it comes to creative activity. Question 29 asks those surveyed to assess whether children or adults are more creative. The responses are in Chart 12 below. Well over half say that children win out in this area. However, it is interesting to compare these answers into Question 29 to answers in Question 7, where only 39.1% of those responding felt they had been more creative as children (see Chart 13 below).

Question 28 asks whether men or women are the more creative gender, or whether both are equal. Those results are in Chart 14 below, with equality being the answer of a large majority of total respondents. Men as the most creative comes in at 1%.

When the data is sorted by gender, only 16% of male respondents designate women as more creative than men, while 29% of female respondents designate women as more creative than men. The lone “men are more creative” response came from a male.

Chart 12: Creativity, Adults v. Children

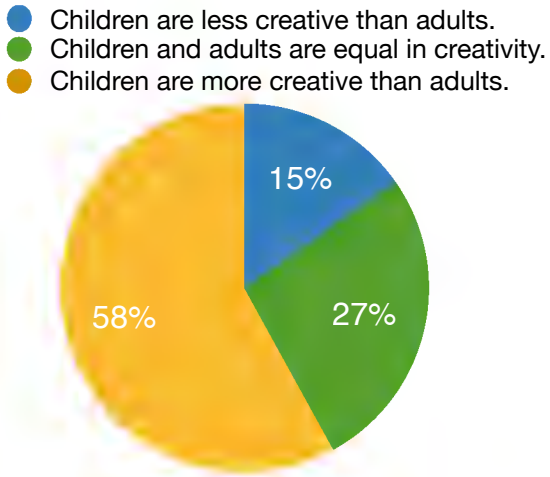


Chart 13: Self-assessed Development

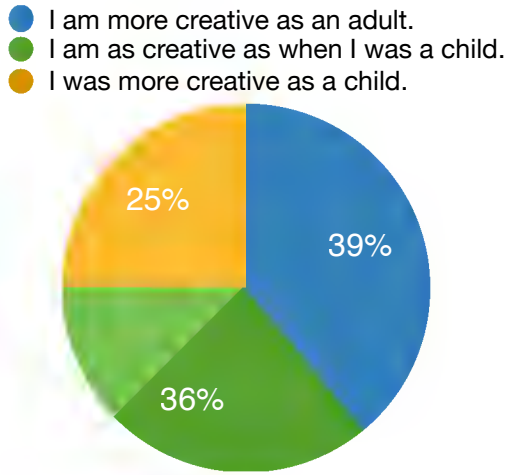
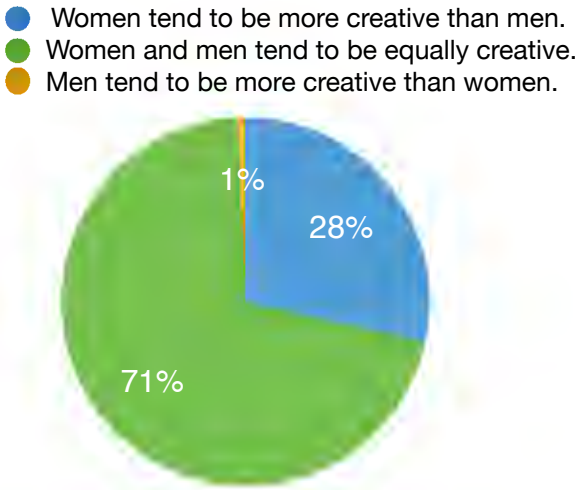


Chart 14: Creativity, Male v. Female



Church and Art. There are several questions that revolve around matters of art and the church, and six of them are of the scaled “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” variety. The average response numbers are presented in Chart 15 below. The answers, as a whole, tend to lean toward the disagreeable side of the scale. The average tipped toward the church not patronizing the arts in an active way and toward New Hope not doing a particularly good job in terms of recognizing the creative gifts of individuals. The average leaned toward being cautious when it came to experimentation in music and art. And pictures and images are not

devotionally important in the lives of many. The item that had the most negative average response was, surprisingly, that “Worship should be beautiful.” The average was the only one fully at the numerical average of “Disagree.” The average response also suggests by a few tenths that the church can promote art and music that is not clearly Christian.

Chart 15: Art and Church

Strongly Agree 1 - Agree 2 - Not Sure 3 - Disagree 4 - Strongly Disagree 5	Average
22. The church should be an active a patron of the arts.	3.31
23. New Hope Christian Church does a good job of recognizing and using peoples’ creative gifts?	3.65
24. Worship should be beautiful.	4.04
25. Churches should feel free to experiment with new kinds of art and music.	3.66
26. The church should only promote art and music that is clearly Christian.	3.44
27. Pictures and images are important to my spiritual life.	3.43

Question 33 asked those surveyed to rank the importance of various arts to worship on a three-choice scale. The averages are above in Chart 16, including the higher scoring of those 53 and under, who seem to rate the arts as slightly more vital to worship. Music, as might be expected, is considered highly important; in fact, it is unanimously necessary to worship for those under 53. The other arts generally are recognized as important, too, with only Dance/ Expressive Movement falling just under Somewhat Appropriate.

Chart 16: Elements of Art in Worship

Inappropriate 1 - Somewhat Appropriate 2 - Necessary 3	Total	53 & Under
Music	2.76	3.0
Poetry	2.25	2.4
Dance/Expressive Movement	1.9	2.09
Drama	2.17	2.36
Visual Art	2.4	2.47

Respondents seem open to the use of Powerpoint and screens in worship (see Chart 17). The data regarding art and devotional experience, based on Question 35, (see Chart 18 below) show that more than half of the respondents feel close to God in corporate worship, while reading devotional material, and while listening to music outside of worship. Less than one fourth of those surveyed feel close to God while looking at art, making art, reading poetry, or making a meal.

Chart 17: Powerpoints and Screens

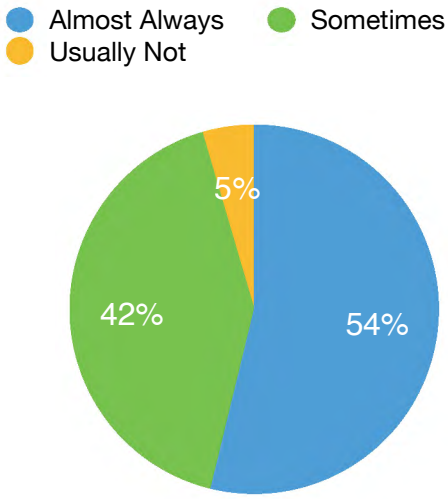


Chart 18: Art and Devotional Experience

35. On which of the following occasions have you felt close to God?	Affirmative Responses
While reading devotional material	113
While looking at art	33
During worship at church	119
While listening to music outside of corporate worship	82
While working at my job	34
While reading poetry	12
While making arts or crafts	16
During preparation of a meal	31

Some of the strongest responses came in Question 36, on movies. Over three-fourths of respondents either agree or strongly agree that Christians should avoid movies with vulgar language (see Chart 19) or graphic violence (see Chart 20). The answers concerning explicit sexuality (see Chart 21) were even more pronounced, as a full 88% of respondents believe

such movies should be avoided. (One gets the impression that New Hope does not keep the movie industry alive.)

Chart 19: Avoid Vulgar Language

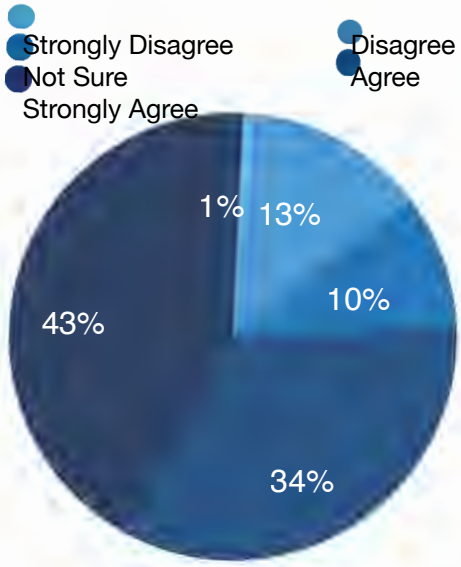


Chart 20: Avoid Graphic Violence

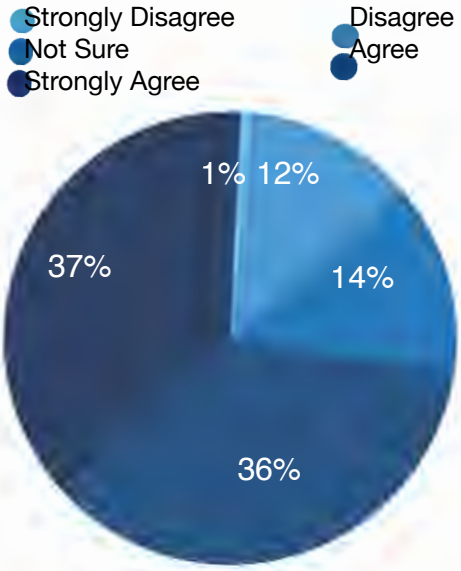
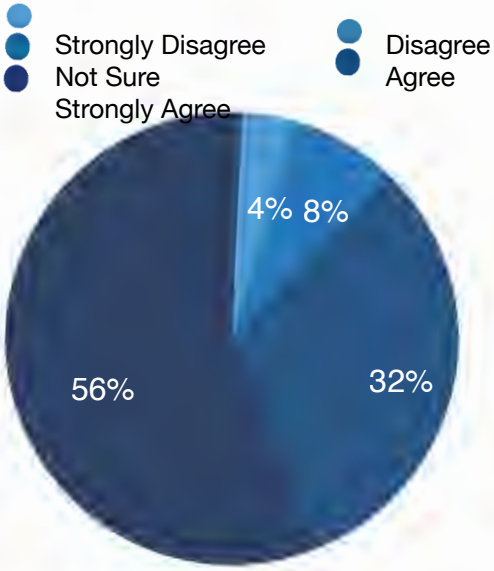


Chart 21: Avoid Explicit Sexuality



Conclusions. The findings of the survey were, for the most part, not unexpected to me. NHCC is a congregation whose worshipers tend to be older, nearly 50% of the respondents falling in the 54-72 age range. Women outnumber men. Education levels are somewhat above the average for Indiana. The vast majority of people at New Hope consider themselves conservative.

A wide variety of artistic interest are spread throughout the congregation, but it is clear that interest and participation leans toward what is usually called arts and crafts and less in the direction of fine arts. Woodworking and fabric art, for instance, have regular practitioners, while sculpture and poetry-writing are barely represented. Technology facilitates at least the dabbling in some arts. Nearly everyone takes photographs (cell phone, if nothing else) and listens to music (at least on the radio.) Regarding music, preferences are diverse, which is one reason why worship music is a constant topic of discussion at New Hope, and many other churches, for that matter. Most respondents read, nearly two thirds read magazines and/or newspapers, about a third read fiction novels, and a third non-fiction novels.

But it is fair, I think, to characterize New Hope as humble and modest in its approach to art. I would use the word “cautious” rather than “suspicious.” There seems to be both an appreciation what art brings to life (indicated, for example, by basic approval of Columbus’ architecture) and an awareness that art may pose a threat (see the movie charts, 19-21). Judging from Question 12 (Chart 9), respondents are fairly comfortable with their present level of engagement in art and craft. I do not think New Hope’s artistic modestly should come as a surprise. It is reflects the general conservatism of south-central Indiana, on the one hand, and also the spirit of practicality and simplicity that has dominated in many Christian Churches/ Churches of Christ like New Hope. That there would be disagreement toward the statement posed in Question 24 (Chart 15), “Worship should be beautiful,” suggests that aesthetic life is seen as having little bearing on truth. (The preacher at this church must not be very good!)

Although I anticipated much of what came in on the surveys, there were three findings that did surprise me, and these showed up in applying demographic filters to the data. I have

mentioned two: first, how those with high school/GED educations showed more confidence in relating to art than those with higher educations. Is art in some ways taught out of us? Secondly, I think I would have expected those who label themselves conservatives to have been been more distrusting of art galleries and worried about what kids hear on the radio. Their responses show them to be less critical of art galleries and less concerned about what people hear on the radio. I suspect New Hope's conservatism has a strong libertarian streak.

The most striking result of the survey, however, was actually a non-result. I continually sorted through the data to find significant generational differences. Almost invariably, the responses of the different age groups came back within a few percentage points of each other. Evidently there is a great deal of homogeneity at New Hope. What does it mean? On the positive side, it perhaps means that we tend to be on the same page and understand each other. On the worrisome side, what does this mean about our evangelistic practices? Why is there not more diverse opinion? Are we only allowing in those who fit in? Those kinds of questions will occupy my attention for a while, I suspect.

CHAPTER 4

A MAKER SEASON IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The public aspect of the project was a ten-week period of teaching and activity at New Hope Christian Church, during which the congregation was challenged to consider the significance of art and creativity in their lives. There were three major components to this part of the project: (1) a series of ten sermons exploring biblical themes related to the topic, (2) ten corresponding reflections shared by church members or, in a couple of cases, video presentation about particular church members and their creative work, and (3) eighteen special activities interspersed across the three-month span that offered opportunities to engage in various creative activities. This combination of teaching and activity was promoted as "a season in church life," as opposed to simply a sermon series, suggesting that it was about involvement as well as learning. The sermons and activities were collectively labeled, "Maker: Celebrating Creation."

Promotion of Maker began on August 26 and was continued primarily through Sunday morning announcements, congregational emailings, and updates on the church website. A calendar of Maker activities was added to the church website, as well as a direct link to that page—newhopemaker.com. The actual teaching and activity was launched on September 23 with this explanation before the sermon:

> Today we begin a new series of sermons and also what amounts to a special season in congregational life. Let's call the series and the season "Maker: Celebrating Creation."
>
> "Maker" you will probably immediately identify with God and "Creation" with the world that God made. And that is a good guess. It will be our starting point this morning. But the word "maker" in this case also includes you, because the Maker (capital M) makes you to make. God creates human beings with creative capacities. We are most human—and simultaneously most like God—when we exercise our creative gifts, when we are creators.

So for the next several weeks, we will spend some time reflecting theologically on creative acts—why it is we like to make things, why some of you take pride in your beautiful gardens, why some of you build, why some of you sing, why some of you play an instrument, why some of you draw and paint, why some of you like to work with words.

Along with the Sunday morning emphasis, there are multiple special events and activities during this season of church life that might help you exercise your creativity and explore the wonder of the world around you. They are listed in the handout. The activities and events are also easily accessible online at the New Hope website or at a hot, new, cleverly named link called newhopemaker.com. Events like New Hope's Got Talent, where you will be able, if you so choose, to make public your long-hidden ukulele skills. Activities like a City of Columbus Architectural Tour and/or tour of the Miller House and Gardens, which can maybe open your eyes to beautiful buildings and living spaces that have been right under your nose here in Columbus.

The series will be a lot about art and beauty. Autumn seems like the perfect season for that. Over the course of the next few weeks, leaves will take on shades of brown, gold, and red. Beautiful green tractors will be heard purring in the background and seen gracefully work their way through fields of tanned corn. The sun sets in sometimes amazing ways in the fall. And if you live far enough out of town, you might catch the scent of a burning leaf pile. So it is a good time for us to turn on all our senses and enjoy.

One of the weekly features of the series will be a Maker Moment, when one from among us shares a kind of making they like to engage in. We launch Maker Moment today with…

The following is a synopsis of those three primary components the series for the congregation: sermons, testimonials, and activities.

Maker Sermons

The first component of *Maker: Celebrating Creation* was the preparation and delivery of sermons. (1) The series of ten sermons grew out of preliminary readings, results from the initial congregational survey, theological reflection, and prayer. (2) I selected single word titles to represent what I believe are some of the most important intersections of theology and creativity. (3) Although I wanted each sermon to be a distinct piece, I also allowed for some repetition of theme and aimed more toward congregational usefulness than intellectual sophistication. (4) I aimed to give some attention to the Trinity.

Sermon One, September 23. *"Maker."* Although in my chapter on Theological Considerations I explore the possibility of a christological entry point to aesthetic theology, for the sermon series I chose to begin at the more traditional starting place, the account of creation in Genesis 1. The

primary text for this sermon was Genesis 1:1-8. I began the sermon by talking about driving by the hospital where I was born and how the circumstances of my birth was probably more determinative of me than I even recognize. Likewise, the Book of Genesis sets the basic parameters for the world and the rest of the biblical story. Not to be missed in Genesis 1 is the fact that, when we go back as far as we can conceivable go, we find featured this critical subject-predicate relationship: *God creates*. God is in the beginning, and God's first activity is "making."[146] As the biblical narrative unfolds, it will be revealed that God is good, holy, merciful, and faithful; but the initial revelation is simply of a God who makes stuff. I included verses 4-8 as sermon text in order to make two additional points in the sermon: (1) to show the first sequence of what is basically a liturgy of making that continues to the end of Genesis 1—"God speaks…it happens," and (2) to note God's positive evaluation of what has been made, that at every interval of creation, God makes what is arguably an aesthetic evaluation of the work done—"It is good." The sermon ended by reemphasizing the point that God is, first of all, Maker. At the end of the sermon I used Ephesians 2:10 to introduce humans as part of "God's workmanship"—or, better than "workmanship," God's "poem" (*poiema*), God's work of art.

Sermon Two, September 30: "Image." This second sermon took up where the first sermon left off, focusing on human creation. The sermon text was the single verse, Genesis 1:26, and the theme had to do with what it might mean to be "in the image and likeness" of God. I began by talking about how as children my brothers and I used to draw for hours at a time, often getting emotionally "drawn into" the scenes we were drawing. Why do we find joy in creative endeavor —drawing, painting, knitting, cooking, restoring cars or furniture, or writing poems or stories? Why do we often feel an attachment to what we have made? I noted how Psalm 104 portrays

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[146] As is widely recognized, I note in the sermon that the particular Hebrew word for "create" is one that is used exclusively for God in the Old Testament. Certainly God's creative work is unique (I touch on the notion of *ex nihilo*) but remain unconvinced (perhaps due to Berdyaev!) that it is a vital to downplay human creativity as somehow *less-than-really* creative.

the Maker as joyfully connected to what has been made. Perhaps we like to create things because we are in the image of God. I returned then to the focus of the first sermon—that the very first thing we know of God in Genesis is that God is a maker. Whereas the notion of *imago dei* has typically been worked out as suggesting that humans are rational, moral, or social, the more immediate connection in Genesis 1 might simply be that humans are, like God, creators. In this sermon I mentioned Berdyaev as an advocate of that view; his emphasis is that to be in the image of God is to have been given the gift of creativity, the freedom to bring about something new, the ability to make things different and better. That God invites, and even expects, creative participation in creation is suggested at least two ways in Genesis 2: (1) Humans are commissioned to "tend and keep" the garden (v. 10). (2) Humans are given freedom in language creation, the naming of the animals (vv. 19-20). Later, through Moses, God will turn loose Israel's craftspersons to build the tabernacle, an endeavor that involves both divine instruction and human creative action (Exodus 35:30-35). As a segue to Sermon Three, I ended by noting how the New Testament features the creative work of Jesus, labeled by Paul as the action of "new creation" (cf. Galatians 6:12-16, 2 Corinthians 5:14-19; also Ephesians 2:11-22, Ephesians 4:17-24, and Colossians 3:1-11), and the creative work of the church, which is to join Christ in ushering in new creation (Ephesians 2:10 again).

Sermon Three, October 7: "Restoration." The scriptural point of departure for this sermon was 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, with its focus on new creation coming in Christ; and supplemental texts are Isaiah 43:16-21, Colossians 1:15-17a, and Revelation 21:5. This sermon was preceded by the Maker Moment video of Ron McIntosh, a man in the congregation who has done considerable work restoring automobiles and motorcycles. The sermon began by reviewing titles commonly associated with Jesus, and then considered Vincent Van Gogh's suggestion that the title "Artist" is appropriate to Jesus. Christ "lived serenely as an artist greater

than all artists. Disdaining marble and clay and paint, working in living flesh, this extraordinary artist…made neither statues nor paintings nor even books [but] living men….” The sermon then highlighted Christ’s artistry in three ways: (1) In original creation, where Christ is present to the Father as Living Word through whom all things are created (John 1:1-3) and in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-17b). (2) In restoration and reconciliation (Colossians 1:19-20), where, like Ron, Christ brings order and beauty to what was broken. (3) In “new creation,” which might be regarded as something beyond restoration, a thing previously unseen. I refer to N. T. Wright’s analysis of John’s Gospel, that the Gospel not only highlights original creation in the Prologue but suggests in chapter 20 the dawn of new creation in Jesus’ resurrection, twice mentioning that the resurrection, as in Genesis creation, takes place “on the first day of the week” (John 20:1 and 19). I ended the sermon proposing that the 2011 New International Version’s translation of 2 Corinthians 5:17 is preferable to the 1984 version—not “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation” but “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation is come.” New creation is in Jesus.

Sermon Four, September 14: “Inspiration.” This sermon considered the work of the Holy Spirit and the notion of inspiration, which is a useful term in both theology and art. The guiding texts were Genesis 2: 4-7 and Acts 2:17-21. I highlighted the Spirit’s activity in six waves or manifestations: (1) the Spirit as the Hovering Wind of original creation (Ephrem the Syrian, Genesis 1:2, and Psalm 33:6; (2) the Spirit as the Breath of Life that animates humans (Genesis 2:4-7); (3) the Spirit as Divine Energy that propels Israel forward by enabling Joseph to interpret dreams (Genesis 41:38), Joseph and Daniel to lead their people (Numbers 27:18; Daniel 4:8; 5:11-14; 6:3), and Bezalel to organize and train Israel’s artisans (Exodus 31:3; 35:31); (4) the Spirit as the Force of Jesus’ life and ministry (Luke 4:18-19); (5) the Spirit as the Power of the resurrection (Romans 8:11); and (6) the Spirit as Outpouring on all flesh ((Acts 2:17-21, NIV,

quoting Joel 2). Toward the end of the sermon I suggested that the Spirit that hovered over chaos before God called for light, the Breath that blew life into clay, the Wind that propelled Israel's story, the Spirit that empowered Christ's work, the Breath that raised crucified Jesus—is upon all the church, giving us life, in-Spiriting our work, and filling us with creative and re-creative energy. I closed with a quote from Erwin McManus' *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art,* in which he takes Genesis 2:7 as a call to an artful kind of life:

> Our story begins with a kiss, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, God pressing against us. We begin when God exhales and we inhale. This the level of intimacy and synchronicity for which we were always intended. While all creation declares the glory of God, we humans bear the image of God. The more clearly we reflect the divine, the more we reflect that which is good and beautiful and true…. Imagine what the world would look like if all of us in our essence reflected this most extraordinary good, and everything we created was an extension of that beauty. I love the fact that the same Hebrew word that is translated as "good" is in other places simply translated as "beautiful." You are an artist. You were created with an artisan soul. The question is: What kind of art will you leave behind?[147]

Sermon Five, September 21: "Matter." The various ways that Spirit acts upon the physical world, as presented in Sermon Four, seemed to me to lead quite naturally to this sermon on matter, which used Galatians 6:11-18 and Mark 14:22-26 as leading texts. I opened the sermon by displaying a physical object that is of significance to me—a lavender dinner glass that I inherited from a grandmother. Although not particularly a thing of beauty, the glass means something to me. It is capable of transporting me to a different time and place, to her cozy little house in the woods of Morgan County and my many visits there. I then raised a question: Matter seems to matter, doesn't it? We all have material things in our lives that mean something—a ring on our finger, a geographical site that conjures up certain emotions, a piece of art that moves us. But we voice such attachments carefully because, by various means, we have been taught a sort of neo-Gnosticism that downplays materiality in favor of spirituality—transient evil matter on one side over against good spiritual things. (I pointed out that classical Christianity's

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[147] (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 23.

label for that kind of thinking was “heresy.”) The core of the sermon attempted to make the case for the body-spirit unity: (1) Genesis 2 has breath/wind going into matter (*adam,* ground), and the combination of the two is a living person (*nephesh*). (2) The final destiny of humans is not ghostly disembodiment but spiritual being in new and perfected bodies (1 Corinthians 15). (3) The biblical story between beginning and end is of Spirit regularly descending on matter. In this final point I drew heavily on Eugene Rogers’ book, *After the Spirit* (2005). In response to the widespread tendency to speak of the Holy Spirit as floating free of bodies, he points out how in scripture the spirit is typically connected to matter—to holy places, holy people, and holy things. The Spirit resides in the temple, works in Mary’ womb to form a baby, and is present at the waters of Jesus baptism where the Spirit descends onto his body. In Acts 2, the Spirit settles upon human bodies which, having been Spirit-filled, become the church, interestingly “the Body” of Christ. The most pure spirit we know—the Holy Spirit—works through bodies. The usefulness of this stream of reflection to the project at hand was to serve as a reminder that the Christian life is an embodied life. I finished the sermon by emphasizing how the physical things we do—the labor of our lives, the land with live on, the shelters we live in and their furnishings, the goods and art we create—all of this is “spiritually” significant. As the sermon was on this day followed by the Eucharist, I reminded the congregation that in the divine economy, water and wine become means of experiencing God.

Sermon Six, September 28: “Dance.” In this sermon, built up from Jeremiah 31:10-14 and Colossians 2:16-23, I asked the congregation to reflect upon dance, both as an actual activity and as a metaphor. Given the fact that a lot of congregants, especially older ones, had during their lifetimes heard prohibitions against dance, there was plenty of room for satirization. But then we considered plenty of appropriate contexts for dance, weddings for example. Also dance is one way that cultures are preserved. I proposed that both the good and bad of dance is

known to any adult that has chaperoned a Middle School sock hop. One moment you are thinking, “What a nice opportunity for these kids to get together.” And the next, “If that boy moves his hand one more inch, I’m going to break it for him.” There is bad dancing in the Bible —Israel around the golden calf (Exodus 32), the prophets of Baal around their pagan alter (1 Kings 18), and in the New Testament Herodias at the fateful royal feast (Mark 6). But dance is represented positively in the dance of Miriam (Exodus 15:20), the eyebrow-raising dance of David (2 Samuel 6:20), in the Psalms (Psalm 149:3 and 150:4), in a victory dance of Israel (1 Samuel 18:6 and 21:11), and when a prodigal son returns home (Luke 15:25). Dance seems to be a natural impulse, especially in moments of great joy. In the middle of exile, Jeremiah anticipates the time when women, as well as young and old men, will dance (Jeremiah 31:13). During the sermon I named several different categories of dancing and got congregants to raise their hands on what they had participate in, which was quite entertaining. The previous week’s sermon, which highlighted embodiment, was recalled. I confessed that I had through the years developed some appreciation for ballet. Dancing seems to honor the body-spirit unity as much as anything we do. Then, in the closing minutes of the sermon, I talked about what an interesting metaphor dance is for church. Worship typically has a dance-like quality. Even the most subdued congregation works its way through worship through orchestrated moves. And we act similarly in our service to the world, coordinating our work to best serve other. When we dance together well, we stand out on the dance floor, because the world around doesn’t know much how to move together. My invitation before our Hymn of Response was an odd one: Would you care to dance?

Sermon Seven, November 4: “Drama.” This sermon had as its primary scripture readings 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and Luke 15:11-32. I opened by reciting lines I learned forty years ago for a Milligan College performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. I talked about how theater sort

of snuck up on me during my college years and captured my imagination. I enjoyed being part of a cast, having the attention of an audience, and even experiencing the pressure of a performance. But probably most of all, I like a good story. The main transitions in the sermon were as follows: (1) We are our stories, ever-morphing and under the influence of other stories. (2) The Bible is a story, about 75% of it narrative and another 15% poetry. (3) Jesus seemed to have preferred to teach through parables (story). And finally (4) worship itself has a dramatic shape, particularly with regard to the Lord's Supper. Week after week, around a table, we reenact the story that aims to incorporate into it all of our stories.

Sermon Eight, November 11: "Icon." There are two preliminary notes to make on this sermon. First of all, it is in some ways thematically repeats Sermon Two; "Image" and "Icon" correspond etymologically. However, Sermon Two aimed to emphasize how humans are created like their Creator—to create. This sermon aimed to show how images bear spiritual weight. Secondly, for this sermon there were thirty crayon images posted on the modesty railing in the front of the sanctuary and on the front of the communion table depicting various "I am" statements in the Gospel of John. Those drawings had been created the previous Sunday during the Junior Worship hour by New Hope's children. Several of those young artists had also been to St. George Orthodox Christian Church the previous day and experienced that image-saturated worship environment and so had visions of icons in their heads.

The primary texts for the sermon were Colossians 1:15-10 and John 14:5-14. I began the sermon by highlighting what was obvious—the presence of the many pictures at the front of the church. I thanked the two art teachers who had guided the kids through that creative work. And I also used the occasion to talk about the children's "field trip" to the Orthodox Church, where they saw how visual representation plays a part in Orthodoxy. Iconography is theology, reflection on God through visual symbols rather than word symbols. The body of the teaching

flowed thusly: (1) I started with the high christology of Colossians which presents Jesus as the icon (*eikon*) of the invisible God (1:15), the one in whom "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (2:9). John 14 reinforces that notion that the visible Jesus perfectly presents the Father to the world (verses 9-10). (2) I then considered how the Orthodox (helpfully, I think) use the incarnation to explain the importance of visual representation. Because God became a material being in the incarnation, we can do the reverse and use matter to direct ourselves and others to God. During the visit to St. George, Father Nabil had explained to the children how Orthodox worshipers do not see themselves as worshiping icons (that would be a form of idolatry); rather the material icon is a window to eternity. I spent a few moments talking about the iconoclastic controversies of the 7th and 8th centuries and Reformation resistance to visual art in worship, noting though how Christians always seem to find a way to bring art back in the church. The impulse to represent faith visually seems too much to resist. (3) I closed the sermon with enlarged images of the children's pictures transitioning on the screen, pointing to it as good worship and hopefully giving encouragement for us to find ways to incorporate our religious art in worship.

Sermon Nine, November 18: "Beauty." The various readings during worship included Psalm 27:1-5, Philippians 4:4-9, and Revelation 21:15-21. The theme was the notion of beauty, obviously an impossibly complicated idea for one sermon but a notion that in Christianity has been consistently connected to God. My purpose in the sermon was not necessarily to define beauty but to maintain the connection. I began the sermon with Augustine's famous conversion quotation in the *Confessions*: "Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient."[148] I highlighted both Dionysius the Areopagite's notion of Beauty as a name for God and the medieval theologians who believed Beauty was one of the transcendental properties as similarly

[148] Augustine, Confressions 10, 27 in *Eerdman's Book of Christian Classics: A Treasury of Christian Writings Through the Centuries*, ed. Veronica Zundel (Eerdmans, 1985), 23.

connecting God and beauty. Secularity, in detaching God from world, takes away the classic divine reference point for beauty. From that sermon:

> For centuries the Christian culture which prevailed in the West at least had a common reference point for God. Specific examples of "what is beautiful" might be debated, and often were, but beauty had a reference point—God. We are not so clear on beauty today. Secular society takes away that reference point, or at least relegates God to the fringes. Without that traditional reference point, "what's beautiful" changes. At the individual level, it becomes a matter of taste—beauty, we say, is in the eye of the beholder. At the social level, beauty is often measured by commercial interests in capitalism (what sells) or reduced to propaganda in socialist systems (eg. Soviet worker's art). At the culture level, beauty may end up getting lost all together, as the frustrations of postmodernity are expressed in increasingly disintegrated and violent ways—the more brutal, the better.

The body of the sermon was simply a counter-cultural affirmation of beauty, based on the narrative flow of scripture. (1) There is beauty in the beginning (Genesis 1) where God repeatedly assesses creation as "good" (Hebrew *tov*, which suggests that something is "the way that it should be," and as cut at least a borderline aesthetic judgement) and the way glory and majesty are attributed to creation (Psalm 19:1-3). I noted the way that some physicists use aesthetic language in their work, describing the beauty a scientific principle or math equation.[149] (2) I noted then that there is a correspondingly beautiful conclusion to the canon of scripture (cf. the bejeweled city in Revelation 21:1-4 and the equally attractive pastoral vision of the next chapter, 22:1-5). (3) In between the ideal beauty portrayed at beginning and end is a story in which not everything is beautiful. The ugliness of the broken world culminates in the cross. But that horror is answered in the resurrection, which begins new creation. (4) The next turn in the sermon focused on N. T. Wright's view that the best art will be honest to both the present (fallen) world and the future (perfected) kingdom. To bypass present reality in favor of an anticipated future leads toward sentimentality; to focus entirely on the horrors of the present leads toward to despair.[150] (5) This sermon ended by affirming Wright—that art that is made by Christians and

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[149] Cf. Edward Davis, "The Motivated Belief of John Polkinghorne" (July 7, 2009), *First Things* online, accessed on April 1, 2019 at https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2009/07/the-motivated-belief-of-john-polkinghorne.

[150] N. T. Wright, "Apocalyptic and the Beauty of God," a sermon preached at Harvard memorial Church, October 22, 2006, accessed online at http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/03/30/apocalyptic-and-the-beauty-of-god/.

art that is received by Christians should be simultaneously honest to reality and hopeful of God's promises. I used the movie "Schindler's List" as an example of such art.

Sermon Ten, November 25: "Sphere." This sermon essentially followed Berdyaev in questioning the hegemony of science and reminding the church of the variety of ways of knowing. I began by dealing with a fairly commonly held notion that Christians have historically been "flat earthers," averse to good thinking and progress. But in fact, few educated Christians ever thought that. One the science textbooks used in medieval (Christian) universities was entitled *Sphere*. Although there are examples of the church thinking poorly, Christians have through the centuries taken the lead in education and the positive transformation of society. I then attempted to turn the table a little bit by suggesting that the ones who really flatten reality are those that reduce the world to matter. In contrast, faith opens us up to a universe that is spiritual as well as physical, a universe that is more than meets the eye, and one in which there is meaning. I then suggested that worship attests to "spherical" depth. The main sermon text was Colossians 3:15-17, where Paul says: "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (3:16). If what matters is just the data, then Paul might have said something like, "Let the message of Christ dwell in you rich by making sure you all study the informational brochure I put together for you." But the world is not mere matter, not mere machine. It is God's art and can be engaged musically. In Paul's admonitions, the church sings its way to life and understanding. I end by pointing out how the central act of Christian worship, the Lord's Supper, is not a purely rational moment information gathering but one where we come to know by touching, tasting, and experiencing the convergence between what is seen with what is not seen.

Maker Moments

One of the most significant pieces of the congregational experience was actually a last minute addition to the project. Just a couple of weeks before the Maker series launch, I began to wonder whether some of our artistically-minded individuals might be willing to share with the congregation concerning the arts they engage in, why they do it, and how it enriches their lives. When I ran the idea by a couple of potential speakers and they agreed to help, I decided to add it as a weekly component. I found ten willing presenters, one for each of the Sundays from September 23 to November 25; and I put quickly put together some basic guidelines for the talks. Each received the following suggestions:

Dear Maker:

Each week of our sermon series, *Maker: Celebrating Creation*, we will hear from one of New Hope's maker/creator/artists.

The activities will vary—cooking, painting, writing, building, etc.—suggesting the different ways that humans exercise creative gifts.

You have been solicited to present one of these testimonies. Although I want to allow for, well, creativity, I will offer some parameters for your presentation.

Keep it at about 3 1/2 to 4 minutes. Most people speak at a pace of about 120 words per minute. So if you write out what you want to say, you should aim for about 400 words.

If you will, please write it out. Not only will that help to bring your thoughts together, but I will also end up with a document for posterity.

You don't necessarily have to "read" it for your presentation. I would suggesting memorizing it enough to be able to speak conversationally to the congregation.

The testimony can start off, "I make food," or "I build houses," or "I paint."

After that, tell us a little bit about what goes in to doing what you make/do. Maybe how you got into it? How does it make you feel when you do it? (You don't have to cover everything; tell us what you think is most important.)

Especially share any theological insights you may have about your craft. Do you think of it as somehow honoring God? What kind of spiritual significance does it have to you? Do you feel close to God when you exercise your creativity?

When you present, relax as much as you can and talk slow—slow enough for people to hear the important words you have chosen.

Most of all, enjoy talking about the thing that brings you joy!

(Note: This document is 300 words long.)

Thanks for helping,
John

In announcements and print, these presentations were labeled “Maker Moments.” We ended up referring to these artists as “Makers,” as in, “Our featured Maker today is….” Those labels quickly became part of congregational vocabulary.

The following is summary notes on those presentations.

September 23, Culinary Art. Vicki is a wife and mother of three grown boys, a business woman during the week, and a much appreciated cook at New Hope. In her Maker Moment, she spoke of growing up in a family that cared for foster children, which taught her how to eat a large table. She primarily cooks now for her own husband and young adult children, all of whom appreciate her cooking. For three years Vicki also planned and cooked Wednesday evening fellowship meals for our congregation. In her testimony, she emphasized the joy not only of cooking but also of service. Her way to “be Jesus” to others is often through this kind of serving. As that Wednesday cycle of congregational life concluded, Vicki turned her attention to putting her recipes on paper. As she concluded, Vicki prayed that others would find “the ingredients to mastering the art of service.”

September 30, Guitar Building. Joe is a 50-something warehouse supervisor whose hobbies include music, wood-working, and electronics. Those passions came together in his building of a custom guitar, which he held in his hands as he talked through his Maker Moment. The guitar is named “Happy Cowboy, Serial # HC001.” It features a “horseshoe tailpiece, Indian head nickel in the headstock.” It is a semi-hollow body electric made of hand-selected woods. Its tuners and electronics are from the Les Paul Deluxe line. Much of his presentation focused on the process of creating something new. He talked especially about the roadblocks to invention. He said:

> “When [I’m] asked, ‘How do you build a guitar?’ I almost always answer, ‘Well, you find a tree….’ This answer gives me a chance to assess two questions: How much do you really want to know? And how much time do you have?”

The hardest part of the process for him was getting started, he confessed. There are so many questions and decisions. Finally, he imagined a simple line and began thinking of how everything worked off of that line. He wrapped up with an almost Platonic and mystic thought—one that Berdyaev might have agreed with—that there is an imaginable perfect line out there.

> All measurements that need to be made can be taken from this line. It can be put down on paper, inscribed onto wood, assigned to a straight edge, and still float around in my imagination. It was here before I was born, it will be here long after. It's in our streets, schools, furniture, houses, machinery, architecture, everything that is 'us,'—the line is there. The line I found is in everything created. It goes through you, it goes through me. If we stay true to this line, we can do anything.

I do not know exactly all that he meant. But it was interesting and had a bit of an artistic flair. (And he is my brother.)

October 7, Vehicle Restoration. Ron is a jack-of-all-trades who stays busy in retirement by working in his well-tooled garage and helping others with their mechanical problems. I visited that garage, did an audio interview with him, took some photos of what was in his shop, and edited that material into a Maker Moment video for Sunday worship. His work and insights corresponded well with the sermon emphasis for the October 7 sermon, which was the theme of restoration. Ron takes great pleasure in finding old and broken junk and either bringing it back to its original glory or sometimes turning it into something new and better. His was particularly animated as he talked about the two auto projects that were in his garage at the time—a 1962 2-door hardtop Impala and a 1947 Chevy sedan. One of his works of restoration happens to be on display at the church grounds. A few years ago Ron cleaned and painted on old, rusted water pump that was on the church property. It is at a side entrance of the main building, so many people walked by his work on their way to worship.

***October 14, Dance*.** Jana is a wife and mother to three young children. She is educated and certified as a Physicians Assistant but currently tends her children and teaches dance and

exercise classes. I will share the full text of her presentation because it is a good representation of the kinds of testimonials we heard and also because it demonstrates a good understanding for what the Maker series was aiming to do.

Good morning, everyone. Today I'm going to talk about my life as a dancer...and it has been pretty well my whole life. More than 3 decades.

The movie "Flashdance" came out the year I was born and some of you might remember the song "She's a Maniac" from that film. Well, I obviously didn't see the movie as a baby and I actually still have never seen it, but that song reached #1 on the charts and enjoyed some popularity for a while. And apparently, I loved to dance to it as a toddler...so much that my uncle even had a "Maniac" shirt made for me, personalized with my name. I don't know…it was the 80s.

So that maybe was my start as a dancer. As soon as I turned three, my parents put me in ballet classes and I happily continued throughout my childhood. At eleven, I began real classical ballet training, taking class six days a week and spending hours each week in rehearsals when we had an upcoming performance. I became a very gifted little dancer.

As a teenager, I spent all of my summers training at more prestigious ballet schools than my little hometown could offer like Boston Ballet and the world-renowned School of American Ballet in NYC. I was offered a job dancing professionally in a ballet company at eighteen, but my parents kindly nixed that idea and away I went to college. (An excellent decision in hindsight!)

I was a dance major in college for one year and then abruptly decided to change career paths and go into healthcare. I still loved dance but, by that point, I had gained enough maturity to know that it maybe wasn't the most practical choice of careers. And it's a tough job to have if you hope to start a family some day. So even though I didn't end up with a career in the dance world, it's stuck with me throughout my adult life too. Currently, I'm teaching six Zumba fitness classes every week (if you're not familiar, think: Latin music meets aerobics), and I'm so happy that I am able to keep ties with my passion while also being a wife and mom.

As a kid in dance class, I never realized the big impact this kind of training would have on my life. Most kids don't have that kind of long-term vision, right? But looking back now I so appreciate all the time and cringe-worthy amounts of money my parents put in to this type of education for me. It really shaped my life and left me:

Major discipline
Flexibility- a key to avoiding injury as we get older
A life-long passion for movement
A love of music with a great beat!
And probably lots of other lessons that I can't even articulate

Also, only more recently have I realized that this talent of mine is in reality a gift from God. There are so many amazing abilities that people have that I know I'm terrible at. Never ask me for decorating advice or to do anything remotely crafty! Or to speak in public! Thanks, John.

But I see now that God created our bodies for movement and dancing is the gift that He gave me. I feel very grateful that my kids can see me doing something I love as a job. I hope it will stick with them—that "Mama has fun when she exercises!" I think that is an excellent fitness legacy to pass on.

> Keeping my body moving and sharing my love of dance with others is the way that I am choosing to honor God's gift and to shine His light throughout my life. I am so thankful that God makes each of us A MAKER with our own individual gifts!

October 21, Creation in General. Bob, who is in his seventies, was excited enough about his presentation that he asked to violate the four minute time guideline, and I consented. Bob is a retired graphic design specialist whose additional creative activities have included working as a videographer for Christian missionaries, finishing a home-built aircraft, and writing a book about his father's contribution in World War II. Bob's main work in retirement has been as founder and Executive Director of Aviation Nation, a national after-school program that gives high school students the opportunity to build an airplane. Several experimental aircraft projects have been completed and are regularly flown, and several young fliers have earned their pilot's license in the airplane they helped build. Bob spoke of the satisfaction of creative endeavor. Concerning his book, he said: "As I reviewed it, I felt much like what God said about His first five days of creation, 'It was good.'" But he spent more of his time talking about how he has been privileged to watch young people grow through the exercise of their creative gifts:

> To me, it would seem that creativity is working from what you already know, and learning from what you are doing. It is a complete circle, always improving. It is never dull or boring. Creativity's end result must benefit both the creator, and those who take the time to appreciate the creation. While you may not totally understand the process or result from the beginning, the journey is never a waste of time.

He emphasized how students (1) learn discipline in their creative work, (2) discover how to work with imperfection, and (3) experience pride in what they had made. Bob suggested that, although the final material result of an Aviation Nation project is an airplane that flies, the more important thing that is built the students who grow through the exercise of their creative gifts.

> That is how I see creation. Whether it is taking food and making it better, or painting a landscape, or even painting the back porch, it is going beyond what is required, instilling something of yourself, learning from it, and making the project something that you, and

hopefully others, can be proud of and enjoy. Art and creativity is a very important part of what we do.[151]

***October 28, Writing*.** Donna is a single woman who teaches software at the local Community College. She was previously a columnist for a small town newspaper in southern Indiana, and she continues to exercise her writing talents in a blog that usually features stories from her family. When I discovered she kept up a blog, I asked her to talk about her writing. Her presentation was one of several that brought to light artistic gifts that were not know to most of the congregation. She did a good job of encouraging people in the congregation (1) to take note of all the different kinds of writing that they do in everyday life and (2) to become more intentional in writing things down. She also used the opportunity to invite people to the Writer/ Blogger Worship that was scheduled for December 5.

***November 4, Music*.** Karen was for many years New Hope's Worship Minister, and the area she focused on in her presentation was music. She began with the memory of watching her father sing a church choir: "As he sang—and looked like an angel to me in my childlike mind—I prayed that one day I could sing just like Daddy." Karen was blessed to grow up in "an elementary school, high school and college that all had outstanding music programs." In the 70s, as wife and mother, she began to sing in a church choir in Indianapolis. When her family moved to Columbus in the 80s, she joined the choir and in 1988 was asked to be Choir Director. Karen highlighted some of the musical memories afforded by that ministry and some of the events that helped her develop her skills as a musical leader. As she assessed her life in music, she remembered words she had heard from Gloria Gather:

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[151] After Bob's "sermon," I gave a personal endorsement for his work. When he founded the organization, he asked me to be its Chaplain, which usually amounts to be a van driver for special events. But his program would seem to support the theology proposed in my Maker project—that we were made to create and, in the process of creating, the world is changed for the better and those who exercise creativity change for the better. Many of the kids who have been in Bob's program a year or two have increased pride and confidence (as reported back by parents, teachers, and coaches).

> Music belongs to God. It is the universal language He uses to speak to the world. Everyone knows and understands it. It is God's language of the heart.

She concluded: “I sincerely thank Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior for answering my childhood prayer—to sing like my daddy—in ways I could have never imagined.”

November 11, Carpentry. I wanted to go beyond the narrower designation of arts (as in the Fine Arts tradition) and include more broadly crafts and construction. To that end, one of the things I decided to do was to create a video piece highlighting the work of one of the carpenters in our congregation. Marty is a 50-something member of New Hope. He is well-known within our church for being a very good builder. Several families have benefited from his work. I chose a video format for this presentation because I suspected that Marty would not be eager to get up in front of the church for a presentation. He happened to be part of the construction group adding two rooms off of the back of my house, so it was easy to get photographs. I wrote up a humorous but nice tribute to him as a skilled creator, and even produced a song for the video, “The Legend of Marty Cox.” It all went over well. Marty enjoyed it, fortunately. And I think it was helpful for the congregation to give attention to one of our quiet artists.

November 18, Needle Arts. This Maker Moment featured one of our only existing arts and crafts ministries, our Needle Arts Ministry, which has been in existence for eleven years. Two representatives of that ministry, Connie and Charolette, spoke about the work that had been done through the years. As they spoke, there was a video loop on the screen of samples of their work. The group makes various kinds of crafts to meet various kinds of needs: (1) baby wrappers, approximately 11” X 13” for newborns, (2) full-sized baby blankets for newborns, (3) small, bookmark-sized crosses for birthdays and extra encouragement, (4) chemo caps for people who are going through cancer treatment, (5) demise caps for stillborn babies at the hospital (provided for the local hospital), and (6) prayer shawls and lap throws given to those

who are shut-in or going through medical procedures of varying kinds. Those projects are typically distributed to people in need by needle arts craftspersons, accompanied by prayer. Well over half of those in attendance on that particular Sunday had benefited at some point from the work of the Needle Arts Ministry, and so were reminded of the value of those hand-created and prayed-over gifts.

November 25, Performance. Jacob is our regular worship leader on Sunday mornings and a frequent performer in basement concerts and coffee houses. His gift is singing and playing guitar. In his Marker Moment, Jacob focused mostly on human creativity—how God leaves room for us to make new things and how those creative activities bring satisfaction. He noted that one of the things that brings him the most joy is helping other people, especially young people, exercise their creative gifts. (On the platform in the worship band that morning were a couple of teenagers that he had incorporated into the team, so there was visible proof of what he was advocating.) He ended by suggesting that the church needs to be patient and have an open mind as people express and develop their creative gifts.

Summary Notes on the Maker Moments. My overall impression of these presentations is as follows: (1) The presenters had prepared and were enthusiastic in their public appearances. (2) I was happy with the diversity of arts and creative endeavors represented. (3) I was glad that most of the presentations, in one way or another, acknowledged the joy experienced whenever they exercised creativity. (4) My impression from informal feedback from a number of people in the congregation was that hearing from the creators in our fellowship was their favorite and most memorable part of the Maker series. (5) I will include as an interesting anecdote that a month after the series ended. I officiated a wedding at which the couple presented a macrame piece that they had worked on together as one of the unity symbols for their marriage and then described it to the congregation. As a part of that explanation, the bride said, “I guess this is our

Maker Moment," which seemed to be a good sign that the cycle of presentations had made an impression.

Maker Activities

The third element in the Maker season in congregational life was a series of eighteen special activities that were calendared during the sermon series (See Appendix 1, Calendar). These activities were developed based on my own ideas but then coupled with input from the Project Team, as well as suggestions from New Hope's ministerial/office staff. Some effort was made to offer a range of special events that would cover all age groups. There was also an attempt to give exposure to a variety of arts. Some of the opportunities involved observation and reflection, others were participatory.

The list of activities was made available in brochure form prior to the Maker series and stayed available at the website. Approaching events were included in the bulletin, in announcements during the worship service, and through New Hope's news/prayer emails. There was a registration area at the church building for the various events. The description for the Maker Activities on the website was as follows:

> From September 22 to December 9, New Hope will enjoy a season of church life during which we give special attention to creation—the work of the Creator but also the artistry of every human creator made in His image. In our worship we'll consider how creativity and art plays out in scripture. We'll honor some of the creative gifts within our congregation. We'll offer opportunities that connect people to art and events that challenge them to use their gifts.

This is a brief synopsis of each of those activities:

Youth Talent Night, September 22. This event was actually planned by the Associate Minister independent of my project. But when he informed me of it, it fit so well into the Maker emphasis that I invited myself in and coopted it as one of the Maker activities. A total of thirteen teens and sponsors attended the weeknight event. They had dinner and then a time of performance, which

included three individuals sharing piano solos, one joke-teller, a heavy metal guitar solo, a lip-sync to a rap song, and a rather lengthy making of an origami swan. Sprinkled in to the silliness were some budding talents that had never been shared in the church context.

Choreographed Movement (aka, Dance), October 21 and 28. How does does a fairly traditional midwestern congregation incorporate dance in worship? First, by labeling it "choreographed movement." And secondly, by bringing it through children. During Sunday morning Junior Worship on October 21, Jana (see the October 28 Maker Moment above) created and taught the kindergarten-grade six kids a dance routine to the music, "Every Move I Make." They next Sunday, October 28, eleven of those kids were brave enough to offer up their choreographed gift to God as a conclusion to the adult worship service. Their dance was immediately preceded by Jana's Maker Moment concerning the importance of movement and dance to her faith.

City of Columbus Architectural Tour, October 6. One of the aims of this project is to make the people of New Hope more conscious of the art that surrounds them. In Columbus, Indiana there is high quality architecture that tourists come to see but locals often ignore. I contacted the Visitor's Center and booked a 12-person, Saturday architectural tour. Ten people from New Hope signed up, only two of whom had ever done the tour. We filled the other two spots with a couple of tourists from Iowa, who happened to show up at the Visitor's Center and wanted a tour. It was good to have them with us, as they spoke glowingly of what Columbus residents sometimes take for granted. The two main buildings on the tour that day were First Christian Church (by Eliel Saarinen in 1942) and North Christian Church (by Eero Saarinen in 1964).

Thursday Night at the Movies—"Tender Mercies," November 1. For several years I have contemplated offering a film club at New Hope as a way of exploring the intersection of church

and culture. This Maker project inclined me to put the idea in motion. I scheduled three Thursday Night at the Movies events. For the first I chose the Award-winning 1983 movie, "Tender Mercies," starring Robert Duvall and Tess Harper. Seven people attended. A couple of general impressions of the night: (1) A slow-paced movie on a winter weeknight demands much from the audience, and (2) vulgar language in movies, which I hardly notice in the comfort of my living room, is in the church building is more noticeable. For a film club, I would likely figure in 30 minutes to an hour of discussion time after the movie; but given the fact that I was already asking two hours on a weeknight, I decided not to require more during the Maker series.

Kid's Trip to St. George Orthodox Church, November 3. One of the highlights of the fall was the friendship I was able to strike up with Father Nabil Hanna, pastor of St. George Orthodox Christian Church in Fishers, Indiana, an Antiochian Orthodox congregation. There were a couple of activities I hoped to arrange that would involve visits to an Eastern Orthodox Church; and when I explained what I hoped to accomplish, Fr. Nabil agreed to host. For one of those activities I arranged what amounted to a Saturday "field trip" for kindergarten through grade 6 children so that they might be exposed to the sensory-rich environment of an Orthodox place of worship. St. George Church was perfect destination for that experience. The congregation goes back to the mid-20s but their new worship center, styled after Hagia Sophia cathedral in Istanbul, was just completed in 2015. Paintings inside were designed by George Kordis and his team of iconographers. There were eight children and four adults who participated. The visit began with introductions and then a few minutes of free wandering around the sanctuary. Then Fr. Nabil had the group sit down and talked about some of the Bible stories represented. He explained some of the architectural features of the room and what it conveyed. The coup de gras was when he brought out the censor, loaded for us with very fragrant frankincense. The kids were mesmerized by the sights, sounds, and smells. We stopped for ice cream on the way

home and talked about the interesting things they had seen. One highlight for the kids was the "Jesus with abs" in the crucifixion scene.

Bringing Art To Worship, November 4. The day after the St. George trip we planned what amounted to a followup activity. During the Sunday morning Junior Worship hour, two public school art teachers, one retired and the other still teaching, assisted the children as they created their own worship art in crayon. The children were instructed to draw symbolic pictures based on one or more of Jesus' "I am" statements in the Gospel of John. Several of the kids had benefited from the previous day's trip and looked forward to decorating our sanctuary with their drawings. The thirty-three 8 1/2 X 11 drawings decorated the sanctuary the next week for the sermon entitled "Icon." As I concluded the sermon, there was a slideshow loop of the enlarged pictures on the the screen.

Culinary Teens, November 7. When the Associate Minister asked me to lead youth group one Wednesday when he was away, I decided to use the opportunity for the benefit of the Maker series. As most teenagers like to eat—especially like to eat Mexican food—I decided to offer an evening of culinary art, during which they would use multiple dishes of Mexican food and various garnishes in order to "design plates fit for the cover of *Bon Appetit*." The five sponsors and six teenagers took to that task eagerly, as well as to the subsequent job of eating. When parents came to pick up their kids, many were impressed that their offspring were capable of such art.

High School Performance of "You Can't Take It With You," November 9 and 10. One of our teenage boys had a lead role in this 1938 comedic play by George Kaufman and Moss Hart, which was performed at his school. Although we only counted about ten adults from New Hope who attended the play, the attention did (1) encouraged our student and (2) highlight an artistic

event in the community. Everyone who did make the effort to attend was rewarded with a very good experience and an exceptional performance by our student.

Saturday Vespers at St. George, November 17. During the Maker series, I made frequent references to Eastern Orthodoxy, and so wanted to include in the optional activities a visit to an Orthodox congregation. A Saturday vesper service seemed like a good opportunity to expose participants to both iconography and Orthodox worship. Once again, Father Nabil was gracious to host the full van of New Hope adults who participated. The service was memorable to participants, not least because they were unaccustomed to standing through an entire worship service. After the service, Father Nabil spent about 45 minutes talking to our group and answering questions. The Church, on the growing north side of Indianapolis, turns out to be a wonderful environment for those unfamiliar with Orthodoxy. (I suggested to Father Nabil [jokingly] that he had a very seeker sensitive church.)

The Prodigal Blues Project, November 24. Of all the special activities in the Maker series, this is the one I looked forward to the most. As a fan of the blues, I had the idea years ago of putting together a night of blues performances, based on the biblical story of The Prodigal Son. Anyone who knows even a basic catalogue of blues themes can see how that would be a good pairing. I invited in a couple of very good blues guitarists who are friends of New Hope, as well as several quality musicians that we have in the congregation, and together we arranged a ninety minute set based on the various moments in the parable. The youth area in the basement of our Family Life Center has a small, coffee house like stage, which was perfect for the show. Fifty-three people came out, enjoyed the show, drank coffee and ate snacks, and, when it was all done, gave it very good reviews.

***Tour of the Miller House and Gardens, November 27*.** One of the best examples of modern architecture in Columbus is the Miller House, which had been the home of industrialist, philanthropist, and first lay leader of the Ecumenical Movement, J. Irwin Miller. Miller and his wife, Xenia, commissioned the home in 1953, and they lived there until his death in 2004. The house is now in the care of the Newfields (Indianapolis Art Museum) and features the work of Eero Saarinen (architect), Alexander Girard (interior design), and Dan Kiley (landscape architect). A good friend of the New Hope congregation is the site manager for the home. When I inquired about a tour, he offered us a complimentary private tour. We took our tour group of a dozen people, and there were several names on the waiting list. Only two in the group had previously toured the home, and all enjoyed it.

***Thursday Night at the Movies—"Columbus," November 27*.** The second Thursday Night at the Movies was on a Tuesday, due to a scheduling conflict. The feature was the award-winning independent film, "Columbus," which featured the architecture of our town as a backdrop for a story of a young professional dealing with his architect father's failing health and a young woman's coming of age. It is a dialogue-rich movies that plays off of scenery that is familiar to anyone living in Columbus, and it highlights a major theme of this project—What does art have to do with our lives? Nine people attended. About half of them gave the movie a thumbs up; the other half thought the Columbus setting made it tolerable.

***The Nutcracker Ballet, November 30*.** I wanted to add a ballet or opera option to the list of Maker activities and decided that Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker would be the most accessible for those who had never risked attending a ballet. I initially purchased sixteen tickets for Butler University's performance at Clowe's Hall, and those were quickly claimed. We ended up getting nine more tickets, for a total group of twenty-five, five of them children. Only ten of the attenders

had previously been to a full ballet production. Everyone was pleased by it and, I think, would try it again.

Writer/Blogger Workshop, December 5. On this Wednesday evening, Donna, a New Hope member who had given one of the Maker Moments, led a workshop to talk about writing and blogging. She keeps up a blog with entries that primarily have to do with her ancestry and family stories. During the workshop she talked about what writing means to her, how she goes about it, and the various types of writing one can engage in. There were eight people at her session, ranging from high school to retirement age. Included in the group were people who like to write poetry, people who were wondering how to start preserving their family stories, and one young man who was collecting ideas for how to write about his business experiences.

Thursday Night at the Movies—"It's a Wonderful Life," December 6. This movie was obviously selected with the holidays in mind. I thought it would be a good one for both adults and kids. The results are easy to report, as it was a very cold, icy evening and only my wife and I attended. We enjoyed it nevertheless. Due to a tightening end-of-year calendar, I did not reschedule it.

Cookie Decorating and Distribution, December 8. This was a combination culinary and service event. On this Saturday, a group of kindergarten through grade six kids came to church at noon, spent an hour decorating cookies, then distributed them to senior citizens and shut-ins. A total of twelve kids and sponsors participated. The cookies were tasty, the icing art adequate.

Presentation—"What Does St. Petersburg Have To Do With Columbus?" December 9. I felt like I owed to whomever wanted it a more thorough explanation of why New Hope had be used as guinea pigs in my Doctor of Ministry project. So during the Sunday school hour on this day, I offered an optional meeting on what I was trying to discern and accomplish in the project.

Surprisingly, two Sunday school groups canceled in order to be present, and a total of thirty-one people attended. I talked about art, Berdyaev, Orthodoxy, and the special activities of the project, which a number of them had participated in. They were fairly enthusiastic about all that had taken place. One of the helpful recommendations that came out of that session was that there should be a short follow-up survey so that the congregation could share its evaluation.

New Hope's Got Talent, December 9. The final of the Maker Activities was a talent show involving New Hope artists of all kinds, held on a Sunday evening in theVenue (the coffee house gathering place in the basement of our Family Life Center). There was a signup sheet out for three months prior to the event, and the week before there were only two talents signed up. But by the time the show started, there were seventeen acts and presentations for the fifty-five people in attendance. The presenters included teenagers through senior citizens. There were seven pieces of music performed; one was an original piece. Our craftspeople presented their works of blown and stained glass, baskets, clay, and Christmas crafts. One wood-worker talked about his hobby of making musical instruments and showed a dulcimer and acoustic guitar he had built. Another man makes custom walking sticks and canes, and he presented several examples of his work. There were about a dozen oil paintings on display, shared by three different painters in the congregation. All of the artisans and most of the musicians spoke briefly about their art, what went into it and what the process of making or performing means to them.

Concluding Thoughts on Maker Activities. (1) Total attendance for all events was 313. (2) There were multiple event options for all age groups and participation by all age groups. (3) Although I did not track attendance by name, by my best estimates the nineteen different activities involved at least 125 different individuals. (4) Even those who were not able to participate were likely influenced to think about church and arts by virtue of the advertisement of

these activities, the reports of those who participated, and the references in worship and intra-church correspondence to events that had or were taking place.

Congregational Evaluation of the Maker Series

In February 2019, the New Hope Congregation was given the opportunity to react to the Maker Series through a short, four-response Final Survey. The idea had been suggested at the December 9 "What Does St. Petersburg Have To Do with Columbus?" session. I did not intend it as one of my primary tools of research but believed that it might prove helpful to get some general reactions to our our focus on art and creativity.

The Shape of the Survey. The half-page questionnaire was made available as an insert to the Sunday morning bulletin on February 10. It was mentioned once during our Sunday morning worship question but was not otherwise promoted. The congregation had already been very generous in its response to the Preliminary Survey. On Sunday, February 17 the surveys were still available but were not inserted in the bulletin. This is that survey:

FINAL SURVEY FOR MAKER SERIES

During the ten weeks between September 23 - November 25, 2018, New Hope had a season in church life focused on art and creativity called, "Maker: Celebrating Creation." If you were present for any of those Sundays or activities, please complete the following survey. You may drop it in the offering plate, bring it to the office, or even leave it in your pew.

1. The teaching/sermon portion of the Maker series was meaningful to me.

   ___strongly disagree ___disagree somewhat ___agree somewhat ___strongly agree

2. I benefited from the New Hope artists who shared during the Maker Moments on Sunday mornings.

   ___strongly disagree ___disagree somewhat ___agree somewhat ___strongly agree

3. I was able to participate in one or more of the special activities associated with the Maker series.

   ___Yes ___No

4. We should continue to find ways to incorporate into the life of our congregation people's creative gifts.

   ___strongly disagree ___disagree somewhat ___agree somewhat ___strongly agree

If you have any comments or criticisms about the Maker series, or anything new that you learned, or any ideas for the future, please feel free to express those on the back of this survey.

Findings. The response was modest but helpful, at least to the degree that it coincided with my general impression of how the Maker Series had gone. There were forty-nine returned, and all were completed properly—that is, there were no unclear markings or responses. It ended up that the respondents were evenly divided on yes-no question number 3—*I was able to participate in one or more of the special activities associated with the Maker series*. Twenty-four had been involved in at least one of the special activities and twenty-five had not. There was no discernible difference in how the two groups responded to the other three items.

In assessing those surveys, I applied a numeric status for the three items (1, 2, and 3) which called for responses of degree. I quantified the four available responses (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") in terms of 1-4. The averages were as follows:

- Responses to question 1—*The teaching/sermon portion of the Maker series was meaningful to me*—averaged out to 3.33, between "somewhat agree" and "strongly agree."
- Responses to question 2—*I benefited from the New Hope artists who shared during the Maker Moments on Sunday mornings*—averaged out, similarly, to 3.27.
- The most positive response was to question 4—*We should continue to find ways to incorporate into the life of our congregation people's creative gifts*—which was a full tenth of a point higher than 1 and 2.

The survey shows that respondents seemed to benefit from the teaching aspect of the project. On the back of one survey was a written comment: "I/we loved being reminded of Imago Dei!" The favorable responses to question 4 likely had in view the Maker Moments, when various artists of New Hope spoke during worship about the importance of art to their lives. One survey was returned with a note at the bottom that said: "It was a great way to learn more about the people we worship with every week." The results suggest that there was overall receptiveness to our sustained period of attention to creativity in general and the arts in particular.

There were some data that I did not expect. I fully expected some "somewhat disagree" responses, since not everyone is enthusiastic about art. But I was surprised to see a few responses of "strongly disagree." There were four such responses to questions 1 and 2, and

there were three to question 4. Those seemed a little bit uncharacteristic of New Hope and not entirely consistent to how I think the Maker series was received, enough so that I am inclined to mention a couple of qualifying bits of information. (1) Two people commented afterwards that I had violated the expected order on surveys, saying that the “strongly agree” usually comes first. One of those had filled out the entire survey with quick checkmarks in the left column but realized, before turning it in, that they had represented the opposite of what they intended to say. (2) The Maker series also happened to coincide with a period of discussion at NHCC on the matter of female roles in our congregation, the leadership pushing toward a more open view. I cannot confirm it as such, but it is not inconceivable that the strongly negative assessments in a few of the critiques was more a criticism of the pastor whose project this is.

CHAPTER 5

A FINAL EXERCISE IN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

This chapter summarizes a concluding exercise to the project—research based in the method of Appreciative Inquiry (hereafter Ai).[152] Anyone who has been involved in organizational or board development the past couple of decades will likely have been through some kind of group-building exercise following the Ai model. Ai assumes that the very kinds of questions asked within a community are instrumental in shaping conversation and determining how a community develops. Therefore, in contrast to models of inquiry that are deficit-based (that is, what is going wrong here?), Ai focuses on what is perceived as going well in an organization and then seeks to learn from and build upon that success.

Ai has many practitioners and versions, but it is regularly divided into stages that I will simplify here as: (1) Inquiry into positive moments. That inquiry primarily seeks stories, because stories are more likely to spark imagination than yes or no answers, or data that can be reduces on charts or graphs. (2) Consideration of the forces behind those positive experiences. What was going on in that moment of positive experience? What were the social dynamics that helped bring about the good moment? What personal qualities were used in bringing about that life-giving experience. (3) A positively-imagined future based on those experiences. In this imaginative step, individuals and/or groups are asked to consider their good experiences—as well as the conditions that they perceived vital to bringing about those experiences—in order to

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[152] The origins of Appreciative Inquiry is usually traced to a 1987 article, D. L. Cooperrider and S. Srivastva, "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life," *Research in Organizational Change and Development, Vol. 1,* edited by R. Woodman and R. Pasmore (Stamford: JAI Press, 1987), 129–169. A more recent book is B. J. Mohr and J. M. Watkins, *The Essentials of Appreciative Inquiry: A Roadmap for Creating Positive Futures (*Waltham: Pegasus Communications, 2002). There are also many websites and online articles devoted to Appreciative Inquiry.

move their organization or group in a good direction. This step takes a hopeful view toward the question, What's next?

Interview Format. As a concluding exercise and also a way to create some next steps for after the project, I decided to conduct interviews—basically on the Ai model—with those on my aforementioned Project Team, all of whom are recognized at NHCC for their various creative gifts. I originally imagined conducting the interview in a focus group type of setting, but then recognized I would get more and better information in eight individual interviews. A group interview, of course, would have allowed the group to build on each other's responses. However, in a group setting some individuals would likely have been more silent. In a group setting I would likely have gotten and an hour and half of response, with the more outgoing doing most of the talking. From the individual interviews, I ended up with nearly five hours of recorded response, and every individual had to help carry the conversation.

The interviews were conducted in April 2019. This was three months after the end of the Maker Series, which, I felt, brought it a little bit out from under the series' cloud of influence. Interviewees were offered their choice of venue for the interview. One took place at a coffee shop, three happened in the the homes of individuals, and four took place at NHCC. The interviews varied in length from 21 minutes to 53 minutes. The total time of the recorded sessions was four hours and 45 minutes. I should also mention that I originally anticipated including the recorded interviews in the digital index; however, I quickly realized that there were too many privacy issues at stake for publication.

I also decided that giving the interviewees a preview of the questions would not comprise what I sought from them but could, in fact, encourage additional reflection. So I sent out with my invitation to the interview, a summary of the questions I would pose. Additionally, I created a more extensive outline of some followup questions for me to have in hand for the interviews. The more detailed outline that I used is in the Appendix. The letter of invitation and basic questions is reproduced here:

Dear Project Team Member,

I would be eternally in your debt if, either today, tomorrow (Thursday), or Friday, I could sit with you individually for an interview of approximately 30 minutes. That could happen any time at all in that range, whatever is convenient for you. I've cleared my schedule to do that. And it can happen anywhere—your home, the church building, a coffee shop…you name it.

It will be an interview about your personal experiences regarding art, craft, and creativity; so there is no wrong answer; and it will likely even be encouraging! I will even provide the basic questions I will be asking.

(1) In the last year, what kinds of arts and crafts you have been involved in—either as an active participant or an observer/spectator/audience?

(2) If you would, can you share a little summary of your creative autobiography? What arts and creative endeavors you've been involved in over the course of your life.

(3) The interests of most of us are, at least partially shaped, by people who inspire us. Can you name two or three people who were particularly important in the development of your creative gifts?

(4) Can you describe an episode in your life when you accomplished some creative or artistic feat and were proud of your accomplishment?

(5) Since God, who is Creator, created the church, we should probably be able to identify, examples of, God's creative influence. Can you name a church experience that struck you as being particularly creative or artistic?

(6) When have you seen the church (any church) doing something that stands out that you would describe as "beautiful"? What did that look like?

(7) If you had unlimited resources (money, personnel, environment, venue) to create an event, program, or practice for the church to encourage the artistic gifts of other people, what might that look like?

(8) If you could help create a beautiful worship service (either hands-on or just input), what would you aim for?

If you have a half hour available block of time, day or evening, let me know. And I'll make it work.

Thank you,
John M. Sichting

Responses. Here I provide brief per-question summaries of the responses to the eight questions.

In Question 1, the interviewees get to name the various arts and crafts they have engaged in the past year, as well as artistic events and activities that have been included on

their calendars. A wide ranged of creative activities were reported: visual art of several kinds, including digitized art; photo collages; sculpture and pottery; paper art; poetry and writing, including blogging; dance, ranging from ballet to Zumba to line-dancing; basket-making; needle arts of all kinds; and glasswork, including stained glass, blown glass, and glass fusion; and music, both instrumental and as a listening interest. Most of these artists had multiple interests, but three spoke of having little skill outside their particular area of interest. But all appreciated the art of others. Most took time to cultivate their interest in the arts, attending shows, musical performances, and museums. Two mentioned using travel as a means of enjoying art, taking in theaters or museums where they went. Not surprisingly, those who have grandchildren tend to be drawn to their artistic interests.

Question 2 seeks autobiography—how did creative interest develop? As might be expected, the stories vary. For some, the story is told in terms of early personal awareness—the dancer who could not stop dancing at age three, the 5-year old boy who watched his aunt draw on a chalkboard and wanted to be able to do that, or the girl who grew up hearing music played in the home and wanted to learn. For a couple of people, the turn toward art came as a result of failure in another area. Most grew up in environments where they had at least a couple of significant artists or craftsperson to watch. Although individual stories are different, each has in common that there was one or more encourager in the picture, offering positive example.

Question 3 has to do with inspirational people. For this question, the response converge to a significant degree. Everyone could identify by name individuals in their lives who were critical to the development of their craft or art. In almost every case, there was mention of one or more family members. That family member did not necessarily have to be artistically talented; it was enough that they were encouraging. In most interviews, teachers and instructors were important, too. The way that influence had worked varied between interviews; some had benefited from hands-on guidance, others primarily through observing their mentor. The other type of influential person mentioned was “friends.” Although a few of the eight interviewees tended to do their work in private, a majority did much of their creative activity in

the company of others. Despite all these differences, the influential persons identified were in case given the same qualities—encouraging, patient, non-judgmental, and accessible.

Question 4 asked about a particular time when the interviewee had experienced a great sense of accomplishment with their art or craft. A dancer remembers receiving special recognition at a Boston Ballet summer camp when she was 15. A newspaper writer's editor entered her series of articles in a statewide news contest, and she won. One person received a national art award during high school, which opened his eyes to what became a career in art education. Others remember experiences of self-accomplishment. Our stained glass maker has a Santa head that he is especially proud of. One woman remembered her satisfaction in high school drama, where despite her nervousness she finished well. The lone high school student on the Project Team recalled a moment during a recent New Hope's Got Talent night (part of the Maker series), when she played the piano and sang a song she had written. Our needles arts expert thought of the knitted vest she made for her late husband. On the other hand, one of New Hope's artist/poets described what is perhaps a common feeling among creative people—he does not like to look back at anything he has done, because he always sees a better way of doing it. But experiences of satisfaction and accomplishment figure significantly into most stories.

Question Five has to do with church experiences that struck the observer as especially creative or artistic. Three people pointed to musical experiences, times when they had been inspired either by congregational music or a musical performance during worship. A dance instructor remembered being involved in a fine arts VBS when she was in high school, and she felt that event helped spiritually validate her craft. The stained glass artist reported how he is regularly drawn to New Hope's early 20th century stained glass window of Jesus in the Old Chapel, and how that piece of art always touches him. When a retired art teacher was asked if he could remember a time when he experienced a creative moment in church, he said, "No, I can't." He laughed, but went on to talk about how felt creativity and excellence have sometimes gotten played down in our churches (Christian Churches/Churches of Christ). He

went on to talk about George H. Bush's funeral, which he saw on TV. He enjoyed its choreography, pageantry, and sense of reverence.

Question 6 was probably a poorly asked question and certainly too similar to the previous question. It asks whether the interviewee can really a beautiful moment in church. I think creative experience and beautiful moment end up being indistinguishable in an interview setting. But there were a few new ideas offered. The experience of a baptism struck on person as an emotional experience of beauty. One remembered a mission trip presentation. One person remembered a presentation of dramatic moment by New Hope youth that had been set to music. Finally, there were two more funeral experiences described as beautiful, one made so by the music and the other by the visual presentation of the coffin.

Question 7 is of the "What would you do if you could?" type, seeking ways to encourage creativity, art and craft in the church. The question came, of course, a few months after the Maker Series, when there was experimentation with several kinds of activities. Some of the ideas suggested in the interview were a book club, more reference to art in the sermon, occasional art and craft opportunities, cooking classes, occasional displays of the work of New Hope artists, and art and craft fairs. One person suggested that there could be concerts and lectures on other days than Sunday that invited in the public.

Question 8 asked to imagine creating a beautiful service on unlimited resources. What would the interviewee do? Every single person in the interview highlighted, above all, that the service they created would center on music. One person said, "Uplifting music—that's the start." Although there were somewhat different answers as to the preferred style of music, everyone thought it should be widely representative. Responses also seemed to strike a balance between genuineness and excellence—the music should be properly executed but not showy. There were also concerns about the peripheral activities associated with worship—announcements, moments of confusion, and talk and activities that do not contribute to actual worship. Furthermore, when asked about the physical worship environment, most had fairly specific visions. Most found comfort in tradition; none of these artistic people hoped for

multipurpose space. Some envisioned candles. Choir robes would be fine with her, said one young women. One man who has traveled often said his ideal worship place would be like one of the simpler Catholic churches in Europe, “hard stone floors worn with age, stucco white walls, large hand-hewn support beams, light filtering through the stained glass, bronze candlesticks…simple wooden benches.”

Findings and a To-do List. I am confident that this cycle of research yields data that is potentially appreciative in our congregational context. If our church wishes to encourage the creative gifts that God has placed within our fellowship—even if in some cases as a seed that has not even germinated—we should recognize and attend to the following findings: (1) That development of creative gifts is fueled largely through encouragement. The eight artist-craftspersons surveyed all cite encouragement, recognition, and understanding as important in the personal story. Everyone heard, “You do that well,” or “You did a good job,” or “You should pursue art.” In several cases, a decisive turning point was an award or special recognition. But in each case, there was some kind of environment of support that could be found. So what are the ways we can be more encouraging to our artists? (2) Encouragement seems to have come not generically but through specific individuals and smaller associations of people. All of the eight identified individuals by name, and some expanded the circle of encouragement to likeminded friends. So, how does the church raise up out of a fellowship that is open and encouraging, specific individuals or smaller groups of people who will be the “point persons” of encouragement for our artists?

I have not answered by own questions. But this research does take New Hope to the final and most important stage of Ai, the point where we mutually design and begin to implement a healthy future. Since interviews were conducted on an individual basis, there has not yet been much dialogue yet, except between the participants and me. But a post-project step is already is taking shape. The last few weeks there has been conversation at New Hope about restoring what used to exist a few years ago—a Worship Ministry or Worship Team. That group, made up of worship leaders and members of the congregation who were interested in

how we worship, ceased meeting a few years ago. But it recently has come to elder/leadership attention how that might be a good thing again. When relaunched, however, it will be done as a Worship-Fine Arts Team, in order to continue some of what was begun in the Maker Series. When it does begin, this exercise in Ai has provided some valuable talking point from which to begin:

First, it is clear how vital music is to worship. The emphasis on music was unanimous among those interviewed, and I suspect it would be nearly so with the rest of the congregation. As a leadership we have recently tried to avoid conversations on music, since they so easily become controversial. The research here inclines me to think it should regularly be in our conversations but always redirected toward positive experiences. If we understand what the other person gets out of musical worship, we will probably work toward appreciating what they enjoy.

Secondly, there are things to learn from observant types of people, and that is what artists tend to be. They notice environment, ambiance, movements, visual cues. When the Worship-Fine Arts Team meets, it will be good to think about some of the "clutter" of worship—when and how we do announcements, how we prayer time, how we handle transitions. It is fascination that during the interviews, there were three separate references to funeral experiences, all of them positive. Among at least these artistically-minded individuals there seems to be a desire for pageantry, or at least a desire for more reverence. We should think about that. Our fear of ending up some kind of production is probably unwarranted. I can hardly imagine that our worship will ever reach the point where people think it is over-produced.

Thirdly, we need to build more positive conversations at New Hope. The emphasis of Ai is finding those encouraging stories that we can build upon and ride into the future. One of the things that became obvious during the interviews had to do with how easy it is for people to be drawn back toward complaint and the things that need to be fixed. That happened every now and then in the interviews. At times, even the interviewer was drawn in and joined the criticism.

I have learned in the process that there are a couple of skills that I need to improve: (1) Listening without talking. For some reason, I think I have things to say. Often I do not. (2) I need to learn to create positive conversations more regularly.

Finally, and with regard to the previous point, I think another next step for me is to visit some of the groups within the church, and some individuals as well, in order to strike up some "What's going well now?" conversations. I think that some of what I have gleaned from the Ai experience can be applied more broadly.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Although I have already used up too many words, I will add a few more here at the end.

This has been an enjoyable exercise, particularly the philosophical and theological sections. I think I will always prefer thinking about something to actually doing it. I have been able to revisit Russian studies and relearn things I should never have forgotten. It was good to consider again the story of late 19th and early 20th century Russia and all that was going on then. I had never read Berdyaev at length, so it was good to do that. There is such a vitality, an energy in *The Meaning of the Creative Act*. Berdyaev, for me, is equal parts inspiration and exasperation. At many points I cannot make sense of him. But I do think that he does a good job of pushing any 21st century person out of their comfort zone. I think one of the things Berdyaev has done for me is awaken neo-platonic nerve endings that I never knew I had. I have always been uncomfortable about the idea of worlds behind the world. But Berdyaev helps one imagine that there are worlds we are not seeing even as we look. One of the silly outcomes of my time with Berdyaev is that during Spring Break in Florida, I sat and watched all the Harry Potter movies with my grandchildren. And enjoyed them! I have since then found myself more comfortable with science fiction and fantasy. Although there will be no ouija board on my Christmas list, I am more open to talking openly of mystery. I also look forward to reading more in this area, now at a more leisurely pace.

It was also good to spend some time doing theology, thinking through the Trinity about art and creativity. Theology is a kind of art, I think. We think in patterns and my putting three categories under each Person of the Trinity was probably more an artistic move than a necessary one. But it worked for me. The theological section allowed me to appropriate some theologians whose works I had known before, like Jon Levinson and Eugene Rogers. It brought me to to some patristic texts that I was aware of, but did not know in any detail. In the process

I also got introduced to books I had not read, like Rowan Williams' *Christ the Heart of Creation* and Andrew Louth's *Modern Orthodox Thinkers*, the latter of which will become my go-to resource for brushing up on Russian thinkers. I also became somewhat familiar with the work of Paul Gavrilyuk, who has excellent insights on the Russian Religious Renaissance. For New Testament insights, I was able to lean on N. T. Wright. I knew who John Goldingay was, but for this project actually read him for the first time.

One of the surprises of this study is that I found convergences between interests of mine that I did not realize were present and currently being explored. Eastern Orthodoxy has always been a fascination. Radical Orthodoxy has intrigued me, too. During the project I bumped into cooperative efforts exploring the points of connection between the two. *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy*[153] alternates articles and commentary between people like Andrew Louth and John Milbank. It did not bear directly enough on the project to read, but it is in the queue.

But the practical part—what is *supposed to be* my vocation—was enjoyable too. The preliminary survey went rather well and afforded me both with expected and unexpected results. After 28 years, New Hope is simultaneously familiar family and confusing mystery. The Maker Series was a very busy 3-month span of teaching and activity that went well and showed things we need to keep doing. The ten sermons seemed like they were accepted; people have thrown back at me things I said during the series. Probably the most effective piece of the project was the Maker Moment, which gave our artists a chance to talk about their particular passion for creativity. New Hope must continue to find way to honor the gifts and talents of our artists and craftspersons. With should built times into our fellowship that allow people to share what they like to make. Likewise, we have to continue finding ways to enjoy art together, whether that be by going to performances, visiting churches or museums, are talking together about a book. We need to remember that the Creator built us to create.

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[153] *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, edited by Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (London: Routledge, 2009).

APPENDIX 1: CALENDAR OF PROJECT ACTIVITY

2018

May	Project Approval
June	After the Fact Acceptance into Milligan/Emmanuel
May - August	Reading, Compiling, Planning
September 10	Distribution of Preliminary Survey
September 22	Maker Activity: Youth Talent Night (Teenagers)
September 23	Launch Maker Series
September 23	Sermon: “Maker”
September 23	Maker Moment: Culinary Art
September 30	Sermon: “Image”
September 30	Maker Moment: Guitar Building
October 6	Activity: City of Columbus Architectural Tour
October 7	Sermon: “Restoration"
October 7	Maker Moment: Vehicle Restoration
October 14	Sermon: “Inspiration”
October 14	Maker Moment: Dance
October 21	Sermon: “Matter”
October 21	Maker Moment: Creativity in General
October 21 & 28	Activity: Choreographed Movement/Dance for Worship (Children)
October 28	Sermon: “Dance”
October 28	Maker Moment: Writing

November 1	Activity: Thursday Night at the Movies, “Tender Mercies”
November 3	Activity: Children’s Trip to St. George Orthodox Church
November 4	Sermon: “Drama”
November 4	Maker Moment: Music
November 4 & 11	Activity: Children Bring Art to Worship
November 7	Activity: Culinary Teens
November 9 & 10	Activity: Local High School Performance: “You Can’t Take It with You”
November 11	Sermon: “Icon”
November 11	Maker Moment: Carpentry
November 17	Activity: Vespers at St. George Orthodox Church
November 18	Sermon: “Beauty"
November 18	Maker Moment: Needle Arts
November 24	Activity: Prodigal Blues Project
November 25	Sermon: “Sphere”
November 25	Maker Moment: Performance
November 27	Activity: Tour of the Irwin Miller Home
November 27	Activity: Thursday Night at the Movies, “Columbus”
November 30	Activity: Nutcracker Ballet at Clowes Hall
December 5	Activity: Writer/Blogger Workshop
December 6	Activity: Thursday Night at the Movies, “It’s a Wonderful Life”
December 8	Activity: Children’s Cookie Decorating and Distribution
December 9	Activity: Presentation of Overview of Project to Congregation

December 9	Activity: New Hope's Got Talent
2019	
January - March	Project Writing
February 10	Congregational Evaluation of Maker Series
April	Final Exercise in Appreciative Inquiry
May 8	Stand Before My Makers or Breakers

APPENDIX 2: PRELIMINARY CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

1. Age:
___ 73 & over
___ 54-72
___ 38-53
___ 18-37
___ High School
___ Junior High

2. Gender:
___ Male
___ Female

3. Education:
___ High School/GED
___ Some College/Vocational Training
___ College Bachelor's Degree
___ Master's Degree or Higher
___ None of the Above

4. Which of the following best describes your political views?
___ Conservative
___ Moderate
___ Progressive

5. Which of the following you have done in the past year:
___ attended a concert/opera
___ been to a movie theater
___ gone dancing
___ made a work of art or a craft
___ attended a ballet
___ played a musical instrument
___ purchased music
___ read a novel
___ taken a photograph
___ read poetry
___ been to a school play or concert
___ visited an art museum or gallery
___ listened to radio music
___ written poetry

6. In comparison to others, I think I am
___ less creative than average.
___ of average creativity.
___ more creative than average.

7. Overall I think I am
___ less creative than I was as a child.
___ of about the same creativity as when I was as a child.
___ more creative than I was as a child.

8. What visual arts do you engage in?
___ Painting
___ Sculpture
___ Pottery
___ Photography
___ Fabric Arts (Sewing, Needlepoint, etc.)
___ Woodworking
___ Jewelry-Making
___ Stained Glass
___ None of the above

9. What do you regularly read? (Check all that apply)
___ Newspapers/Magazines
___ Books, Fiction
___ Books, Non-Fiction
___ Plays
___ Short Stories
___ Poetry
___ I do not read often.

10. What types of movies do you enjoy seeing? (Check all that apply)
___ Comedies
___ Drama
___ Action
___ Horror
___ Science Fiction
___ I rarely watch movies.

11. What styles of music do you listen to at home or in the car? (Check all that apply.)
___ Rock/Pop
___ Hip Hop/Rap
___ Folk
___ Classical
___ Country
___ Jazz
___ I rarely listen to music.

12. I wish I had more time to engage in arts and crafts.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

13. I like to do things my way, even if it means breaking the rules.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

14. I grew up in a home that considered the arts important.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

15. I often get my best ideas when daydreaming or doing nothing in particular.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

16. I do not like it when things are uncertain and unpredictable.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

17. Much of what is labeled art is nonsense.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

18. I feel like I don't really understand a lot of what is called "art."
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

19. I feel like a lot of art in public galleries dishonors God.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

20. Art, literature, and music are vital for having a meaningful life.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

21. Most of the music I hear on the radio these days is harmful to our young people.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

22. The church should be an active a patron of the arts.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

23. New Hope does a good job of recognizing and using peoples' creative gifts?
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

24. Worship should be beautiful.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

25. Churches should feel free to experiment with new kinds of art and music.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

26. The church should only promote art and music that is clearly Christian.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

27. Pictures and images are important to my spiritual life.
___ Strongly Agree ___ Agree ___ Not Sure ___ Disagree ___ Strongly Disagree

28. I think that
___ women tend to be more creative than men.
___ women and men tend to be equally creative.
___ men tend to be more creative than women.

29. Generally speaking, I think children tend to be
___ less creative than adults.
___ equal in creativity to adults.
___ more creative than adults.

30. Which of the following statement best expresses your attitude toward the public art and architecture in the City of Columbus. (Check best answer in the list.)
___ It's mostly a waste of money.
___ I don't really notice it or have an opinion.
___ I think it makes our city more livable.

31. Which of the following brings you more joy (check one):
___ Creating or inventing something new and original.
___ Making or reproducing something that I know how to do well.

32. How much do you admire people in each of the following vocations. Rank them from 1 to 10 with 1 being the most admired.
___ musician
___ artist
___ clergy
___ school teacher
___ nurse
___ engineer
___ writer
___ attorney
___ politician
___ scientist

33. In the following list, circle a number in each line that describes how appropriate each art is to Christian worship:

	Generally Inappropriate	Sometimes Appropriate	Usually Appropriate
Music	1	2	3
Poetry	1	2	3
Dance/Expressive Movement	1	2	3
Drama	1	2	3
Visual Art	1	2	3

34. Do you think visual displays, PowerPoints, and screens are helpful to worship?
___ Almost Always ___ Sometimes ___ Usually Not

35. On which of the following occasions have you felt close to God. (Check all that apply.)
___ while reading devotional material
___ while looking at art
___ during musical worship at church
___ while listening to music outside of corporate worship
___ while working at my job
___ while reading poetry
___ while making arts or crafts
___ during preparation of a meal

36. Christians should avoid most books, music, and movies that have…

Vulgar Language	Graphic Violence	Explicit Sexual Content
___ Strongly Agree	___ Strongly Agree	___ Strongly Agree
___ Agree	___ Agree	___ Agree
___ Not Sure	___ Not Sure	___ Not Sure
___ Disagree	___ Disagree	___ Disagree
___ Strongly Disagree	___ Strongly Agree	___ Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX 3: SURVEY COVER LETTER

September 8, 2018

Dear New Hope Friend,

Please find enclosed a fairly brief survey that I ask you to complete and return within the next few days. It is part of a project that will help me complete my Doctor of Ministry Degree. While your anonymous input will obviously be of benefit to me, but I think it will be useful to New Hope and other congregations too.

I have tried to keep the process as painless as possible. The survey will only take about 15 minutes to complete. And I include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. So all you have to do is get it back in the mail.

I will share some of the results over the course of the next few weeks and months.

Thank you so much for your consideration.

Your friend,

John M. Sichting

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEWERS SET OF QUESTIONS FOR APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY EXERCISE

1. First, can you tell me what kinds of arts and crafts you have been involved in, say, the last year—either as an active participant or an observer/spectator/audience?
    1.1. Hands on creation of arts or crafts?
    1.2. "Taking in" art? (Museum trip, concert, performance, architectural tour.)

2. If you would, can you share a little summary of your creative autobiography? What arts and creative endeavors you've been involved in over the course of your life?
    2.1. When you remember first being draw to creative activity?
    2.2. What were activities you were drawn to as a kid?
    2.3. How creative activity has waxed and waned—particularly "waxed," periods of energetic and creativity. Did creativity (in those energetic periods) seem to increase because of something you did, or just sort of "come at you"? Which leads to…
    2.4. Would you describe creativity in your life as more built or more a a surprise?

3. I want to talk for a moment or two about personal influences. I'm guessing the interests of most of us are, at least partially shaped, by people who inspire us. Can you name two or three people who were particularly important in the development of your creative gifts?
    3.1. What did they do to inspire you?
    3.2. Were there particular personality qualities that made them an inspiration?
    3.3. Did they assert their influence on you (that is, take an interest in you and attend to you), as a role model you could observe, or both?

4. Can you describe an episode in your life—I won't take it as bragging—when you accomplished some creative or artistic feat and were proud of your accomplishment?

5. I'll preface the next question with a theological statement—the God who is Creator created the church. So we should probably be able to identify, even a church like ours (Christian Church/Churches of Christ), God's creative influence.
    5.1. Can you name a church experience that struck you as being particularly creative or artistic? What was the situation? What did it look like? What moved you or spoke to you?
    5.2. Can you highlight a personal creation or act that you experienced as worship…that was spiritually meaningful to you?

6. When have you seen the church (any church and any situation in your range of personal experiences) doing something that stands out that you would describe as "beautiful"? What did that look like?
    6.1. To what extent had that experience/event been shaped/organized and to what degree did it "just happen"?
    6.2. Were you an "actor" in that experience?
    6.3. If not, are they any such (church) creative experiences that you have "acted" in and felt blessed by?

7. Let's say you were given unlimited resources (money, personnel, environment, venue) for creating a beautiful worship service—what would it look like?

8. Based on what you've experienced in life, if you create an event, program, or practice for the church to encourage the artistic gifts of other people, what might that look like?

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