

Art is Christian's necessity and joy

A good friend of mine, Dr. Walt Hern, who is the Poetry Rejection Editor of Radix Magazine said something that really shook me up. He said, "Those uninterested in poetry on earth will have to take a crash course on it in heaven."

Walt is right because we will sing songs in heaven. And if the Bible gives us any clues about those songs, then we know that they will rhyme. I guess this means that poets and song writers are important after all.

I have always felt in my heart that they were, but I know there have been times when I made the mistake of thinking that songsters and bards were a luxury, not a necessity. But the longer I live and the more that I study people and their history, I know that's not a good mistake to make, because the poets and music makers are keepers of our souls.

How is this so? It is because they help us and sometimes force us to feel in our hearts as much as we think in our heads about great reality and funny possibility. They do it with the art of form, line, sound and shape. It might be an outlandish song about "Puff the Magic Dragon", or the crystal clear prose of simple speech at the dedication of a cemetery at Gettysburg. In both of these, we who listen encounter the art of a song and the art of words.

The importance of all human art for the Christian and the Christian's understanding of the world is therefore a given necessity and a joy at the same moment. This means that we, as Christians, should always try to understand the vision and portrayals of every generation's art. We must also seek to share our faith, our love and our hope that has its origins in the grace of God by, in and through the art of each generation.



From Your Minister
by Earl F. Palmer

It seems to me that there are three distinct visions in art, and the greatest of art is that which contains the most insightful and the most beautiful portrayals of these three visions.

First, there is a vision of *creation* itself that is the beginning and most primeval mark of man, woman, the artist. The oldest art known to the world is found in limestone

caves in France, and the ancient artist who sketched these drawings of deer delighted in the elegant form and playful dance of creation itself.

Man, woman, as artist interprets the created world that is our home. We do this by melody, poem, line and clay. We see this vision of creation in Rembrandt's "Anatomy Lesson," in Ferde Grofe's haunting sunrise sounds of "Grand Canyon Suite," in Robert Frost's poem about a forest filling up with snow. In each instance the artist is portraying the world of God's creation with obvious delight.

The second vision in art is the shadow theme that journeys alongside this first drawing of the exuberant or quiet deer in the cave. The second vision is of the *crises of life*; it is the sense of the tragic unravelling of the created oneness so that there is a shattering of image and a distortion of line. The poet

tells of this as often as he or she tells of the beauty of life.

Poetry tells this tragic and ominous story and the songs terrify us. We feel an uneasiness when we read T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" or E.E. Cummings' "Humanity i Love you". We feel the complicated human tragedy in Chavert's "Stars" in "Les Miserables," or in Woody Allen's film, "Crimes and Misdemeanors." These artistic portrayals tell us of despair and loss of hope by a world hurt and broken.

The third vision for the Christian artist is rooted in the *grace of God* toward all who live the human story. This is the remarkable encounter of Sonia and Raskolnikov in Dostoyevski's "Crime and Punishment"; it is G.F. Handel's "Worthy Is the Lamb" chorale in "Messiah"; it is David's Psalm 51, and Jean Valjean's song, "Who Am I?" in "Les Miserables."

We, as Christians, need to listen to and watch the art of our generation, some of which can only portray the celebration of the earth, some of which can only portray the bleak landscapes of anger and brokenness, some of which seeks to portray the surprise of redemption and love.

We know, because of the gospel, the reality of each vision. For this very good reason, I believe our art is enabled to have a full richness of depth and context. We have one more vision that is not our doing and it is the best of all. It is the vision that invites us to celebrate the surprise of love when we discover the character of God who is the Creator of the whole, who comes to us in the dark valley of the crises of our bad choices and who finds us by his grace.

A Christian has a profound challenge to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and that challenge is personal, it is public and it is artistic, too.