

Arts and the Liturgy: With Countless Gifts of Love

Mark P. Bangert

"With Countless Gifts of Love:" like a mantra these words flow through our lives. At some point we begin to realize that the countless "gifts of love" are primarily people, and one such person, Herbert Lindemann, we are all privileged to acknowledge these days.

In this context it is obvious that "countless gifts" also designate those many creations we call works of art. We come by that appellation easily, because for most of us our own inventories of favorite works of art are derived from personal love affairs with them, and because theologically we have been taught by Martin Luther to embrace music, at least, but surely all of the artistic media as *dona dei*, gifts of God, bestowed, we confess, out of love.

At that point our happy consensus may begin to break apart, for when we begin to press questions about which arts or what genres go together with liturgy, or about what percentage of the Church budget should be moved from the desks for multi-cultural ministries to investment in the arts, ecclesiastical umpires seek refuge from our disagreements and our press for decision. Persisting entanglements regarding the arts in the Church have led to *this* rather frank analytical observation from two American writers: "Art is not really necessary to Christian salvation at all. The Church can get along without art."¹ We all know Christian brothers and sisters who subscribe to that operating credo.

The situation is complicated by the nearly unlimited accessibility to the arts in our culture. Aesthetic experiences--whatever they are--are so plentiful that one

1. Frank and Dorothy Getlein, as quoted in Edward Robinson, *The Language of Mystery* (London: SCM Press, 1985) 59.

needs to work at the guilt which arises from apathy towards the panoply of opportunities. My neighbor confessed his artistic sin a few days back by admitting to greater joy over the sound of his new CD player than over the Mozart it played. Our technology and wealth infects us with a practiced avoidance of artistic depth, or with what Edward Robinson has called Acquired Immunity to Mystery Syndrome.²

How do we who love the arts respond? With restlessness, to be sure. We watch helplessly as ecclesiastical fiscal engineers--long ago trained to categorize the arts as alternatives to tennis and volleyball or as tolerable tokens of culture irrelevant to the work place--trim off the fat of mystery from the Church's life. Artists fear for their lives, as well as for the world of art they believe essential to the welfare of us all! No wonder they band together, as church musicians have recently done, admirably to explore together the sinews of their profession, though often being forced to look more and more like trade unions.

Years ago I set out to find or develop that single linkage between music and liturgy which would compel both musician and pastor, artist and theologian, to subscribe to their inextricable partnership. Permit me to give you a progress report: I'm still looking: not that there aren't some warm contenders.

Were it not for my recent African experience I would have urged upon you a reconsideration of music and art as *creaturae dei*, (creatures of God)--part of the creation as Luther said--whose conservation should be guarded by the Church with the same vigor it employs to campaign against styrofoam cups, in order to conserve the ozone layer.

Or I would commend to you the insights which derive from viewing liturgy, music, and all the arts from the posture of the cultural anthropologist, specifically through the lens of structuralists, those who press us to

2. *Ibid.* 81.

discover meaning in the interrelationship of parts, and in how things happen.

Or I would make a case for the inseparable bonds between the components of ritual and the arts, bonds which have been observed, supported, and fostered by the anthropological and philosophical studies of people like Suzanne Langer and Carl Kerényi.³

Or I might have urged us to examine the relationships between some current Church art and the ancient practice of rhetoric. We might discover that we are "being had" by artists who are interested only in propaganda. Church artists are intent on persuasion these days, be it through moralistic anthem texts or banners with slogans. Such works depart from efforts at lifting the arts as doorways through which we are pushed to mystery, which is one of the things liturgy is about.

Finally, it would be tempting to explore with theologians and artists a possible mutual ground for discussion. Something like that appears to be evolving from a convergence of fresh mappings of the artistic spirit and life. Writing from within the Matthew Fox school of spirituality, Cynthia Serjak has recently argued for a new recognition of the bondings between music and cosmology. She invites Christians into new discoveries of the spiritual dimensions of the cosmos through music.⁴ Another recent book, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth*, written by Joscelyn Godwin, professor of music at Colgate University, challenges us to discover and rethink the interrelatedness of all things through music, a tenet held at least as early as

3. Some of this work has been done by Edward Foley, *Music in Ritual: A Pre-theological Investigation* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1984).

4. Cynthia Serjak, *Music and the Cosmic Dance* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1987) 147-169.

Boethius (d. 524), and at the core of treatises on music through the Reformation.⁵ Set that into the context of the long-term popularity of Stephen Hawking's book, *A Brief History of Time*, in which he concludes that it is only a matter of time before we will be presented with a unified theory of the universe: "Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of why it is that we and the universe exist."⁶ It's intriguing to ask whether Boethius and Hawking and Serjak have something in common, and whether the key is music.

But then came Africa, that is, my own twelve-week visit during which I sought to discover the uniqueness of traditional African music and art. The project surfaced two insights concerning African art which I offer today as two more linkages between art in general and the liturgy. The first might be titled "Gifts without Strings," by which I mean that works of art are essentially self-contained body and soul entitles set for engagement. The second bears the heading, "Thank we all . . . with hearts, voices, hands, etc.," by which I mean to examine the significance of the process of creating art. Following that you will hear how one might particularize these linkages born from a third world experience.

Gifts Without Strings

For my wife Kristi and me Tanzania in East Africa was home for a quarter of a year. We were embraced by the faculty, staff, and students at Lutheran Theological College, Makumira, a magnet seminary for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Excursions into nearby and distant villages and to other of the church's educational facilities broadened our experience. One such safari took

5. Joscelyn Godwin, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1987).

6. Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988) 175.

us to Ruhija Evangelical Academy set on the bluffs overlooking the western shore of Lake Victoria near the city of Bukoba. Ruhija is actually a mini-university, combining a school for evangelists with a school for traditional African art and a school for church music. The entire surrounding area is home for Tanzanians from the Haya kingdom which in pre-colonial days extended into modern-day Uganda and Zaire.

It was at Ruhija that we were introduced to the drum and one people's inextricable involvement with it. Knowing that true African hospitality means engagement at every level, we were not surprised to be directed on our second day there to participate in a class drum lesson for the church musicians. Thirty drums and drummers, both of all sizes. My drum was so small, I received it by hand. Kristi had to straddle hers. Inside both was what appeared to be a loose piece of wood. Could this be a deficient instrument for the visitor, I asked myself, madly trying to follow the rhythms of our master drummer? Afterwards it became clear: like other drums across Africa, my drum contained a small knot tied from cowhide string, the identifying trademark of its maker, who later explained further to me that the knot *is* the soul of the drum. For the Haya it truly is.

Later that same day, as Kristi and I walked through the lush, nearby *shambas* (family gardens), Wilson Niwagila, the principal of the school, unraveled for us some of the deep bonds between the Haya people and their drums. There was a time, Wilson explained, when only the King had drums, and they were sounded before and while he spoke as chief warrior and spiritual leader. Years later only certain drums, or special-size drums, were assigned that special task. In the minds of the people these sacred drums became identified with the King himself. Soon the ritual custodian and musician stored them in a special hut where they, like the King, would be protected and accorded special honor. Even when these drums weren't played, the people reckoned them to be soul and body entities worthy of care, for they were thought to be equivalent to the King.

This kind of orientation is in the bones and sinews of the Haya people. In 1971 ethnomusicologist Klaus Wachsmann observed similar attachments to the drum among Roman Catholics at the Cathedral in Nnameremba in modern Uganda. One church drum announced its opening in 1892; by 1908 there were six drums for that purpose, and by 1971 all of them were housed in a special hut.⁷ Among Haya Lutherans in Bukoba, drums announce the beginning of all festival services at the Cathedral in Bukoba. In the sanctuary itself hang altar and lectern paraments embroidered with cross *and* drum, inviting these Haya people to hear Christ in the drums. Who knows whether the Haya also honor the Spirit of Christ encased in the body of the drum?

Is the drum art? Or is it a membranophone whose art issues in sound? Africans are much more inclined to welcome the drum itself as art; they in fact build them at Ruhija's School of traditional African art. To ask the question another way, do soul and body come together here? Is the drum form and its sound the real substance? Does the work of art refer to something external to the work? Is that "something" best and ultimately presented through cognitive and verbal means?

According to John Cook, director of Yale's Institute of Sacred Music, some theologians have tended to respond to queries such as these by assigning the arts a penultimate role on the way to comprehension. For instance, Cook faults Jacques Maritain because he thought art works are tools for revelation, pointing beyond themselves, thus providing another way of looking at the real world. According to this view art serves simply as means to some other end. Paul Tillich, in spite of his high view of

7. Klaus P. Wachsmann, "Musical Instruments in Kigandu Tradition and Their Place in the East African Scene," *Essays on Music and History in Africa*, ed. Klaus P. Wachsmann (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971) 101.

art, also held that art assists us by offering clues about a predetermined view of the world and God.⁸ It can be thought of as dispensable once insight is gained. Africans would find this to be incomprehensible.

In Africa, meanwhile, the souls of the drums kept rattling. Their seeming independent, self-contained life served as a kind of artistic parallel to other examples of African art, we discovered later. For instance, in West Africa this personalized attention to art surrounds the *Ibeji* twins, not-quite identical wooden carvings valued by the Yoruba people. The twins take on a life of their own being, housed, dressed, and in certain instances provided with nourishment.

Is this general African understanding of art unique? My own reflections during warm Tanzanian afternoons without telephone and meetings may coincide with your own. I have always been tempted to approach works of art as living entities. My experiences with instrumental music nudge me to such enthusiasm. There is a kind of soul/body unity presented in Bach's "Prelude and Fugue in G Major," for instance, which for me points nowhere, it simply *is*. Same composer (only accidentally because the example pertains this time of the year) for a vocal example: the Bach "St. John Passion" *presents* an experience of the Passion which is possible no other way. It appears to be a living soul/body entity which covets interaction, *my* interaction. If it is a means to anything or anybody, it participates in the mystery we know as our Lord Jesus Christ who, St. Paul tells us in Colossians, is mysteriously central to the work of art in another way for he, that is Jesus, *is* "before all things and in him all things hold together."⁹ If this sounds like an elevation of the

8. John Cook, "The Arts in Theological Education for the Church," *Theological Education* XXV/I (Autumn, 1988) 23-24.

9. Colossians 1:17.

arts to things sacramental, I don't apologize, for Lutherans have always been a bit reckless about such matters.¹⁰ Nevertheless it is probably wise to keep the sacramental issue at bay even though it's edifying to allow oneself to be teased by it on occasion.

Whether or not the G-Major Prelude and Fugue share something in common with the Haya drum, on the other hand, is a question given considerable clarity through an interpretative approach to African art proposed by Robert Plant Armstrong. He has sought to understand Yoruba art in its cultural setting, and offers a way to apprehend all art in a way which is tantalizingly resonant with experience.

He begins with the observation that a work of art is a thing in itself without extrinsic meaning.¹¹ In this respect works of art are to be distinguished from symbols; the latter are strictly speaking vehicles of meaning whose physical natures are somewhat arbitrary and whose significant meaning is external. For example, water triggers in us notions of washing, Baptism, and possibly our own Baptism. Few of those referents are immediately apparent or present; in fact, a major characteristic of symbols is their ability to transport and convey an accumulation of histories and meanings. Hence their significance and value grow as the external referents multiply and are assimilated.

A work of art, on the other hand, is physically identical to its meaning, claims Armstrong, and via the means of metaphor that work of art is identical to the emotion

10. One discussion of this together with some citations from Luther is offered by Oskar Soehngen, "Theologische Grundlagen der Kirchenmusik," *Die Musik des evangelischen Gottesdienstes*, vol. IV of *Leiturgia* (Kassel: Johannes Stauda, 1961) 184f. and 258.

11. What follows is a summary of some of the theories proposed by Robert Plant Armstrong, *The Affecting Presence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971) 1-100.

transacted. Works of art, he maintains, are actual presentations of the life of feeling; through metaphor (that is, the movement from the well known to the less well-known) works of art incarnate the non-verbal, affective life of human beings. That life incorporates potency, emotion, values, and states of being. Because works of art present the life of feeling, they are themselves presences. Because they are themselves incarnations of being, they are affecting, that is, most come into our sphere of consciousness with the intent to cause effect. Presentation, asserts Armstrong, not representation is the goal of art. Hence he prefers to speak of works of art as works of affecting presence. They are self-contained, self-perpetuating, and even demonstrate a kind of immortality. So it is that one experiences the unmistakable presence of an artifact recently exhumed by archaeologists.

A work of affecting presence is like an actor; it has its own autonomy. In this way the presence is subject. However, in engagement a work of art also becomes object receiving the attention of an auditor or perceptor. In certain highly charged instances such a work of affecting presence receives extraordinary attention as if it were royalty or a demigod. Once created, it doesn't need its creator anymore, it is free from extrinsic meaning, it is its own meaning; yet that meaning is derived from the initial impulses of its creator. Summarizing his own work Armstrong writes:

In [the] universe of feeling the affecting presence is a special thing, for whereas all objects and events in the realm of the sensibilities *are* by virtue of metaphor *what they convey*, the affecting presence is more than simply this. It is always, in one respect at least, the recipient of special treatment; unlike the decorative element . . . the affecting presence is a special kind of entity, an end in itself. It is a self-contained, self-sufficient, whole act of being. The affecting

presence, then, is a very particular cultural reality, an entity, like the creator from whom it sprang and whom it perpetuates.¹²

If the soul/body entity, or what Armstrong calls affecting presence, has an existence independent of extrinsic meaning, then works of art confront us with reality otherwise inaccessible. We can relate to them as if to another person. One theologian, at least, comes close to such a lofty regard for the art encounter. Langdon Gilkey challenges us to make place for the arts because they provide a unique entrance to reality and then push us through that entrance. In a word, they disclose reality.¹³ Such a high sense of purpose warms the hearts of those who love God because of and through "countless gifts of love," and gives us courage to proclaim and live out assertions about the essential necessity for the arts in the Church. Precisely because the arts cannot be translated entirely into other modalities, their disclosures must have implications for theological work, as theologian Karl Rahner has suggested.¹⁴

And how about the artists? Do they imagine themselves as creators of "beings" which have such effects? Some are rather forthright about their artistic intent. Aaron Copland, to be sure before his flirtations with serialism, commented:

12. Armstrong 194-95.

13. As quoted in John Dillenberger, *A Theology of Artistic Sensibilities* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 221.

14. *Ibid.* 228.

What, after all, do I put down when I put down notes? I put down a reflection of emotional states Art particularizes and makes actual these fluent emotional states.¹⁵

Chagall spoke of his painting as "a tissue of flesh, made up of all my thoughts, dreams, and experiences."¹⁶ As flesh it has taken on its own life, a presence intended to affect.

To obtain the full impact of Armstrong's observation, it is necessary to present a little fuller account. The feeling, potency, or value in a work of affecting presence is culturally determined. That explains matters of style and persisting forms and themes in a given group. Moreover, reflection on the arts in general suggests that affecting presences fall into categories fixed around one of three axes: spatial (sculpture, painting), temporal (music, poetry, and narrative), and spatial/temporal (drama and dance). Those three categories rest on another foundation which Armstrong identifies as the cultural metaphoric base, or that which gives to a wide range of things their cultural identity (e.g. German Romanticism or American Neo-classicism). At bedrock is the universal metaphoric base, which makes it possible for people of all cultures to become engaged in some way by a work of affecting presence.

The axes in turn are culturally refined to accommodate the particular cultural base which is to be modulated. To better understand how that happens Armstrong proposes a simple matrix which consists of two sets of opposites. An affecting presence tends to be modulated either by intension (tightly compacted and narrow-scoped detail) or extension (loosely arranged components). That's one set.

15. Cited in Janet R. Walton, *Art and Worship* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988) 74.

16. Cited in Walton, p. 80.

Another moves between continuity (an attempt to demonstrate connections to the past or present) and discontinuity (no attempt at connections, a deliberate attempt at individuality). From these two sets Armstrong derives four possible modulation patterns: Intensive Continuity, Intensive Discontinuity, Extensive Continuity, and Extensive Discontinuity.

Examples might deliver all of this from impractical erudition or clinical pigeonholing. Applied to music, intensive continuity shows up in a narrow tonal spectrum, and in deliberate ties to tradition; intensive discontinuity shows up in a narrow tonal spectrum with varieties of junctures and segments; extensive continuity is evident in broad tonal spectrum and deliberate relatedness; extensive discontinuity is noticeable in broad tonal spectrum with no genetic development.

How this can be of assistance comes clear when you put these patterns to work. Armstrong has helped me understand the uncomplicated chordal vocabulary so typical to East African church music. Chordal structure and progressions are relatively new in the African experience, having been introduced chiefly by the 19th-century missionaries. Those missionaries were and are highly regarded, however. Hence, uncomplicated chordal development is clearly a manifestation of intensive continuity. That same kind of modulation shows up in the ebony wood carvings of the Makonde people of East Africa. They display their creativity in variation upon variation of single artistic ideas: for example, in the narrow vertical human totem, or in the corpus of Christ detached from the cross. All in all, East Africans develop art which reflects a culture which is intensive and highly desirous of continuity.

We experience affecting presence through cultural modes. Many of the characteristics of these modes, as we will point out later, resonate with Christian liturgy and suggest how well art and liturgy can get along.

Gifts without strings, these body/soul entities which Armstrong calls affecting presences, demand from us a certain seriousness. Any other alternative suggests casual behavior which is to prejudge the worth of the presence. Sometimes, however, some art-like entities only

appear to be presences. Advertising jingles, department store dummies, some posters, and many church banners have as their sole purpose to persuade you and me to offer loyalty to a particular product. They solicit a confidence in their integrity as affecting presences, may even display certain valid characteristics, but in the end it is clear their sole purpose is profit rather than an enlargement of our apprehension of reality.

Other problems persist. Our availability to affecting presence is diminished by the bulk of stimuli which address our senses. It is nearly impossible to hear seriously any performance of the *Messiah* during the Christmas season. We tend to protect ourselves from affecting presence overkill by filtering most of the sound out, hearing the music as pleasant background music. What's left, then, in our art-filled society, is to substitute economic motivations for a serious engagement. To buy and sell affecting presence is then championed as the primary way of dealing with works of art. We have become unwilling victims of that process, and are the weaker for it.

But soul/body entities remain undaunted and tireless and stand as powerful witnesses that we can't go on pretending the whole world of art out there is simply a billboard or merely for sale. Sooner or later we will have to be engaged, even if it means saying no to affecting presence as if one were on a diet (as I did once for two years with *Messiah*). When such engagement seems appropriate again it will bring us to new dimensions of mystery and possibly to new experiences of community. For affecting presences are diametrically opposed to individualism; they make it possible to apprehend what is the height and breadth of the whole human mystery and put us in touch with others. And, as will become apparent in the next section, engagements such as that are the means for discovering one's true identity in the cradle of community.

In sum, Haya drums and other like works of art confront us as self-contained body/soul entities set for engagement. Understood as affecting presence they metaphorically present feelings, emotions, potency, and values through the work of their creators. Though filtered

through cultural structures and various modes they nevertheless address us with a seriousness that demands engagement which in turn leads to the disclosure of reality. Because of the self-sufficiency of affecting presence, works of art provide entrance to life's mystery not otherwise possible.

Now thank we all . . . with hearts, hands, and voices

All works of affecting presence, Robert Plant Armstrong has instructed us, beg for some sort of engagement which can range from saying no to a substantial mental or emotional alteration in our selves. Those arts which fall into the temporary/spatial axis, that is, drama, dance, and to some extent also music, intensify the expectations for response of a physical sort. In our culture that kind of response is often not encouraged because we have "civilized" such engagements to the extent that even a cough during a symphony concert is considered rude. Contrast that with a typical Italian opera audience where overt participation is almost expected, especially if the performance doesn't meet up to audience anticipations.

Most of the cultural cliches about Africa are just that these days. One needs to travel deep into the bush, as it is sometimes called, to find bare-breasted women dancing an initiation rite for the circumcision of young women. Traditional folk dances are frequently done by specialized groups and that only for entertainment. But certain behavioral patterns we might expect from Africans do persist. Participation in a musical event is assumed, for instance, even if that means a gentle swaying of heads or arms.

Parish liturgies in Africa include some performer/listener situations, but the established pattern is the singing of hymns and liturgy by everyone. Participation is a condition of attendance--it's the reason for coming in the first place. Hymn and liturgical accompaniment is unnecessary, for the parishoners simply move from one segment to the next, all having the pitch somehow embedded in their bones. Perhaps communal pitch memory is a sign of deeply shared musical experience, not unlike the kind of pitch memory John Blacking has observed among some children of Africa when they band together to perform

their songs on each occasion in the pitch in which they originally learned them.¹⁷

This desire to participate in communal music shows itself in other ways. During our stay at Ruhija the church music students, together with the rest of the student body, presented us with a concert. We arrived early to enter into what can only be described as a spontaneous jam session. A few of the church music students had begun to play on the xylophones, others joined in on drums, more found rattles, kayambas, and finally anything that sounded until everyone was in on an improvisation which had every bit the characteristics of affecting presence.

A similar unfolding of community through music occurred at a Roman Catholic seminary near Arusha, in Tanzania. At the close of the mass the whole congregation broke into a trope based on the text "Thanks be to God" (*Asante*), sung after the presider had said: "Go in peace, the mass is ended." From every corner of the rectangular space came the sounds of voices; then, one by one, the voices were embellished by a tambourine here, claves there, one drum here, another there until there was a fullsome outburst of improvisatory praise. No one missed the moment. In a short time we were singing and swaying as well.

This compulsion to participate manifests itself most clearly in the African understanding of rhythm. Common knowledge holds that Africans and their descendants in this country have rhythm, as we say, and we have come to expect rhythmic prominence from African and African-American music. To become a master drummer in Africa requires many years of apprenticeship and a series of initiation rites, presumably, by the way, so that the novice can deal with the affecting presences embodied in the drums. Europeans and Americans understand the uniqueness of African rhythm when it is explained as layers of differing rhythms much like layers of melody lines which

17. John Blacking, "Music and the Historical Process in Vendaland," *Essays* ed. Wachsmann, 197.

comprise polyphonic music. That's the structure; the meaning is another matter.

For Africans, according to master drummer Robert Chernoff,¹⁸ rhythm occurs when there are at least two different but simultaneous patterns. A single pattern is always incomplete, it is merely an ingredient. Further, two rhythmic patterns are normally given to two people, three patterns to three, and so on. While it might be true that a talented drummer in Africa or in North America could negotiate two or three patterns by herself, in Africa these patterns are shared with others. Without participation rhythmic patterns have no meaning. Hence, silences here and there in the rhythmic presentation are invitations for another to enter with a unique personal contribution. Even if there is no formal pattern to be offered, Africans expect those physically present to offer some addition to the whole, if only a gentle movement of the head, indicating a unique comprehension of all the elements. Everyone expects to be engaged. In this context improvisation was born and is nurtured. The master drummer skillfully holds it all together and like a good host arranges for "space" so that always one more person might find a place in the group.

An African rhythmic presentation is a social happening, which is why most social events evolve successfully through music. Where there is music something is happening. Because of such intricate social and communal understructure, musical presentations, especially rhythmic epiphanies, pulsate with ethical sensitivity and care. From this base the musical event draws meaning, according to Chernoff:

18. What follows derives from John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), *passim*.

In music, random improvisation and imprecision spoil the delicate structure of the rhythms, and in society random expression spoil the delicate structure of communication.¹⁹

Because music is a mode of being in society, Africans understand music as a "species-specific trait of humans."²⁰ They are puzzled with the typically North American approach to music as a tool for competition, the best, the loudest, or the richest receiving reward. For the African, music is simply shared experience.

The African way is attractive. With all our hearts we wish for once that we didn't have to beg, cajole, threaten, or seduce people into opening their service books and mouths for the hymnody of the parish. We grow weary of devising ever new ways for garnering support for the arts in and for the liturgy. It is enough to make artists give up.

Fortunately, most don't. They are a stubborn lot, to be sure, but there may be another reason why they are determined to assist the Church in its liturgy. All artists from time to time reflect on the process of creating, what it is, how it happens, and its significance for their lives. Some might say that the creative process brings them closer than anything else to the being of God.

Like God the creative process is profoundly complex. One study has focused on a single aspect. Performance, Ellen Basso has discovered, is integral to the Kalapalo people of Central America and to their interaction with communal myth. Performance is undertaken as a way to embrace culture and to integrate one's own experience with

19. *Ibid.* 167.

20. John Blacking, *How Music is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973) 44.

it.²¹ Her study in fact changes our notions of performance from something done under the scrutiny of others to an event of cultural or cultic significance in which individuals, artists, and non-artists alike, creatively participate. There is help here for those interested in the nature of ritual.

Basso maintains that performances assist one's development by integrating changing roles, ideas, and ideals into the received tradition. What is held true by the group is explored and developed through action. Performed events are the place where creative experimentation is both appropriate and expected, and through it new understandings emerge, and they in turn find expression and new forms. In an attempt to distinguish Kalapalo experience from our own, Basso reflects that we tend to place emphasis on the finished work of art as something to perceive or hear while people from the Kalapalo tradition invest in performance as the art of creating, for through it one is given opportunity to rearrange the factors of tradition and present experience. The creative process in performance constitutes a "clarification of reality,"²² and at least within the Kalapalo tradition these performances are chiefly musical.²³ We are here led to an understanding of the function described as improvising on a well-known hymn tune.

According to Basso, performance of this kind provides personal growth for the participant. But there are other benefits as well.

21. Ellen B. Basso, *A Musical View of the Universe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

22. *Ibid.* 4.

23. Basso, p. 8, cites a comment from Claude Levi-Strauss that "an understanding of music might be the key to understanding myth."

From this perspective, cultural forms created within a performative frame can be regarded as strikingly imaginative sources of variation and adaptation to changing conditions--reservoirs for models of new social relationships, attitude, and moral-evaluative systems, the materials for new cultural inventions.²⁴

Shared experiences resulting from common engagement with works of art--that is, works of affecting presence--activate levels and tracks of bonding which deepen our sense of community. That is why we like to visit art museums with somebody. In performance this process is heightened because there is a chance to reconstruct or rearrange our worlds of value through the interplay of tradition and actual experience, of self and other selves.

Perplexed with Countless Gifts of Love

Try as it might sometimes, the Church cannot remove itself from the influence of the arts. Within or alongside the liturgy the arts challenge the Church to be itself precisely in, with, and under the arts. Additional understandings about the inner workings of art suggest that we explore some redesigned linkages between the arts and liturgy, with the frank admission that what follows is only the beginning of such a process.

It would of course be foolish to assume that each of us knows what the other means by "liturgy." In order to get at the task quickly permit me to ruminate about arts and the liturgy under three commonly accepted functions of liturgy: a) liturgy as epiphany of the Church; b) liturgy for the life of the world; c) liturgy as the work of the people.

24. *Ibid.* 5.

Jean Jacques Von Allmen's insightful observation concerning liturgy as the epiphany of the Church²⁵ serves to lift the liturgical assembly from the category of mundane gathering to a timeless, boundless, particularization in the Monarchy of God. You can say that all you want, perhaps know it, but never experience it unless assisted by the arts. If the arts are works of affecting presence, Christian examples carry the exciting potential of embodying an epiphany of the Holy Spirit for they were sparked into existence by creators musing in, with, and under the Spirit. This, it seems to me, is the truth behind iconography, as articulated by St. John Chrysostom: "After [the saints'] death . . . the grace of the Holy Spirit inexhaustibly dwells . . . in their holy images."²⁶ In a comprehensive way the whole of Christian art is a manifestation of the workings of the Holy Spirit and presents us with a specialized epiphany of Church parallel and complementary to the liturgy, at least if the observations about affecting presence are accurate. Works of affecting presence support liturgical epiphany, and in their own way insure the tradition of the Church. In this way, "the record of history lives in the arts,"²⁷ as Martha Graham has said.

Further, that tradition which works of art perpetuate, besides being living and therefore changing, is a tradition apart from the verbal and cognitive, but centered rather in the feeling, emotions, and values of the saints before, for better or for worse. Works of art are a record of how the Church *felt* in the power of the Spirit,

25. Jean Jacques Von Allmen, *Worship. Its Theology and Practice* (New York: Oxford, 1965) 42-56.

26. Cited in Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983) 44.

27. Cited in Mircea Eliade, *Symbolism, the Sacred, and the Arts*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: Crossroad, 1986) xvi.

a scary thought to theologians trapped in their own left brains.

Like the verbal tradition, works of art need periodic critique and re-evaluation. Some no longer engage positively, as, for example, presences which beg surrender to death for the cause of virginity. Some presences if they are to have affect require profound engagement, hard work, if not special invocation of the Spirit (organ works of Messiaen?). Yet, complication carries no special blessing. In the relationship between liturgy and the arts, less is probably more. Bombardment leads to total disengagement, and eventual boredom, with affecting presence, or with the liturgy itself.

Continuity is important to the Church, for its liturgy exists in the company of saints, as one holy Catholic Church. Works of affecting presence, then, will have their greatest impact when they fall within the continuity mode of the matrix proposed by Armstrong. Sometimes intensive continuity assists (nineteen-stanza chorales for a German parish), sometimes extensive continuity serves (Le Corbusier's pilgrim chapel at Ronchamp).

We like to speak as well about the Church at liturgy for the life of the world. In spite of the in-house nature of Christian eucharist--an event meant primarily for the initiated--Christians purport to gather in liturgy in order to ritualize God's actions upon them and their own actions in the world as the Body of Christ. Resurrected life is the sole energy for the entire liturgical action. However, the cultic activity of the Church at worship grows in clarity and authenticity as the Church feels the pulse of the world, its emotions, its values, and its sense of being. Precisely because of that attention to the world the Church will discover those ways to filter the Gospel energy into the bloodstreams of life.

Ultimately this is one complex process requiring delicate (should we say artistic?) balance in the liturgy. But the arts supply assists at crucial junctures in the liturgy, and contextualize Christian ritual. The *pulse* of the world, or, more modestly, of our culture, best reveals itself in the arts. You can read all you want about the growing popularity of committed love relationships, but

Final Alice of David Del Tredici *does* the value struggle between unrequited love and the debilitating fear of loving at all. Interaction with the affecting presence of *Final Alice* pushes one into the realities of that world which is present in the bread and wine and which is about to be transformed. Attention to the arts, to contemporary art (and artists), will yield not only innumerable fields of evangelism and service but places where the reality of this world is being disclosed for affirmation and blessing.

Another face of liturgy is its never-ending task of empowering the assembly to be the body of Christ for a hungry world. There is abundant talk among theologians these days regarding the imaging of the faith. Imaging is one of the new buzz words. By it church folks hope to provide fresh ways of comprehending world and faith. It takes stamina, sometimes, to hear out theologians on this matter, for their much talk leads to boredom. Images are what artists are about. Hymnists and poets, as always, have moved more worshipers these days than many a prosaic preacher struggling to provide new images by telling us a story. Unless, of course, the preacher is artist, too. But ordination does not bestow the muse. The very task prescribed by theologians is the task meant for the artists. Artists are the ones who can embrace the feelings, values, and hopes of the battered, those with AIDS, and oppressed minorities, and artists are the ones who can *present* them to the rest of us, inducing empathetic response from us and from those whose hope, yet unknown, is in Christ.

Losing faith in this fundamental gift of the arts has impoverished liturgy and thus the Church. Re-investment promises integrity of the liturgy, integrity of the people who do liturgy, and integrity of the whole Church as it worships for the life of the world.

Liturgy (from *leiturgia*), most of us now know, means the work of the people: all the people. Each person's tongue is important to the chorus of saints. Offering one's own tongue to the chorus of tradition was a way Christian scholars understood their contributions to the Church's teaching. Glossing, as it is called, dates from at least the time of Christ. In a way this modest method

of participation, practiced by writers and composers alike, is central to the notion of performance discussed earlier. Performative glossing is what we do when we sing hymns, march in procession, or even share the peace. In each one of these events we expand our own accumulated experience of a particular liturgical event and are surprised by ever new realizations from the experience itself. Performative arts in or as liturgy yield a tradition always being challenged and altered. People are given permission to blend their lives with tradition, and people have a chance to build integrity into their lives through participation. The significance of live performance understood this way lifts up the prominence of music and drama in liturgy and should mobilize liturgists and musicians alike against any kind of pre-packaging of liturgy which by-passes participation.

How can one escape the conclusion that every possible way must be explored to encourage and facilitate performative or participatory events in the liturgy? In a time often bereft of linkages between arts and liturgy the vision of a fully participating community dare never be lost to artists and theologians alike. Otherwise we will be cursed to a cult of virtuosos, and to a cadre of pseudo-professionals who think arts in the Church have to do with interior decorating.

"Now thank *we all* our God with hearts *and* hands *and* voices" is more than an old song; it is a persisting invitation to live and play as whole people in the presence of God for the world, and to receive those countless gifts the Spirit of God patiently waits to give us.