

William Wilberforce and The Clapham Circle



William Wilberforce
August 24, 1759 - July 29, 1833

The Clapham Institute, named after the town of Clapham in Greater London, was the home of abolitionist parliamentarian William Wilberforce, who led a long but successful struggle to end British involvement in the slave trade (1807) and to abolish slavery in the colonies (1833).

Wilberforce seldom worked alone. He often used the town of Clapham as a gathering place for distinguished friends and influential allies – including Henry Thornton (a banker and financial genius), Zachary Macaulay (philanthropist and estate manager in the West Indies who was disgusted with Jamaican slavery), Josiah Wedgwood (of Wedgwood pottery fame) and John Newton (a former slave trader and author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*).

The faith-centered work of the “Claphamites” inspired a broad agenda of political and social reforms in late 18th and early 19th century England – including a ban on bull fighting and bear baiting, suspension of the lottery, prison reform, improved working conditions in factories, banking reform, founding Sierra Leone as a colony for refugee slaves, and setting higher standards of morality for public officials and politics.

The Clapham Circle also used empirical research to support policy positions, what today is called “policy analysis.” Claphamites pioneered techniques to mobilize public opinion – including the petition to exert pressure on Parliament and use of voluntary societies to advocate causes – that are now commonplace in democratic polities.

A secret of Wilberforce’s success was his capacity for bridge building, often joining with philosophical opponents in pursuit of common goals. An example is prison reform, where he joined with Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham. “Measures, not men,” was a favorite saying of Wilberforce – i.e., different worldviews should not preclude collaboration on shared goals.

The faith-centered legacy of Wilberforce and the Clapham Circle of friends demonstrates the value of bridge building, the wisdom of community building and social innovation, and the importance of continuing cultural engagement – a legacy that inspired the naming, the mission and the work of The Clapham Institute.

Sharing God’s Big Story

Why The Arts Are Part Of Our Mission

What is the Big Story?

Throughout your entire life you only entertain four types of conversations. Take, for example, all that your family talks about. You either have conversations about how you *ought to be* as a family, how things *are* going, how your family *can be* better, or what it *might become one day* (i.e., your hopes). Whether we are discussing our families, business, sports, church, or anything; we convey all of our thoughts through four categories of conversations. And there is a reason why.

For over two thousand years, the Christian gospel was understood as a Story made up of four kinds of interlocking conversations: how life *ought to be* (*Creation*), how it actually *is* (*The Fall*), how it *can be* made better (*Redemption*) and what it *will be* one day (i.e., the final *Restoration*). Christians have believed in this Big Story as a four-chapter narrative that explains *everything*; including our work, our families, sex and sexuality, government, education... everything! This understanding was enshrined in such early documents as the Nicene Creed (AD325), the Apostle’s Creed (8th century revision of the Old Roman Creed of the 3rd century), and the Athanasian Creed (5th or 6th century). And, since every-one is made in the image of God, this accounts for why everyone – regardless of creed or faith – entertains only four types of conversations throughout their life. The gospel describes how *everyone* lives *everyday* – right down to the things we talk about.

How do we come to understand the Big Story?

There are many ways of knowing this Big Story. We primarily know it through the Scriptures. Yet the ancient church also appreciated other avenues in which people comprehend and become more fully aware of biblical truth. For example, the arts enhanced understanding of the Gospel. At the beginning of the third century, Christians in Rome pooled their resources to purchase a plot of land on the Via Appia Antica outside the city. There they constructed an underground burial chamber and commissioned artists to decorate the walls and ceilings with frescoes.¹ According to Robert Wilken, its construction

¹ “Church as Culture,” by Robert Louis Wilken. Wilken is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of the History of Christianity at the University of Virginia. The original version of this article was delivered as the Palmer Lecture at the Center of Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey.

represented the first “organized effort (diggers, designers, plasterers, painters) on the part of the Christian community in Rome to create a distinctively Christian space.”²

The significance of Christians creating a “distinctively Christian space” is that “Christian faith – no matter how enthusiastically proclaimed by evangelists, how ably expounded by theologians and philosophers,”³ cannot be sustained for long without the support of a nurturing Christian *culture*. In other words, the arts are part of the “total harvest of thinking and feeling”⁴ that helps people grasp the meaning of the good news. The arts build “the pattern of inherited meanings and sensibilities encoded in rituals, law, language, practices, and stories that can order, inspire, and guide the behavior, thoughts, and affections of a Christian people.”⁵ Art and icons, painting and pantomime, theater and entertainment, dance and drama – all of these enhanced, illustrated, and helped people imagine and appreciate the truth of the gospel. Even Constantine’s setting aside of Sunday as a day to worship and rest (AD321) helped cement the Christian faith as something that truly made a difference in how people worked and lived. When 3rd century readers picked up the Book of Genesis and read about the 6-day workweek, they also *saw* it outside on the street.

How people *really* live.

“Nothing is more needful today than the survival of Christian culture, because in recent generations this culture has become dangerously thin.”⁶ “Thinness” means our reliance on evangelism without the incorporation of the arts and imagination yields a slender faith. Survey after survey indicates that many people believe in the gospel as a way to get to heaven. Yet it is our music, theater, books, and movies that shape how people – especially our youth – really live. And those two – the gospel and the arts – are often at odds.

The gospel *is* truth. People come to genuine faith through evangelism and hearing this truth. But it is the arts that make the gospel *meaningful*. Why? It is because the arts are three-dimensional. They are *sneaky*,⁷ *upstream*, and make truth *coherent*.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁵ “Four Quartets,” by T.S. Eliot

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Sneaky” can have positive connotations, such as Jesus’ use of parables to “sneak” truth by people who were skeptical of religious faith.

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Prior to his work overseas, Mike was the founding pastor of Bay Area Community Church in Annapolis, Maryland. After the pastorate, Mike developed and led business and professional “open forums” – discussion groups of civic leaders and government officials throughout the National Capital area.

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He also has been active in government and policy making at every level – including more than 10 years as president & senior fellow, the Western Governors Policy Office; founding president of the Center for the New West; two terms as a Colorado Commissioner on the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE); and a member of the US Department of State’s European Advisory Council.

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Batteries and Baywatch.

During her tenure as Ambassador to Morocco, Margaret Tutwiler⁸ learned that the average day for a Moroccan man went like this: he worked hard all day, came home in the evening, unplugged the car battery, hauled it into his home and turned on *Baywatch*. It's the most widely watched TV show in the country.⁹ Most Moroccans assume *Baywatch* is a PBS-type of show documenting real life in America. So why don't we correct this impression and ship more PBS documentaries to Arab countries? It's because *Baywatch* sells.

We hate you – but send us *Baywatch*!

In 2003, Professors Margaret and Melvin DeFleur¹⁰ published a report on Arab youth attitudes toward America called *The Next Generation's Image of Americans*. As expected, these two authors found that an overwhelming majority of Arab teens had negative feelings about Americans. Very negative feelings. They believed Americans are violent, prone to criminal activity, materialistic and sexually immoral.¹¹ But before this survey was conducted, most Americans assumed Arab hostility was the result of U.S. foreign policy. Not at all. It came from American media and the arts. When the Screenwriters Guild in California reviewed the report, they suggested the DeFleurs change its title to "We Hate You, But Please Send Us Baywatch!"

Art shapes attitudes.

"You can't turn on your television set on any night or go to a movie without seeing unmarried people cavorting in bed," reports Professor Melvin DeFleur, "or you can see folks with no clothes on, and so on, particularly women."¹² Their study found the arts, particularly the powerful influence of American movies and television programs that are seen by millions of foreign teenagers primarily shapes Arab hostility. "When it came to "overall attitudes" toward Americans, Saudi Arabian teens ranked #1, with the most negative feelings about Americans. Saudi teens were followed by those in Bahrain, South Korea, Lebanon, Mexico, China, Spain, Taiwan, Pakistan and Nigeria."¹³

⁸ Tutwiler was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on July 11, 2001 as the new Ambassador of the United States of America to the Kingdom of Morocco.

⁹ Unscripted remarks from Bill Ivey's "The Corrosive Incoherence of the U.S. Arts System," given at the "Fate of The Arts" conference hosted by The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia, April 2, 2004.

¹⁰ Both are professors at Boston University's College of Communications.

¹¹ DeFleur and his wife Margaret surveyed 1,400 teens in 12 countries around the world about their attitudes towards Americans and American culture.

¹² "The Next Generation's Images of Americans," by Margaret and Melvin DeFleur.

¹³ Ibid.

As a diplomat, Tutwiler discovered that America's aims and objectives in Muslim lands are severely crimped when foreign policy derives from the West Wing of the White House while the arts are relegated to the East Wing. This reduces the role of the arts to "what sells" – leading Bill Ivey,¹⁴ former Chairman for the National Endowment, to declare that the current U.S. Arts System is "incoherent."

Why should we care?

The way some Christians think about the arts is often just as incoherent. In most Arab lands, Western arts have generated a hostility toward Western ideas – including the Gospel. The same is true in Europe and the United States. When believers treat the arts as something secondary or "nice"¹⁵ (for cultured people with time and money on their hands), we are, in fact, making it more difficult to present a plausible, coherent, and compelling gospel.

This is *not* to say that – without the arts – no one will come to faith. Just as Melvin DeFleur agrees that not everyone who watches American TV is going to become a terrorist. "But if you are a militant terrorist group and you have to recruit people to join your movement, this 'culture of hate' that is being created, provides a foundation for that."¹⁶ Nor are we saying that *fewer people will come to faith if the arts are neglected*. The point is not *quantity*, but *quality*. It is not *conversion*, but *coherence*. In an age of spirituality, conversion is relatively easy. "This is not the point," says Peter Berger. The challenge of the twenty-first century is *coherence*. "To have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to keep taking it seriously; to retain a sense of its plausibility."¹⁷

For many who hear and receive the gospel, it is "a truth widely held, but a truth greatly reduced. It is a truth that has been flattened, trivialized, and rendered inane."¹⁸ Why? It's because the arts are viewed as relatively unimportant to our mission.

¹⁴ Bill Ivey is currently Director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt and former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. From May 1998 through September 2001, Ivey served as the seventh Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal cultural agency. He is also a four-time Grammy Award nominee (Best Album Notes category), and holds honorary doctorates from the University of Michigan, Michigan Technological University, Wayne State University, and Indiana University.

¹⁵ "Nice" comes from the Latin meaning "silly" or "stupid."

¹⁶ "The Next Generation's Images of Americans," by Margaret and Melvin DeFleur.

¹⁷ Peter Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality*, p.158.

¹⁸ *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation*, p.1

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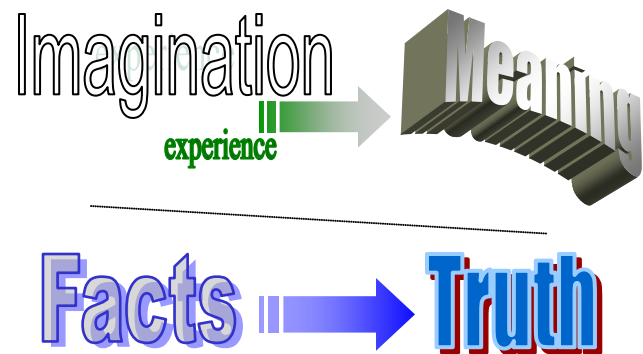
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But we believe they are vital and three-dimensional. The arts are *sneaky*, *upstream*, and make truth *coherent*.

The arts are sneaky.

“Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterprise, its five year mission to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life, and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before...” With this moniker, the original *Star Trek* series¹⁹ - and all subsequent episodes – was launched. Captain James T. Kirk’s crew was commissioned “to boldly go where no man has gone before.”

The first characteristic of the arts is its stealth capability. It can take the gospel where it has not gone before. The arts bring truth to people who might be resistant to the gospel by taking them to imaginary lands where truth can sneak in subversively. People are usually on guard against religious people seeking to evangelize. The arts, according to Lewis, can “steal past” the age-old religious associations that destroy our neighbors’ ability to grasp the truth of Scripture as they should. By presenting gospel truths “in an imaginative world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations,” people apart from faith can see these truths “for the first time appear in their potency,” wrote Lewis. The arts help evangelists “steal past those watchful dragons.”²⁰ For example, many people who appreciate theater have come to faith in Christ through watching a performance of *Les Miserables*. The gospel “snuck up” on them through Victor Hugo’s masterpiece.

Even the Scriptures often resort to artistic expression and stealth language when presenting delicate matters. If you read the Song of Solomon, it describes sex with great artistic license and symbolism. In this way, Emily Dickinson said the Bible dealt with delicate matters in a “slanted way” – an artistic way. Simply proclaiming the truth can be blinding, as Dickinson expressed in her poem #1129:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant -
 Success in circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth’s superb surprise.

¹⁹ The series premiered on NBC on Thursday, September 8, 1966 in the 8:30-9:30 PM timeslot with the episode “The Man Trap.”

²⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds*, p.37.

As lightning to the child eased
 With explanation kind
 The Truth must dazzle gradually
 Or every man be blind.²¹

C.S. Lewis believed that good art can sneak Christian theology into pagan settings that are normally resistant to the truth of the gospel. He sought to do exactly this in many of his books, including *The Chronicles of Narnia*. According to Colin Duriez, Lewis:

Self consciously sneaks in Christian insights. One of his books, *Till We Have Faces*, retells the classical story of Cupid and Psyche. It was a myth which to him had great meaning and power. He retold it in the form of a modern novel. It's set in pre-Christian times, and he explores the insight that it is possible to have within the pagan imagination that prefigure Christian truth.²²

Some of Lewis's books are explicit regarding the gospel.²³ Yet, in all of his writing, he sought "to create a climate in the reader, an imaginative and intellectual climate that would make the reader more able to receive the gospel when they heard it," according to Duriez. "He was preparing the ground for the gospel because he felt that the gospel itself was pointing to the deepest reality about nature."

There's an old saying that you attract more bees with honey than vinegar. Telling someone they are fat, ugly, or have bad breath might be the truth – but it's not very gracious. The gospel is both bad and good news. The arts can subversively steal past people on guard against bad news. A great example is the recently released film *Hotel Rwanda*. This is the true-life story of hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina (played by Don Cheadle) who housed over a thousand Tutsi refugees during their struggle against the Hutu militia in Rwanda (800,000 Tutsis were slaughtered over 100 days in 1994). By retelling this inspirational and redemptive story of one man's efforts, *Hotel Rwanda* subversively steals past our natural defenses and challenges those in the West to consider their own complicity in the genocide. Educators have long understood this phenomenon; how the arts foster "incidental learning."²⁴ For example, most kids go to movies or rent videos

²¹ From "The Riddles of Emily Dickinson." *Obbligati* (Atheneum, 1986)

²² "C.S. Lewis, the Sneaky Pagan," interview of Colin Duriez by Rob Moll, *Christianity Today*, 06/28/2004. Duriez is the author of *A Field Guide to Narnia*, and book that explores how Lewis wove pre-Christian ideas into a story for a post-Christian culture.

²³ *Mere Christianity* is one example.

²⁴ Rogers, A. "Learning: Can We Change the Discourse?" *Adults Learning* 8, no. 5 (January 1997): 116-117. (EJ 540 449)

another drummer. Seekers anchor their being and who they are by embracing transcendent truths. Like the sailor who throws out a sea anchor during a storm, they are able to sail into the wind and slice through the waves rather than be carried by them. The sea anchor helps by permitting sailors to have some control over the speed and direction of their lives. Many Seekers embrace transcendent truths to anchor their lives in times of rapid change. The typical characteristic of the Seeker is rectitude (i.e., virtue, integrity, uprightness, justice).

Shield-bearers – those who disregard the arts.

Shield-bearers generally disregard the arts. They are people who bring order to their lives by withdrawing from and walling off the most intrusive parts of the culture. Many shield-bearers cocoon⁴⁵ to protect themselves from the vicissitudes of wind, weather, and wave; or they escape to religious fundamentalism and take refuge in religious bomb shelters. Among Christian shield-bearers, for example, practices include sending kids exclusively to religious schools, buying books only at religious bookstores, only patronizing vendors in the "Good Shepherd" book of Yellow Pages, hanging only with friends who are believers, living in Christian ghettos, and avoiding, as much as possible, contact with the culture. The typical characteristic of the Shield-bearer is smugness (vanity, conceit, bigotry). They prefer direct evangelism and see little value in the arts.

Conclusion.

The task of Christian evangelism is to "weld together imagination and experience."⁴⁶ The arts are worth our support (and funding) because they are sneaky, upstream, and make truth coherent. Lasting moral changes in human personality must involve the imagination. If the goal of Christian missions is merely conversion and church growth, then the arts become ancillary. But if the goal is complete conformity to the will of God and "They Kingdom come, they will be done on the earth," then the arts are essential to redemption and restoration. This is why Lendor Calder urges us to remember C.S. Lewis' understanding of imagination and the arts:

Spiritual awakening will not occur when Christian doctrines are better defended; rather, it will occur when holy imaginations make the Christian story more likely to be appreciated. The experience of C. S. Lewis is a case in point.



⁴⁵ *Cocooning* is a term invented by marketing oracle Faith Popcorn and is discussed in *The Popcorn Report*, *Clicking* and other publications of Popcorn's New York-based BrainReserve market research firm.

⁴⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination*, p.81

whether or not they are a believer – usually embraces the arts as vital. Here is a description of these four types of people – and why they view the arts in different ways.

Drifters – those who see little or no value in the arts.

A *Drifter* sees little or no value in the arts. They could not care less if the arts are essential to shaping the imagination and culture. That’s because *Drifters* are people who go with the flow; they absorb the conventional wisdom and reflect the dominant values and features of the culture – but they are primarily survivors, not achievers. The typical characteristic of the Drifter is boredom or indifference. They view “fulfilling the Great Commission” as meaning direct proclamation of the gospel with little care for the complementary nature of the arts.

Surfers – those who “use” the arts.

Surfers only see the arts as honey for attracting flies. They incorporate drama, music, dance, etc. for its *instrumental* value – not for any *intrinsic* worth. In other words, this is not art for art’s sake – it is art that we use for other purposes. *Surfers*, like *Drifters*, are people who go with the flow, but they try to catch the “big wave” as they amplify the dominant values and features of the culture. Most *Surfers* are found in the fast lane and include the “Uber Moms”⁴³ and workaholic dads seeking the prestige, power, popularity, pleasure and possessions that are the world’s measure of success. The typical characteristic of the Surfer is exhaustion (as tactics of “success” and “keeping up with the Joneses” are life’s focal points).

Surfers, unfortunately, are quite popular in much of evangelicalism, especially in the music and media industry. Matt Odmark (a musician with *Jars of Clay*) once wrote a song prompted by the group’s collective response to the tragic death of a friend.⁴⁴ The problem was that “Christian” radio stations would not play the “The Valley Song,” telling the group that it was not “happy” enough for their formats. They wanted music that was “upbeat” and “lifted people.” Matt was left asking what it is that the Church communicates to the world – beyond what it communicates to itself – about the meaning of life, if we can only be “happyhappyhappyallthetime?”

Seekers – those who appreciate the arts.

Seekers appreciate the role of art in shaping the imagination, and understand the link between meaning, coherence, and truth. They are people who resist or are troubled by the dominant currents and tides of the culture, bringing order to their lives and their relationship to the changing environment by marching to

⁴³ David Brooks’ description of suburban mothers in his book *On Paradise Drive*.

⁴⁴ TCI fellow Steve Garber contributed this story.

to be entertained. The directors and producers who make the films do not intend to teach moral lessons any more than Arab youths intend to come out after watching *Baywatch* thinking that Americans are ungodly people. But, while being entertained, this is exactly what they learn. For good or evil, the arts are sneaky.

The arts are upstream.

Clive Staples Lewis (1899-1963) was known as “The Apostle to the Skeptics.”²⁵ Lewis’ legacy was as a writer of apologetics through the medium of fantasy literature. He was an artist with pencil and paper. The foundation for Lewis’ understanding of fantasy literature and art lie in believing that *reason* and *imagination* have distinct roles: reason has to do with theoretical truths; imagination has to do with the very conditions of truth. Reason had to do with proclaiming truth; as in the gospel. Imagination had to do with preparing the mind to receive truth as meaningful. This was the place of the arts. Thus, as Lewis saw it, *imagination precedes reason* (since *facts* give us *truth*; but *imagination* yields *meaning*). If Lewis is right, the arts are upstream. Artists get there first.

Lewis was not (as is the case with many romantics) saying that the arts are sovereign. Imagination did not supersede reason as the organ of truth; rather it *preceded* reason as a condition for truth:

It must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of truth. We are not talking of truth, but of meaning. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition.²⁶

What do we mean when we say the arts are upstream? Forty years ago, if anyone was asked to describe a homosexual man, you would have most likely heard adjectives like *disgusting*, *effeminate*, or *distasteful*. That’s what most people imagined. Those imaginations were fed by media and the arts. And four decades ago, if you went to church and heard a sermon describing homosexuality as a sin, that would “fit” with your imagination. In this case, the truth is meaningful because your imagination was set before you heard the truth. Now fast-forward to the twenty-first century.

If anyone is asked to describe a homosexual man *today*, you’ll likely hear *humorous*, *classy*, or *sharp*. Now go back to that church and listen to *the*

²⁵ Chad Walsh, *C.S. Lewis, Apostle to the Skeptics*. 1974.

²⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays*, p. 265.

same message as forty years before (since truth doesn't change). For most listeners, the idea that sharp, caring, and humorous people are an abomination to God is tough to swallow. The biblical truth is much more difficult to swallow because the arts beat you to the punch.

The ancient Judeo-Christian tradition held that God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) *imagined* the creation before they began their work. They spoke of it while conceiving it (Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule..." – Genesis 1:26-28). Human beings are made in his image, and therefore have the capacity for imagination. As Louise Cowan has said, "If we're made in the image of God, it's not so much in our analytical reason, as it is in our imagination."²⁷ The core of our being is our *imagination*. C.S. Lewis historian Colin Duriez reports that Lewis believed "the imaginative man in him was more basic than any other aspect."²⁸ Imagination, then, precedes reason (i.e., truth). And the arts are the primary vehicle for shaping the imagination. Samuel Johnson, for example, described poetry as "the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reason."²⁹

Because the arts are upstream, they both *reflect* and *promote* a society's hopes and dreams, its attitudes and thought-patterns; its understanding of what human life is and ought to be. This is the consensus of a group of thoughtful, politically-placed people in Washington, D.C., who are also thoughtful, serious culturally-engaged Christians.³⁰ They understand that if believers are to affect our culture, they have to understand *what* shapes culture – and *how* it is shaped. Too many believers think that politics shapes society – but, at best, politicians merely respond to it. In Washington, lawmakers make laws, enforce laws, or interpret laws. But they do not shape the hearts and minds in our culture. Politics is *downstream*. For example, elected officials cannot shape the imagination of how people view same-sex marriage. As representatives of the electorate, they can only enact laws that express the will of the majority and respect the rights of the minority.

It is the arts that shape the soul of the society. Those who are giving of themselves as artists, musicians, novelists, filmmakers, poets, actors, dancers, and painters are upstream. If you want to understand Greek culture in the 4th century B.C., then the surest window in is to study its sculpture, as

²⁷ Caroline J. Simon, "On love, destiny, and imagination," Mars Hill Audio, Volume 30 Jan./Feb. 1998.

²⁸ "C.S. Lewis, the Sneaky Pagan," interview of Colin Duriez by Rob Moll, *Christianity Today*, 06/28/2004.

²⁹ John Milton, *Lives of the Poets*.

³⁰ TCI fellow Steve Garber contributed this story.

While Coke's marketing was diligent, other companies have not fared as well. When Clairol® introduced the "Mist Stick" (a curling iron) in Germany; they soon learned that "mist" is slang for manure in German. Not too many people had use for the "manure stick." In the '70, Pepsi® entered the Chinese market with its catchy slogan "Come alive with the Pepsi Generation." But it was translated to mean "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave."

In many places around the world – including the United States – the gospel is not faring as well as it should. For Christians, the message of "God loves you" means something attractive and appealing. But only because it fits our imagination. If our friends imagine a different world, "God loves you" can sound like "manure stick." Only the arts have the power to make truth coherent.

"Art. Ask for more."

The Ad Council® runs a provocative commercial showing a father and mother trying to get a conversation going over dinner with his 10 or 12 year-old son. "So, son, what did you do in school today?" With a dry, monotone voice, the son dutifully responds with something like this, "Well, first I went to spelling. And then that was over. And then study hall... and then that was over. Then it was lunchtime, and I went to lunch [Mom and dad are starting to look forlornly at one another]... and then.... [long pause] ... I ate it... and then I went to recess... and then I came home. And now I'm here."³⁹

Eventually, the father mutters, "Sounds just like yesterday..." The voiceover: "Art. Ask for more."

Art, evangelism, and reaching the world.

Sociologist Robert Wuthnow, director of the Center for Religion at Princeton University points to surveys indicating "people with greater exposure to the arts were more interested in spiritual growth, devoted more to it and more regularly engaged"⁴⁰ in practicing their faith. Wuthnow's conclusion is that the healthiest believers view the arts as "allies, not adversaries."⁴¹

But what do we mean by "healthy" believers who appreciate the arts? The Clapham Institute believes our modern times produce four kinds of people: Drifters, Surfers, Seekers, and Shield-bearers.⁴² Only one kind of person –

³⁹ See it at http://www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/Americans_for_the_Arts/

⁴⁰ "Feeling God's Spirit Through the Arts," *Washington Post*, February 5, 2005, B9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² These archetypes were identified and developed by TCI senior fellow Phil Burgess and are detailed in his "Seeking Anchors in a Sea of Change" (September 26, 2004) and other TCI working papers.

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
 But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

I believe in the kingdom come
 Then all the colors will bleed into one
 Bleed into one
 Well yes I'm still running
 You broke the bonds and you
 Loosed the chains
 Carried the cross
 Of my shame
 Of my shame
 You know I believed it

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
 But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
 But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
 But I still haven't found what I'm looking for...³⁸

There is an 'urban legend' – widely circulated in the marketing and advertising worlds – that Coca Cola® made a serious blunder when it first entered the Chinese market in 1928. The story is the Chinese could not make heads or tails out of the name 'Coca Cola' – it was incoherent to them. Supposedly, Coke's marketing people failed to realize this and 'Coca Cola' was translated as 'bite the wax tadpole.' Although recalled and taught in countless marketing and advertising seminars as history, it never happened.

The truth is that Coca Cola's entry to the Chinese market was highly professional and well planned. Before the official launch, some Chinese shopkeepers (not the Coca Cola Company), anticipating Coke's entry to the market, produced advertising material that had rendered the name into Mandarin characters with no regard to the meaning of the phrase the sounds produced. Signs were produced by combining characters that formed the sound string 'ko ka ko la,' but meant 'bite the wax tadpole' or 'female horse flattened with wax' and other nonsensical variations. Coca Cola did extensive research before the launch to find a meaningful and positive transliteration. The character pronounced 'la' means wax, so this was abandoned in favor of the character 'lê' (pronounced 'ler') which means happiness or joy.

³⁸ The Joshua Tree 1987.

it is there that the hopes and dreams are most plainly seen. And if you want to understand 12th century A.D. Italy, then study its paintings, read its poetry, as it is there that its attitudes and thought-patterns are manifest. And if you want to understand the profusion, tempo, and incoherence of the 21st century, then pay attention to the filmmakers and musicians, as it is in their movies and songs that we imagine what human life is and ought to be. The arts get there first.

The arts make truth coherent.

In the 19th century, the Christian faith was eclipsed by competing ideas that ultimately failed to deliver.³¹ As a result, the poet William Butler Yeats saw the 20th century as an age of incoherence (as in his stunning poem "The Second Coming").

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all convictions, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
 When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep

³¹ For example, Darwin's naturalism, Nietzsche's atheism, and Marx's socialism, and Oliver Wendell Holm's utilitarianism all contributed to almost 170 million people murdered by governments between 1900 and 1987 – far more than the 34.4 million killed in wars. Hitler, Stalin, and Mao account for over 100 million of those murdered. Pol Pot – in just 4 years – killed about a third of Cambodia's population. Under Sadam Hussein, at least 290,000 Iraqis disappeared. These grim statistics are part of an article entitled "Murder by the State" (November *Atlantic Monthly*) which examines the work of R. J. Rummel, a professor of political science at the University of Hawaii. Rummel has compiled statistics accounting for the number of people killed in the twentieth century by "democide," a term he coined to describe government's intentional killing because of *ideas* – not war.

Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Yeats wrote “The Second Coming” in 1922, while Europe and much of the rest of the world was trying to recover from World War I (naively described as “The War To End All Wars”). Yeats saw the chimerical nature of this view. The world was spiraling downward into incoherence – “The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.” Within two decades, World War II unleashed the horror all over again. As an artist, Yeats got there first.

In the 21st century, you see our incoherence by studying teen sexual behavior – even church-going teens. Most teenage Christians acknowledge they understand the Scripture’s position on pre-marital sex. But scores of surveys indicate they can’t imagine *why* these truths are indeed *realistic* or *coherent*.³² Given the massive deluge of free-wheeling sex they see everywhere; it just *doesn’t make sense* to abstain. It’s not a coherent idea. And if it’s not coherent, it’s not compelling. The imagination of most teens today has been warped by film, fashion, magazines, television, and street buzz. “I have a suspicion that one factor is the starved imagination of congregations,” writes Warren Wiersbe. “These people have studied the Bible and listened to sermons, but the truths of Scripture have never penetrated their imaginations.”³³ Theologian Sallie McFague suggests a reciprocal relationship between art and proclaiming concepts in order to derive meaning: “Images ‘feed’ concepts; concepts ‘discipline’ images. Images without concepts are blind; concepts without images are sterile.”³⁴ Kids may say they agree with what the Bible teaches; but if it doesn’t sync with the arts, it doesn’t make much sense. The pictures make the propositions coherent.

³² *True Love Waits*, a program sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention, is one of the most recognized efforts to reduce premarital sexual activity among our youth. Since 1993, about 2,400,000 young people have signed a pledge to wait until marriage to engage in sexual intercourse. For seven years, researchers from Columbia University and Yale University studied 12,000 teenagers who took the pledge. In March 2004, they reported on their findings. 88 percent of those who pledged reported having sexual intercourse before marriage; just 12 percent kept their promise. The researchers also found that the rates for having sexually transmitted diseases “were almost identical for the teenagers who took pledges and those who did not.” Lawrence K. Altman, “Study Finds That Teenage Virginity Pledges Are Rarely Kept,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2004, A20.

³³ Warren Wiersbe. *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination*. p.61.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p.41.

“All our truth, or all but a few fragments,” according to C.S. Lewis, “is won by metaphor.”³⁵ Thus, part of the reason for the gospel’s incoherence in the modern world is due to the arts being relegated to a secondary status. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien³⁶ held that “great stories take us out of the prison of our own selves and our presuppositions about reality.”³⁷ The arts free us to understand how truth is coherent. Tolkien, for example, took the seven virtues of the ancient church and spun them into a fantasy trilogy we know as *The Lord of the Rings*. His aim was to widen the imagination of readers and widen the circle of those who would not normally pick up a religious book. Tolkien knew that, ultimately, the only world where these virtues hung together was in the ancient Judeo-Christian tradition. Lewis’ and Tolkien’s works made Christian truth coherent.

In 1987, *U2* became more public about their Christian faith; especially in “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For.” Bono’s lyrics are not a denial of faith; they are the cry of a Christian lamenting the incoherence of faith in the modern world.

I have climbed highest mountain
I have run through the fields
Only to be with you
Only to be with you
I have run
I have crawled
I have scaled these city walls
These city walls
Only to be with you

But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for
But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for

I have kissed honey lips
Felt the healing in her fingertips
It burned like fire
This burning desire
I have spoke with the tongue of angels
I have held the hand of a devil
It was warm in the night
I was cold as a stone

³⁵ C.S. Lewis, “Bluspels and Flalansferes,” *The Importance of Language*. ed. Max Black (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 50.

³⁶ Tolkien led Lewis to faith and both were part of a literary circle dubbed “The Inklings.”

³⁷ C.f., footnote 35.