

## BOOK REVIEW: CREATIVE CHURCH HANDBOOK

J. Scott McElroy does a phenomenal task of encouraging, envisioning and motivating churches to develop arts ministries. He uses Ephesians 2:10 which states “For we are God’s handwork, created in Jesus Christ to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”<sup>1</sup> He also quotes Nikolai Berdyaev, by stating “Creative experience foreshadows a new heaven and a new earth.”<sup>2</sup> His most powerful statement states “Throughout Christianity there are signs that a sort of new renaissance is rising, a Holy Spirit-initiated movement to integrate the arts and creativity in the churches.”<sup>3</sup> One profound statement by the author is “Artists carry the gifts of intuition, insight, imagination, and creativity, gifts designed by the creator.”<sup>4</sup> The book’s recurring theme encourages us to what the Apostle Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 14:12. The scriptural reference in 1 Corinthians 14:12 states “So it is with you. Since you are eager for gifts of the Spirit, try to excel in those that build up the church.”<sup>5</sup> It is an important reflection for McElroy to admonish us to use our gifts to edify the mission of the church through the arts.

McElroy makes two important viewpoints in his pursuit of creative arts in the Church. First, I commend him stating in his fourth viewpoint everything we do in creative arts should be “Leading in Worship. He cites a biblical reference in the Old Testament by stating, “God

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<sup>1</sup> J. Scott McElroy. *Creative Church Handbook: Releasing the Power of the Arts in Your Congregation*. (Intervarsity Press: Downer’s Grove, Illinois), 2015, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16,

<sup>5</sup> Holy Bible. New International Version.

designated a whole tribe of musicians, Levites, who would do nothing but lead the people into glorifying God through music. “<sup>6</sup> Although McElroy is somewhat critical of the music arts because he believes music has a powerful presence in the church, he cited a great biblical reference. He seems to prefer the development of other art forms other than music. I disagree with McElroy’s viewpoint that music is already well developed and there is no need for further development. I believe music can be more developed in churches to enhance the creative arts ministry.

Another profound viewpoint made by the author is the creative arts should reveal the gospel message. He states “God designed the Hebrew tabernacle and then Solomon’s temple using dazzling beauty.”<sup>7</sup> This viewpoint is well taken. He also states “Jesus drew our attention to artistic symbols.”<sup>8</sup> McElroy’s viewpoint that the creative arts is an excellent tool for mission outreach is quite profound. Teens and preteens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are very much attracted to creative arts in the secular world. It would be great to have them connected to cultural arts in the church. I was quite intrigued when McElroy stated “the ancient Hebrews used art intertwined with prayer for thousands of years. This is a great idea! I know many youths, young adults, and older adults who are quite talented in art illustrations. It would also be a great way those who are hearing impaired to see illustrations of prayers. McElroy’s viewpoint of using the arts to help enhance aesthetic beauty in the church is very well taken. The author is critical of “Protestant churches regarding their neglect for years of imagination and creativity.”<sup>9</sup> McElroy correctly

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<sup>6</sup> McElroy. Creative Handbook, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.32.

states that we should reconcile artists to God. He cites an artist named an artist named Corinna who came to God through the arts program at her local church. This is an excellent example of using the creative arts to build up the kingdom of God.

It is commendable that McElroy gives a detailed, structured approach to developing creative arts ministries in churches. “Table 7.1 entitled Arts Ministry Operations gives pastors, church leaders, youth leaders, and congregants the skills needed to develop creative arts ministry in churches.”<sup>10</sup> One important aspect McElroy emphasizes is the importance of working with pastors to develop creative arts ministries.

I love the fact that McElroy used one of my favorite scriptural references to illustrate building a creative congregation. He quotes Matthew 19:4 which states, “Unless we become as little children we will not inherit the kingdom of God.”<sup>11</sup> Children often use their imagination, This is a great analogy.

Finally, the scholar Niebuhr did extensive work on the Christ of Culture. In my opinion, McElroy’s book emphasizes Niebuhr’s viewpoint regarding the Christ of Culture. McElroy stated how at a particular time in history, the church was the center of aesthetic beauty and culture in the community. McElroy envisions a return to that phenomenal time. I commend the author and highly recommend that congregants read and emulate the forming of creative arts ministries in their local churches.

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<sup>10</sup> McElroy., p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> Holy Bible. New International Version.