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**Book Review of
*Creative Church***

The book being reviewed is *Creative Church* by J. Scott McElroy. This book functions well as a reference tool for seasoned creative church leaders as well as being a good starting point for those desiring to incorporate the creative arts into their church ministries but have no experience building or leading a ministry from the bottom up. McElroy is a very excited writer and his passion for the arts seeps through the pages, but his step-by-step instructions for starting the various ministries he mentions can be exhausting (again, this is great for those new to start-up creative arts ministries).

The chapter that was very helpful and encouraging was chapter 5, because it centered on the role of the creative leader and their responsibility to the teams they serve. Creative leaders should not use their artists solely for what they can add to the ministry, they should be ministering to them as people above all else. Creative leaders create space to nurture their people's artistic potential and their identity in Christ. This quote from page 60 stood out as a powerful charge for creative leaders "For arts leaders this starts with loving and caring for our artists as individuals, helping them to grow spiritually and turning them to their true source." If creative leaders are not intentionally helping their artists connect with God, they are failing them.

McElroy gives great advice about leading and the joys and challenges typically associated with volunteer-run ministries. It was good to see McElroy emphasize collaboration, which seems obvious given the nature of art, move horizontally to vertical as he reminds us that creative collaboration is also with God.

With regards to collaboration, there is one quote from McElroy that could possibly cause theological debate. The quote is from page 22, "We collaborate at the moment of salvation when we give our life to Christ and he takes our sin. When we turn our mind and heart to reading the Word, the Holy Spirit collaborates with us and brings understanding. In fact, collaboration is at the core of faith." One can argue that the sinner does nothing in the regenerative process and illumination of Scripture is all the Holy Spirit, the message of vertical and horizontal collaboration McElroy is trying to convey is still there and it is an important aspect in creative arts ministry.

The best advice McElroy gives to not just creative leaders, but to pastors of creative leaders, is to take faith-filled risks but set boundaries. If we are wise we will recognize that everything in the liturgy is imbued with creativity, and if we have a clear vision of our mission, we can probably find ways to involve the gifts of the entire body of Christ, to include the creative arts, to fulfill that mission. Problems arise when the creative arts we use in the church begin to veer from mission. There is a deeper purpose for incorporating the arts, not just doing art for art's sake. McElroy tells us we can look to Jesus as the example of focused creative ministry "Everything Jesus did was a direct reflection of what he saw the Father doing. He didn't just come up with a wacky idea to make a point and then throw it out there to shock people. All his actions and teaching were led by the Holy Spirit." (pp. 121) This is the big take away that will carry over once this book is shelved.

This is not a bad book if it is treated as a reference, skimming where you need to and picking out what is useful. Reading this book cover to cover as a step-by-step manual is probably not helpful unless a reader enjoys theory and practice. The audience for this book is also niche as it seems geared toward readers who are already artistically inclined. Readers who are not

artistically inclined or are adverse/hesitant about the arts, this book may change their perspective if they can appreciate the details McElroy gives. It is not a book for everyone.

Interestingly, McElroy's championing of the creative arts aligns with the Christian and Missionary Alliance's (C&MA) "Love, Proclaim, Reach, Launch" strategy as detailed by C&MA President John Stumbo at national council during his third year as President. When speaking about *Launch*, Stumbo publicly said "May God allow us to *launch* new waves of musicians, poets, and artists." He will go on to say the following

Evangelicalism still hasn't fully recovered from some of the unnecessary elements of the Protestant reformation ... unnecessary ramifications from that 500 year old event. May our sisters and brothers with creative gifting increasingly find open doors for their contributions to shape us. Our God is a creative being. His nature is to create and in creating us in His image he gave us a creative soul ... musicians, poets, artists are a great gift to us. As they express that creative soul they help us be more honest, expressing ourselves, knowing ourselves, facing ourselves with splashes of sound, and crashes of words, and dashes of color. The creatives stimulate us, anger us and enlarge us.

Though this quote is not from McElroy's book, the essence of what Stumbo is saying could have been said by McElroy. Hearing the creative arts be legitimized and affirmed by a denomination president is not insignificant. The point being made is if John Stumbo recognizes the value of the creative arts in mission then there are certainly other Christian leaders who recognize this, and McElroy's work can further define what that looks like in practice.