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How Can Art Bring About Such a Great Thing?

David McNutt

InterVarsity Press Academic

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Recommended Citation

McNutt, David, "How Can Art Bring About Such a Great Thing?" (2016). *Symposium on Worship Archive*. 21.

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**Calvin Institute of Christian Worship
2016 Symposium on Worship**

**Workshop A16:
"How Can Art Bring About Such a Great Thing?"
Handout**

The Rev. Dr. David McNutt

Opening Questions

- How do the sacraments function in your worshiping community?
- What role do the arts play in your worshiping community?

The Reformers on the Sacraments

John Calvin on the definition of a sacrament:

"It seems to me that a simple and proper definition would be to say that it is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.14.1)

Martin Luther on the efficacy of the sacraments:

"How can water bring about such a great thing? Water does not; but it is the Word of God with and through the water, and our faith which trusts in the Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God, that water is nothing but water, and there is no baptism. But when it is linked with the Word of God, it is a baptism." (*The Small Catechism*)

John Calvin on the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments:

"But the sacraments properly fulfill their office only when the Spirit, that inward teacher, comes to them, by whose power alone hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacraments to enter in." (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.14.9)

"Sacrament" Applied to the Arts

Dorothy Sayers:

"We cannot deal with the industrialism or unemployment unless we lift work out of the economic, political and social spheres and consider it also in terms of the work's worth and the love of the work, as being in itself a sacrament and manifestation of man's creative energy." (*The Mind of the Maker*, p. 218)

David Jones:

"... sign and sacrament are to be predicated not of *some* men and their practices but of *all* men and their practices." ("Art and Sacrament," in *Epoch and Artist*, p. 166)

David Jasper:

"... the artist can draw us back, even in the vast spaces of Durham Cathedral itself, to a eucharistic realization that now requires new and different exercises in the imagination for both the architect and the worshipping, celebratory community." (*The Sacred Community: Art, Sacrament, and the People of God*, p. 149)

David Brown:

"My own view is that one way to recover enchantment and so a holistic view of how God relates to human experience in its totality is through a reinvigorated sense of the sacramental." (*God and the Enchantment of Place*, p. 5)

"Words are potentially just as seductive as images, and so inherently in just as much danger of misleading the worshipper into idolatry as any visual image... If that is the negative side of the equation that I want to suggest here, the positive is the capacity of a good preacher's words to act just as sacramentally as any image: to draw the listener into an experience of the God who is always present and ready to address us." (*God and Mystery in Words*, p. 110).

Questions

- What can we learn from the Reformers about the relationship between sacrament and art?
- Do you find it helpful to think of the arts as a form of sacrament?