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Covenant Theological Seminary

**“We Are All Patrons”:
How Artists Receive Patronage in Support of Their Work
for the Common Good**

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By

Erik Bonkovsky

St. Louis, Missouri

2017

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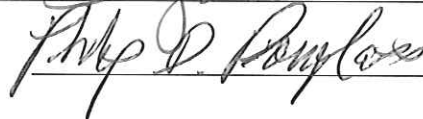
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Abstract

Many artists feel under-supported to the detriment of both themselves and their communities. The purpose of this study was to explore how artists receive support for their work through patronage.

This study focused on three areas of Christian theological heritage: common grace, *imago Dei*, and patronage. The study followed a qualitative research design relying on semi-structured interviews of artists working for the common good.

The study identified three potential areas of support: material, relational, and intellectual. By recognizing and leveraging its resources the church could provide patronage in support of artists working for the common good.

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Acknowledgments

As a younger man I was quick to join the chorus of peers who hoped one day to be a published writer. Now as an older man, who has only just managed a dissertation—not a book—I realize writing is an enormous sacrifice for the author and for the author’s community. Therefore, I offer thanks:

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Chapter One

Introduction

On the corner of Park Avenue and Lombardy Street, in downtown Richmond, Virginia, on the side of a 100-year-old brick building is a cool-colored mural. With shades of blue and black, it depicts a bearded man, staring somberly towards the viewer's left. The plaintive profile of a woman stares aloofly in an opposite direction. Only the dog, painted near the center of the mural, looks directly at the viewer, pleadingly. The mural graces a corner across from a triangle-shaped city park frequented by preschool children and their doting parents. It adorns the exterior of a Cuban restaurant—an institution in Richmond—that attracts long lines for weekend brunch and receives frequent mention in national press.¹ Each day as thousands of people walk, bike, or drive past, the mural does what public art does—it brightens a mundane routine, causes someone to stop and look more closely, sparks a conversation or a moment of creativity. Or does it?

The mural was painted by Ed Trask, whose work graces many other buildings throughout Richmond.² His murals are an example of public art, art for the common good. As with most art, responses to Trask's murals are mixed. Some question the depth and the longevity of his contribution to the common

¹ Justin Bergman, "36 Hours in Richmond, Va.," *New York Times*, October 14, 2009, accessed February 3, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/18/travel/18hours.html>.

² Amy David, "Artist Ed Trask paints mural across Millie's Diner as part of Route 5 Coalition's 'Take 5' initiative," *RVAMag*, June 30, 2015, accessed February 3, 2017, <http://rvamag.com/articles/full/24828/artist-ed-trask-paints-mural-across-millies-diner-as-part-of-route-5-coalitions>.

good of Richmond. Others poke fun at the ubiquity of his work, as one blog satirically reported on a Richmond City Council resolution that would “require murals by famed local artist Ed Trask to be put on the visible sides of all buildings within [Richmond].”³ But Trask continues to paint murals and receive commissions for large-scale paintings at various businesses around Richmond.⁴ His art undoubtedly shapes the current look of the city.

Just a block from Trask’s mural stand the 100-year-old sanctuaries of several mainline protestant churches. These sacred buildings deposit girth and weight on their hulking footprints. Their grand stain-glassed sanctuaries and soaring steeples evidence the historic influence of churches on city life. The juxtaposition of these churches—some of the most beautiful worship spaces in the city—with Trask’s mural begs the question: What is the relationship between popular public works of art and the church of Richmond? What interest, if any, does the church have in supporting the work of artists who are contributing to the common life of the city?

The Problem

The present study confronts two problems: a problem for artists and a problem for the church. First, many artists feel alone, unsupported, and insecure.⁵ Even Christian artists who self-identify within a church tradition often

³ “Council: Ed Trask Paintings For Every City Building” Tobacco Avenue, entry posted September 2, 2009, accessed March 26, 2014, <http://tobaccoave.wordpress.com/2009/09/02/council-ed-trask-paintings-for-every-city-building/>.

⁴ Examples of some of his recent work can be found at the artist’s website: <http://www.edtrask.com/murals/>.

⁵ Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 186.

feel their imaginative work is outside the church's interest. Tania Runyan is a poet who has worked at her art within a Christian context for many years and has struggled to find support. Runyan says, "Without question, evangelicalism is known for keeping lockstep with 'rational (or sometimes not-so-rational) propositions,' distrusting mystery, and dismissing the arts unless they serve a utilitarian purpose of drawing people to a service. [Thomas] Kinkade's certain, sentimental lines usually win out."⁶ Artists feel as though they inhabit liminal space—on the edge of both city culture and the church. They feel under-supported and under-appreciated; like there is no place for them in the church.⁷

Second, the church has largely lost the ability to speak to artists and into the artistic culture. At best, the church's relationship with artists is innocuous; more or less ambivalent to what (if anything) the arts have to offer. At worst, the church is viewed negatively by artists, as a threat to their free expression or as a competitor for the interest and support of city.

The chasm between the church and the artistic culture has both practical and theological roots.⁸ Practically, the church is an effective non-entity in the contemporary art world. Jesse DeConto explains the situation by quoting an observation of a Lutheran pastor in Minneapolis:

Christian art is sometimes just praying hands, or Jesus carrying sheep over his shoulder or... an American flag or an eagle soaring. "It's

⁶ Tania Runyan, "Stumbling into the Waterfall: 25 Years of *Image*," *Good Letters*. March 19, 2014, accessed March 20, 2014, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/goodletters/2014/03/stumbling-into-the-waterfall-25-years-of-image/>.

⁷ Deborah Sokolove, *Sanctifying Art: Inviting Conversation Between Artists, Theologians, and the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 166.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

illustration, it's not art," she said. "In some churches I served, people... just didn't think about art. You go to the Minneapolis Institute of Art — and then you come to church and a puppet show will do?" she queried. People know that there is more to faith, she said, "it's just that they don't have any vocabulary, don't know how to articulate it."⁹

The contrast between the Minneapolis Institute of Art and the church is telling.

The pastor recognizes that churches (and the people in them) lack both language and understanding to engage substantially with the arts.

A malnourished conception of the arts applies to the church's ability to support work through patronage as well. As painter and author Makoto Fujimura observes, "churches are operating under a utilitarian pragmatism."¹⁰ That pragmatism prevents the church from investing in the arts. At times within its history, however, the church was a key supporter of art, even public art.¹¹ But more recently, the church's relevance to art has decreased. As artist and art curator, Dan Siedell observes in his book *God in the Gallery*, "The loss of church patronage has drastically diminished Christian presence in the visual arts."¹² The retreat of the church's influence in the world of art is typically traced to the Protestant Reformation and the overall reaction to the Catholic Church's emphasis on icons and sacred objects. Historian Patrick Collinson writes, "The sixteenth century witnessed a holocaust of religious imagery, the most extensive

⁹ Jesse James DeConto, "Artists in Worship," *Christian Century* (November 29, 2011): 29.

¹⁰ Fujimura, Makoto. "Ask an artist (Makoto Fujimura)... Response," *Rachel Held Evans* (blog), entry posted April 16, 2013, accessed March 20, 2014, <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/ask-an-artist-makoto-fujimura-response>.

¹¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Sciences & Art* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2011), 108.

¹² Dan Siedell, *God in the Gallery: A Christian Embrace of Modern Art* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 138.

and thorough in history."¹³ What began on the continent through the influence of the Reformers, spread to England during Elizabethan reforms and shaped the larger development of Protestantism in its relationship to art. According to professor of art Deborah Sokolove, "For nearly 500 years, visual art was suspect in most Protestant churches."¹⁴

The pragmatic removal of art from the life of the church which was catalyzed by the Reformation has been reinforced theologically. The protestant church tradition has done little to develop a coherent and comprehensive philosophy of the arts. The more recent evangelical movement is fully complicit with this theological apathy. The church over the last two or three hundred years, writes theologian Jeremy Begbie, has "been dazzled by a kind of intellectualism, where the mind is effectively divorced from other parts of our humanity and forced to work at a high level of abstraction."¹⁵ Begbie here is building off the observations of Christian novelist and essayist Dorothy Sayers, who, writing in the 1940s, concluded,

Oddly enough we have no Christian aesthetic — no Christian philosophy of the Arts. The Church as a body has never made up her mind about the Arts, and it's hardly too much to say that she has never tried. She has, of course, from time to time puritanically denounced the Arts as irreligious and mischievous, or tried to exploit the Arts as a means to the teaching of religion and morals.¹⁶

¹³ Patrick Collinson, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2006), 187.

¹⁴ Sokolove, 2.

¹⁵ Jeremy Begbie, *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), xii.

¹⁶ Dorothy Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," quoted in Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), ix.

Vacillating between denunciation and exploitation of art has left the church adrift when it comes to understanding and explaining the place art should have in common life. The contemporary voice of Mako Fujimura agrees, “We do not see beauty as valuable. I believe this mindset has as much to do with how we view the gospel as how we view the arts.”¹⁷

The church’s historical indecision in relation to art haunts its practice today. Finding itself positioned in an increasingly post-Christendom moment marked by a diminished relevance to, and influence on, the common life of the city,¹⁸ a standard reaction of the church has been a deepened parochialism and further retreat into its own private life and work. A physical illustration of the church’s retreat from shared public life will be familiar to any visitor to small-town New England. Many historic towns are centered around a village green that long served as the hub for the town’s common cultural life. As New England historian John Cushing observes, most of these town greens began as part of the lots accompanying meetinghouses (or buildings for public worship) in the towns. Because of their central location, the meetinghouses became the “focal center of all community activity, religious, social, and political.”¹⁹ The physical layout of these towns illustrates the proximity and influence of the church on the common life of the town. Recently a far more familiar tack for churches has been to build expansive multi-acre campuses far removed from town centers where parking is

¹⁷ Mako Fujimura, “Ask an artist...”

¹⁸ Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 238.

¹⁹ John D. Cushing, “Town Commons of New England.” *Old Time New England Journal* 51, No. 183 (Winter 1961): 87.

both convenient and plentiful, but where compartmentalization of interests persists.

Churches (through their leaders and congregations alike) are skeptical of, and hesitant to foster and sustain, the work of artists because of confusion over the purpose of the church in the world. This confusion is captured well by an anecdote from writer (and occasional art collector) Lauren Winner. After a speaking engagement, Winner was accosted by a woman clutching a copy of Winner's memoir, graffitied in places with indignant marginalia. She thrust before the author a particularly offensive paragraph that described how Winner, a graduate student at the time, purchased a \$900 paper-cutting inspired by Ruth 1:21. With disbelief, the woman asked Winner, "How, in terms of Christian ethics,' she asked, 'can you justify spending that money on art when there are poor people to be fed?'"²⁰ Winner's interlocutor voices a common feeling: Christians and the church should focus on mercy and evangelism. Support of the arts, if justified at all, surely is secondary.

Churches often adopt a "Yes, but" approach when it comes to the common good being done in their cities. Many churches are hesitant to foster partnerships with or are unequipped to support the vocational efforts of Christians and non-Christians alike, particularly within artistic disciplines. As critic Gregory Wolfe, who has dedicated his life's work to intersection of art and faith through his work as editor of *Image* magazine, writes, "It is my conviction that the Christian community, despite its many laudable efforts to preserve traditional morality and

²⁰ Lauren Winner, "The Patron," in *For the Beauty of the Church: Casting A Vision for the Arts*, ed. W. David O. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 77.

the social fabric, has abdicated its stewardship of culture, and more importantly, has frequently chosen ideology rather than imagination when approaching the challenges of the present."²¹

Relatedly, the church disagrees over what constitutes a city's common good. Such disagreement can lead churches to commit efforts and resources exclusively to work within the structural boundaries of the church itself. Such church pragmatism is often reinforced by theological reasoning. In the summary of New York City pastor Tim Keller, one prominent view of the church's relationship to culture maintains, "God's common kingdom is predominantly a force for restraining disorder, not for building new order."²² The (perhaps unintended) result of such theological conviction and practicality is a church posture towards the cultural life of the city that is overly antithetical, positioning the church as against the city rather than a vital part of what is good, true, and beautiful in the city. Describing his own journey into a vocation in support of the arts, Wolfe witnesses to this antithesis, "As a young man and a person of faith, I was trained to see the world in adversarial terms."²³

Some authors see an antidote to the church's current skeptical attitude and antithetical posture in the recovery of what art historian Daniel Siedell calls "the way of St. Paul."²⁴ Siedell explains that this way is rooted in the Apostle

²¹ Gregory Wolfe, "Art, Faith, and the Stewardship of Culture," in *It Was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*, ed. Ned Bustard (Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2006), 249.

²² Keller, *Center Church*, 211.

²³ Peter Blair, "Interview: Gregory Wolfe," *Fare Forward* (Summer 2013): 7.

²⁴ Siedell, 11.

Paul's interactions with the artistic community of his day, in first century Rome. Acts 17 records how the Apostle Paul noticed monuments throughout Rome inscribed with the work of secular poets. He commended their art and indicated the ways it pointed to deeper truth. From Paul's example, Siedell suggests that when the church today encounters the often beautiful, compelling, and powerful altars to unknown gods within contemporary public art, it must examine and celebrate those "cultural artifacts and to reveal and illuminate their insights into what they are only able to point to, not to name."²⁵

Starting with the example of St. Paul, theologians have developed the idea of common grace as an essential resource in helping the church better define its interaction with artists contributing to the common good.²⁶ Articulated by the Genevan father of Reformed theology John Calvin in the sixteenth century, the doctrine of common grace lay largely fallow until it was re-appropriated by Dutch Neo-Calvinists in the late nineteenth century.²⁷ Even so the history of common grace theology has been contested, rendering it an under-used and under-trusted doctrine today. While certain pockets of the evangelical church have some familiarity with the idea of common grace, the full outworking of its implications for interaction with the common life of a city is under-developed. Because understanding of common grace is weak, distrust is persistent. Many

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ H.R. Rookmaaker and Calvin Seerveld, for example.

²⁷ Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace," trans. Raymond Van Leeuwen *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1989): 35.

Christian voices—even those conversant in common grace—doubt its value without evidence of explicitly articulated special grace.²⁸

A more robust doctrine of God’s common grace might lead to a more robust welcome to the value of art within the common life of cities. Teacher and writer Steve Garber is fond of observing, “Artists get there first.” He quotes Beat poet Allen Ginsburg who describes artists as the “froth riding the wave.”²⁹ Garber implies that artists have a prophetic role in helping the rest of a society to see. Similarly, artist Joshua Banner says, “The greatest gift the arts have to offer us is a lively attentiveness—a wakefulness—to the beautiful and interesting things our Father Creator has surrounded us with.”³⁰ If this is true, the wakefulness of artists is not a problem for the church. It is an opportunity. By identifying ways to better support artists in their work, the church can produce a greater attentiveness to the world.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore how artists receive support for their work through patronage.

Research Questions

To that end, the following research questions guided the study:

²⁸ See, for instance, Jeff Haanen, “Why Serving the Common Good Isn’t Enough,” *Jeff Haanen: Faith, Work, Culture*. March, 14, 2013, accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www.jeffhaanen.com/2013/03/05/why-serving-the-common-good-isnt-enough/>.

²⁹ Steve Garber, *Visions of Vocation: Common Grace for the Common Good* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 59.

³⁰ Joshua Banner, “The Practitioner” in *For the Beauty of the Church*, 142.

1. In what ways and in what patterns do artists receive support for their work by patronage?
2. In what ways are the artists' understandings of their work as contributing to the common good relevant to their receiving support for their work through patronage?
3. What obstacles to receiving support for their work through patronage do these artists encounter?
4. In what ways and to what extent can artists imagine receiving support for their work through church patronage?

Significance of the Study

The present study is significant for several reasons. First, it is significant for artists who encounter obstacles in obtaining patronage for their work for the common good of the places where they live and work. A systematic project of listening to artists allows identification of certain themes within the artistic experience and suggests an outline of remedies for an under-developed system of patronage for artists. This study will indicate how individual and institutional patronage, especially from the church, can support artists in their work for the common good of a place. Artists who feel under-resourced and under-nourished in their work can discover ways that the church's resources—theological, physical, and communitarian—can be mobilized in support of public art.

Second, the study is significant for churches with an expressed desire to support the work of artists in their cities. From a posture of listening, churches can find out how better to support artists within their congregation and within their

cities. As churches support efforts toward the common good within their cities, they can internalize how artists feel supported in such work. Recently many churches have demonstrated the importance of developing vocational stewardship by starting faith and work centers³¹ and championing books on the integration of faith and work.³² But interest in equipping the artistic vocation through patronage remains limited.³³

The findings of this study, however, are not limited in their application to artists or churches seeking to better support artists. Insofar as the artistic vocations are representative of other vocations, the conclusions of this study can be widely applied. Because artists are paradigmatic of an essential aspect of humanity³⁴—namely creativity—careful study of how artists are supported in their work can advance understanding of a key part of the human vocation. Therefore, all churches with an interest in vocational discipleship more generally, could discover through the present study ways to better support people (both Christian and non-Christian) in their work for the common good. As beneficial structures for patronage within the arts are better identified and understood, they may be applied more widely to other vocations, increasing the church's opportunity to disciple all people in their work lives.

³¹ Redeemer Presbyterian's *Center for Faith and Work* in New York City is one example.

³² *Work Matters* by a pastor, Tom Nelson, is one example.

³³ In private correspondence with Christian bookseller Byron Berger he acknowledged a lack of awareness of books on this subject.

³⁴ W. David O. Taylor, in private conversation March 7, 2014.

Definition of Key Terms

Art – A work of art is a human artifact made or presented for aesthetic contemplation.³⁵ A work of art is composed of multiple elements including: the use of the physical environment, an embodied emotional response to human experience, a display of the quest for human meaning, and an act of praise to the Creator (whether acknowledged or not).³⁶

Common good – The common good describes a state of affairs that promotes the flourishing³⁷ of all humanity. It describes a situation in which human beings can become all they are meant to be. As common good, it is not just about individuals, but about communities—people in relationship with one another.³⁸

Common grace – Common grace refers to the general blessing of God given to all humanity.³⁹ As the sun shines on both the righteous and the unrighteous⁴⁰, so God’s goodness is present even for, and in, those who fail to acknowledge him or his gifts.

Patronage – Patronage describes a reciprocal relationship in which one party makes an investment in the other to further a certain vision of cultural life.⁴¹ Long

³⁵ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 18.

³⁶ C. Nolan Huizenga, “The Arts: A Bridge Between the Natural and Spiritual Realms,” *The Christian Imagination: Essays on Literature and the Arts* ed. Leland Ryken (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 75.

³⁷ Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

³⁸ Tom Nelson, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 125.

³⁹ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 24.

⁴⁰ Matthew 5:44 (ESV)

⁴¹ James K. A. Smith, “Let’s Talk About Your Investment Strategy,” *Comment* (Winter 2013): 2.

a negatively perceived word dating to the abuses of the medieval church, the broadly defined idea of patronage is experiencing renaissance as a positive and distinctive aspect of stewardship of culture.⁴²

⁴² Mako Fujimura, "Culture Care: Called to Be Patrons," *Comment* (Winter 2013): 14.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how artists receive support for their work through patronage. To that end, several relevant fields of literature provide fertile ground for reflection: the extant academic understanding of what constitutes the common good and art's role within it; a definition of common grace and its biblical and theological grounding within the Christian tradition; and a contemporary survey of the practice of patronage, particularly as understood by faith communities.

What Constitutes the Common Good

In a 2012 article for *Christianity Today*, Andy Crouch summarizes the rise of 'common good' language within contemporary culture from both Christian and non-Christian circles. As a Protestant writer drawing on an unlikely source—Pope Leo XII's papal encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*—Crouch explains how common good came to be defined as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily."⁴³ Two significant aspects of this definition are worth highlighting. First, common good is measured by human beings becoming all they are meant to be. Common good thus has semantic overlap with the Hebrew word *shalom*, succinctly defined by Cornelius Plantinga in *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, as "universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which

⁴³ Andy Crouch, "What's So Great About the Common Good?" *Christianity Today*, entry posted November 2012, accessed December 23, 2012, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/november/whats-so-great-about-common-good.html>.

natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed.”⁴⁴ Similarly, pastor Tom Nelson explains that the phrase common good describes “all the various aspects of contemporary life that contribute positively to human flourishing both as individuals and as communities.”⁴⁵

Second, recent literature describes the common good as about both groups and individuals. Authors use the concept not just about "humanity" in some abstract way, but about persons in relationship with one another.⁴⁶ Thus the common good maintains a balance between thinking about dignity of individuals, not just collectives, and thinking about public concerns, not just individual liberty. Likewise, common good, to be truly common, must be more than mere utilitarian good. It is the most good for *all* people. Crouch suggests that a key element in a Christian understanding of the common good includes care for the most vulnerable and marginalized in any society.⁴⁷

Elsewhere Crouch explicates work for the common good through the language of creation and cultivation, a helpful shorthand. In his book *Culture Making*, Crouch exegetes humanity’s creation in the “image of God” as carrying a twofold ramification. First, humanity images God in creativity as he makes the diverse world. Second, humanity images God in ordering the just-created world. As he summarizes, “Genesis presents God as both Creator and Ruler, of the universe. Creators are those who make something new; rulers are those who

⁴⁴ Plantinga, 10.

⁴⁵ Nelson, 125.

⁴⁶ Andy Crouch, “What’s So Great About the Common Good?”

⁴⁷ Andy Crouch, in a phone conversation with the author, January 4, 2013.

maintain order and separation.”⁴⁸ Therefore, Crouch believes people can pursue the common good of their cities through vocational work that is either creative or cultivative.⁴⁹ Calvin Served is a philosopher who likewise views Genesis as illustrative of the role humanity should play in the world. In language that resonates with Crouch’s, he says, “formative culturing of creation is intrinsic to human nature.”⁵⁰ In Seerveld’s view, the creation of God is unfinished. It is waiting to be used by human agents. He concludes, “Its variegated meanings are waiting there to be unleashed in a new chorus of praise for the Lord. This is our human calling. And we two-legged people who pledged ourselves to be children of God may not be found wanting.”⁵¹

The approach shared by Seerveld and Crouch appreciates the ‘this-worldliness’ of creation and cultivation. Any common good produced by humankind now derives from that first good created by God. This idea of how the human purpose within creation finds expression in rather mundane ways is explained by biblical scholar Richard Middleton, who refers to “the distinctive way *humans* worship or render service to the Creator is by the development of culture through interaction with our earthly environment.”⁵² Because eschatological redemption consists in nothing other than the renewal of human cultural life on

⁴⁸ Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵⁰ Calvin Seerveld, *Rainbows for the Fallen World: Aesthetic Life and Artistic Task* (Toronto: Tuppence Press, 2005), 24.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵² Richard Middleton, “A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Case for a Holistic Reading of the Biblical Story of Redemption,” *Journal of Christian Theological Research* (2006): 81.

earth,⁵³ faithful work towards for the common good in the present consists in everything that renews human cultural life. As Yale theologian Miroslav Volf says, “Because the whole creation is the Spirit’s sphere of operation, the Spirit is not only the Spirit of religious experience but also the Spirit of worldly engagement.”⁵⁴ Thus, the door is opened to comprehensive worldly engagement that advances the common good.

Pastor and writer Skye Jethani helpfully summarizes common good work as that which promotes flourishing through order, beauty, and abundance.

We, the people of Christ, are here to plant the seeds of his kingdom; to cultivate gardens of order, beauty, and abundance in the wilderness of this world. These gardens not only draw people to our God, and they not only point to the restoration of all things that is yet to come. The gardens we cultivate through the resurrection power of Christ also bring flourishing here and now. They bring life into our communities. They bridge the gap between the world that is and the world that is yet to come.⁵⁵

Jethani’s synthesis includes several already mentioned strands within the common good tapestry: the way it glimpses a proximate kingdom; the way it describes the basic human task as cultivation; the way it reaches towards the goal of broad flourishing now as a picture of the final flourishing then. As these thinkers position the idea of the common good in relation to other core theological concepts, its benefit is clear. It is not a threat to God’s grace but a product of that grace. Common good work is not meritorious effort offered to God

⁵³ Middleton, 86.

⁵⁴ Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 104.

⁵⁵ Skye Jethani, “Planting Gardens in Prison: Why We Labor for Shalom Now,” *Christianity Today*, entry posted October 9, 2012, accessed December 23, 2012, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/thisisourcity/7thcity/skyes-essay.html?paging=off>.

for blessing, but the result of God's blessing working itself out in cultural life, including the artistic life of a city.

Despite the multiplicity of voices championing the common good and arguing for its utility to Christians seeking to engage their communities, other voices challenge the recent embrace of common good projects. Writing on his blog, Jeff Haanen, Executive Director of the *Denver Institute for Faith & Work*, writes, "Serving the common good isn't enough by itself."⁵⁶ Haanen emphasizes that while common good work has its place, what makes Christians unique in the world is the gospel. Further, citing the earthly ministry of Jesus, he says, "His miracles were meant to verify the truth of the gospel." Similarly, Canadian pastor John van Sloten is doubtful about the lasting value of common good language to the Church's efforts to help people find meaning in their vocational lives. He writes, "Sometimes working for the common good is an impediment to what is work's primary purpose: a real-time knowing and experience of God."⁵⁷ Van Sloten and Haanen, while not completely opposed to the idea of the common good, seek to curtail the breadth and pervasiveness which thinkers like Crouch and Jethani want to ascribe to it.

Another contemporary voice who comments on the place of common good theology is doctor and writer Matthew Loftus. Through the prism of healthcare, Loftus challenges Haanen's conclusions by expanding the arena of what should

⁵⁶ Jeff Haanen, "Why Serving the Common Good Isn't Enough."

⁵⁷ John van Sloten "Why Working for the Common Good Isn't Enough," *Think Christian*. April 18, 2013, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://thinkchristian.reframemedia.com/why-working-for-the-common-good-isnt-enough>.

be considered faithful Christian work in the world. Loftus writes, “It’s not enough to merely challenge individuals to eat better. We must look at our corporate habits of consumption.”⁵⁸ He is suggesting that an embodied corporate ethic aimed at the common good is necessary alongside any proclaimed truth of the gospel. Loftus argues that common good work, even when it does not make explicit reference to the truth of Jesus, should be viewed as a dimension of God’s restorative work in the world. Projects for the common good, then, restore people to the fullness of flourishing life with God.

Another facet of understanding the common good important for the present study is the specific role that art can play in establishing and maintaining human flourishing. One of the more cogent defenders of art’s beneficial role in human flourishing is Gregory Wolfe, the longtime editor of *Image Journal*. Wolfe writes, “Art in itself cannot save a single soul... [but] the imagination helps us see and speak the truth.”⁵⁹ He goes on to quote Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz’s “One More Day”:

And when people cease to believe that there is good and evil
Only beauty will call to them and save them
So that they still know how to say: this is true and that is false⁶⁰

Wolfe is suggesting, and Milosz is bearing witness to (with verses that provide the title of Wolfe’s book), the necessary role beauty plays in pointing to good, even when a society lacks the philosophical or ideological resources to recognize

⁵⁸ Matthew Loftus “Public Health and the Common Good,” *Comment*. October 16, 2014, accessed January 27, 2017, <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/4326/public-health-and-the-common-good/>.

⁵⁹ Gregory Wolfe, *Beauty Will Save the World* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2011), 60.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

the good. Wolfe is a Catholic who, while supporting the idea of the common good and art's place within it, undertakes his project from a posture of "Christian Humanism."⁶¹ This vision rests on the theological conviction that humanity's fall damaged, but did not obliterate human nature. As Wolfe writes, "After the Fall, the image of God in man was marred, but not completely effaced. Another way of putting this is that nature bears witness to God, even if it needs to be completed and fulfilled by grace."⁶² Wolfe's approach to religious humanism contains foundational suppositions that not all proponents of the common good share. Without acceding completely to the premise of Christian humanism, Wolfe's insights support the particular role that art can play in establishing common good. Art provides a space for contemplation and an often subversive beauty that can pull people back from the thrumming realm of action to send them back wiser and more fully human.⁶³ Wolfe is not far away from the observation of writer and cultural observer Steve Garber who likewise suggests that art treads the vanguard of culture by attending to the yearnings of what human life is and ought to be. As Garber says, "Artists get there first."⁶⁴

The abstract painter Makoto Fujimura is another artist who positions himself in line with this tradition as he applies the idea of common grace to his artistic work for the common good. Fujimura brings a broad-mindedness to bear on the question of who can participate in work that promotes the flourishing of all.

⁶¹ Ibid., 30.

⁶² Ibid., 36.

⁶³ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁴ Garber, *Visions of Vocation*, 59.

He says, "Everyone can—and I gratefully acknowledge that many people from all sorts of backgrounds do—contribute to the common good. These conversations are open to all people of good will."⁶⁵ In establishing that these conversations are open to all as part of their defense of work for the common good, thinkers like Garber and Fujimura are quick to reference the doctrine of common grace, a important theological basis for the larger discussion.

Common Grace

Despite a recent proliferation of literature exploring the nexus of faith and work for the common good,⁶⁶ there remains a relative dearth of contemporary reflection on the theological concept of common grace, which undergirds human work of both the faithful and the faith-less. Since its first articulation in the sixteenth century, the doctrine has suffered from misconception and denigration.⁶⁷ It is to the church's detriment that greater effort has not been extended to recover common grace theology.

God's common grace refers to the general blessings of God given to all humans indiscriminately, including the general operation of the Holy Spirit by which he restrains sin, maintains order, and promotes righteousness.⁶⁸ John Bolt describes common grace as "restraining the effects of sin and bestowing general

⁶⁵ Makoto Fujimura, *On Becoming Generative: An Introduction to Culture Care* (New York: Fujimura Institute, 2013), 32.

⁶⁶ A couple of helpful bibliographies of Faith and Work books have been published: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/faith-and-work-what-needs-to-be-read-and-what-needs-to-be-written/> and http://www.heartsandmindsbooks.com/reviews/books_on_vocation_calling_book/

⁶⁷ Herman Bavinck, "Common Grace," trans. Raymond van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24 (1989): 35.

⁶⁸ Lloyd-Jones, 24.

gifts on all people, thus making human society and culture possible even among the unredeemed.”⁶⁹ Because much culturally renewing work, especially the work of artists contributing to public art, is done in a secular context, knowledge of how common grace operates can foster a better understanding of how art can advance the common good.

The Reformed doctrine of common grace traces its roots to John Calvin,⁷⁰ the sixteenth century Swiss pastor and theologian known for his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin was the first thinker to define the concept of common grace, even though he did not always use that exact language. Calvin described this common grace as the aspect of God’s providence by which He maintains human life and culture as well as the rest of creation for his own purposes.⁷¹ In distinction from the more familiar redemptive grace of God, common grace sustains the creation order while special grace restores and transforms it. Calvin suggested that common grace was interposed by God between sin and God’s creation. It makes manifest traces of the image of God continuing in mankind, specifically through all sorts of natural gifts, such as reason, music, the arts, and science.⁷²

After Calvin, the doctrine of common grace lay largely dormant for 400 years until two neo-Calvinist Dutch theologians, Abraham Kuyper and Herman

⁶⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 2:17.

⁷⁰ Raymond van Leeuwen in translator’s introduction to “Common Grace,” 35.

⁷¹ Bavinck, “Common Grace,” 36. (Citing Calvin’s *Institutes*, 2.2.3.)

⁷² *Ibid.*, 51.

Bavinck, revived it in the last half of the nineteenth century.⁷³ Kuyper and Bavinck both built their understandings of common grace on Calvin's foundational work but articulated them differently. Kuyper is likely the better known of the two Dutchmen. He famously said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"⁷⁴ Kuyper said this in 1888 during his inaugural address at the dedication of the Free University in Amsterdam. It has come to represent Kuyper's underlying belief in the sovereignty of God and support of his articulation of Christian's living a public theology in the world.

As a pastor, theologian, and statesman, Kuyper developed his view of Christian participation in society in reliance on the doctrine of common grace. Although he was more a prophetic practitioner than a systematic theologian,⁷⁵ Kuyper wrote three volumes on common grace. Over the course of those volumes some development in his theology emerged. Building off the foundation present in Calvin and endeavoring to distinguish common grace from its counterpart special grace, Kuyper explained that special grace (regeneration) removes the cancer of sin by taking out its roots and giving in its place the power of eternal life. In contrast, Kuyper describes common grace:

Common grace does nothing of the sort. It keeps down but does not quench. It tames but does not change the nature. It keeps back and holds in leash, but

⁷³ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁴ *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488.

⁷⁵ Vincent Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 155.

this, as soon as the restraint is removed, the evil races forth anew of itself. It trims the wild shoots, but does not heal the root.⁷⁶

From this entry point on common grace, Kuyper's understanding receives further nuance. He later writes, "There is added to this first constant operation of common grace... another, wholly different, operation to make human life and the life of the whole world... develop itself more fully and richly."⁷⁷ As one later commentator on Kuyper's theology summarizes, "Thus, next to the stemming of sin and curse, common grace in Kuyper's view also operates for 'progress': it serves and promotes cultural development and progress, and makes these possible."⁷⁸ To summarize the outline of common grace theology in Kuyper's conception: it begins in man's soul keeping 'small sparks' of divinity from dying out. Next, it supports the body of man by pushing back coming death. Third, it produces positive activity in the world of man.⁷⁹

As Kuyper's view of common grace developed throughout his life, he discovered resources that allowed for 'progress' within human history. The impact of common grace applied by individuals through their work in the world is evident in the fuller realizing of a potential latent within creation. Wheaton College theologian Vincent Bacote, an expert on Kuyper's public theology summarizes, "For the human race at large, life improves as a result of tilling the soil of

⁷⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972), 15-16. Here Van Til is quoting from Kuyper's first volume on Common Grace.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17. Here Van Til is quoting from Kuyper's second volume on Common Grace.

⁷⁸ S. U. Zuidema, "Common Grace and Christian Action in Abraham Kuyper," *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatkunde* 24 (1954), 14. Translated by Harry Van Dyke. http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com/rpp/docs/s_u_zuidema_on_kuyper.pdf.

⁷⁹ Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 16.

creation, made fertile through common grace.”⁸⁰ This tilling, and its subsequent improvement of earthly life, is not limited to people of Christian faith. Often non-Christians accomplish the work of progress. As Bacote puts it, “Common grace is the reason there is so much to admire from non-Christians.”⁸¹ Furthermore, Kuyper connected this human development to a theology of the image of God—the full glory revealed within a multi-valent creation. As humankind employs the resources of common grace, it reflects the image of God with ever greater accuracy.⁸²

Perhaps because of the development present within his articulation of common grace, various commentators⁸³ have pointed out inconsistencies in Kuyper especially on his explanation of the relationship between common and special grace. In his defense, however, Kuyper was seldom trying to write theology. Instead, he was writing to motivate people to act.⁸⁴ In contrast to Kuyper’s approach stands the work of his contemporary Herman Bavinck, a longtime professor of systematic theology at both Kampen University and the Free University perhaps best known for his multi-volume work *Reformed Dogmatics*.

In an address called “Common Grace” that he gave at Kampen University in 1894, Bavinck revealed his indebtedness to Calvin’s prior work on the topic.

⁸⁰ Bacote, 103.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁸³ Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 16.

⁸⁴ Bacote, 109.

Bavinck distinguished that common grace sustains the creation order while special grace restores and transforms it. He writes, "In his teaching on common grace, Calvin has expressed a principle which is uncommonly fruitful, yet was subsequently misconceived and denigrated all too often."⁸⁵ Systematician that he is, Bavinck then traces the development of Calvin's theology of common grace back to the shortcomings of the Roman Catholic Church. He sees Calvin's explanation of common grace in reaction to the wrong view of Rome, which placed too high a view on natural man. While Rome postulated a super-added gift given in support of man's natural gifts as enough help him reach a supernatural destination, the Reformers insisted on a view of man in which the divine image was thoroughly tarnished by the fall. But, in Bavinck's opinion, Calvin's view also avoids the errors of his sixteenth century contemporaries, Luther and Zwingli. Luther separated common grace into two distinct spheres, and Zwingli extended the influence of special grace to non-Christians. Conversely, Calvin maintained a clear distinction between general and special grace; the working of the Spirit in all creation and work of sanctification in those who believe.⁸⁶ In Bavinck's reading of Calvin then, common grace was interposed between sin and God's creation.

What Calvin's approach to common grace promotes, in Bavinck's formulation, is an appreciation for both the seriousness of sin and the legitimacy of the natural world.⁸⁷ He believed that a recovery of a full-blooded commitment

⁸⁵ Bavinck, "Common Grace," 39.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

to Calvin's view was necessary in order to avoid the twin ills of Pelagianism and pietism. Bavinck thought it necessary to resuscitate common grace because in Reformed churches the principle had been frequently weakened or adulterated.⁸⁸ As he scanned the intervening 400 years of church history between Calvin's day and his own, Bavinck saw how some theologians scorned common grace and acknowledged nothing besides special grace, leading to a flight from the world.⁸⁹ While initially an Anabaptist view, this posture eventually won a wider place of influence in Reformed churches as well.

Another helpful entry point into Bavinck's view is found in Jan Veenhof's Ph.D. dissertation on the Dutchman's theology. The excerpt is studded with insights dealing with the relationship between nature and grace. For instance, Veenhof quotes Bavinck: "Faith appears to be great, indeed, when a person renounces all and shuts himself up in isolation. But even greater, it seems to me, is the person who, while keeping the kingdom of heaven as a treasure, at the same time brings it out into the world as leaven."⁹⁰ Reflecting on Jesus' parables on the kingdom,⁹¹ Bavinck suggests an important tension between Christians treasuring God's grace and unleashing God's grace into the world. God's grace is meant for the whole world, not just those regenerated by special grace, so that it can work its way through creation as leaven.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁹⁰ Herman Bavinck, *De katholiciteit van christendom en kirk* (Kampen, 1888), 20, quoted in Jan Veenhof, "Nature and Grace in Bavinck," trans. by A.M. Wolters, *Pro Rege* 34, No. 4 (June 2006): 17.

⁹¹ Matthew 13

Bavinck's position is that the fundamental work of grace restores nature, of which humankind is central. Grace, he maintains, is not opposed to nature, as the church—particularly in its pietistic strains—sometimes teaches, and as many evangelicals assume. Rather, grace returns nature to its normal, God-intended development. Grace does not abolish nature but affirms and restores it. Taking this argument a step further, grace does not conflict with humanity. While grace is anti-sin, it is decidedly pro-human. As Bavinck writes, “The Christian and human are not in conflict with one another....The Christian is the true man, on every front and in every domain. Christianity is not opposed to nature, but to sin. Christ came, not to destroy the works of the Father, but only those of the devil.”⁹²

Bavinck extends these ideas in his Kampen address of 1894. Answering the rhetorical question of why God preserves a sin-polluted world, he writes, “Is it not because natural life, in all its forms has value in his eyes in spite of sin's corruption?”⁹³ He continues by saying that in addition to destroying the sin-polluted works of the devil, Christ came to restore the works of the Father and to renew humanity after the image of Adam. As such, Bavinck concludes, “Christianity does not introduce a single substantial foreign element into the creation. It creates no new cosmos but rather makes the cosmos new. It restores what was corrupted by sin. It atones the guilty and cures what is sick; the wounded it heals.”⁹⁴

⁹² Herman Bavinck, *De Bazuin* L, 41 (Sept. 26, 1902), quoted in Veenhof, 25.

⁹³ Bavinck, “Common Grace,” 60.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

Despite the rediscovery of common grace theology by Kuyper and Bavinck, the doctrine did not earn a unanimous reception. Men like Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof, both ministers in the Christian Reformed Church in the United States during the early twentieth century, wrote vigorously against common grace. To them it was inconceivable that God should in any way be graciously inclined to those who were not elect.⁹⁵ In their reasoning, the idea of common grace threatened the classic Reformed doctrine of total depravity. If natural man can do some good, then he is not totally depraved.⁹⁶ The anti-common grace views of Hoeksema and Danhof were condemned by the 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church.⁹⁷ In response to these challenges to common grace, the Christian Reformed Church, in many ways the American spiritual heir to the tradition of the Dutch neo-Calvinists, reasserted that the unregenerate, though incapable of any saving good, can perform civic good. In so doing, the Christian Reformed Church was stating that the cultural activity of people, whether Christian or non-Christian, in the world is an instrument of God's common grace.⁹⁸

The dispute over orthodox articulation of common grace theology did not end with the Synod's demarcation in 1924. Cornelius Van Til, a professor of apologetics at Westminster Seminary reignited the debate in the 1940s, by presenting a view of common grace that questioned both Kuyper and Bavinck. In

⁹⁵ Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 18.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

Van Til's estimation those seminal Dutch neo-Calvinist thinkers were, "to an extent, untrue to their own principles."⁹⁹ Van Til's primary complaint about the common grace theology of Kuyper and Bavinck was that they failed to effectively break from the natural theology of the Roman Catholic tradition.¹⁰⁰ While Van Til's line of reasoning is not always easy to follow because of its dependence on esoteric philosophical argumentation, his purpose is to stress the moral bankruptcy of natural man, that is, those not regenerated by the special grace of God. Van Til then outlines the inevitable epistemological implications of the moral bankruptcy of natural man. The unregenerate, he maintains, are bound by an epistemology that is everywhere informed by their ethical hostility to God, even when they are not fully self-conscious of their own position.¹⁰¹

Van Til explains, "What then more particularly do I mean by saying that epistemologically the believer and the non-believer have nothing in common? I mean that every sinner looks through colored glasses. And these colored glasses are cemented to his face."¹⁰² Elsewhere he says with a similar vividness, "All looks yellow to the jaundiced eye."¹⁰³ The present-day theologian Richard Pratt, himself influenced by Van Til, interprets what his teacher means:

In principle, non-Christians have rejected the epistemic foundation that makes understanding truth possible. But *in practice* they do not carry through with their principle. God's common grace enables unbelievers to have a degree of true understanding about many things.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Van Til, *Defense of Faith*, 189-190.

¹⁰² Ibid., 259.

¹⁰³ Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 95.

In other words, only their own inconsistent commitment to rebellion against God permits non-Christians to borrow from God's general and special revelation.¹⁰⁴

Van Til is committed to a firm antithesis between Christians and non-Christians that prevents ideas from being common to both. He fears that ceding some common ground would lead to a result in which non-Christians do not face an epistemological challenge in those shared areas.

Because of his blistering critique of Kuyper and Bavinck—the architects of common grace theology—some accused Van Til of holding a doctrine of absolute depravity, or even of resurrecting the previously countermanded arguments of men like Hoeksema and Dahof.¹⁰⁵ Van Til, however, insisted that he was merely keen to maintain a distinction between the regenerate and unregenerate. He emphasized that natural man was at odds with God. Covenant keepers could use the work done by covenant breakers, in spite of themselves, to advance the human activity of culture making. He wrote, “As Solomon used the cedars of Lebanon, the products of rain and sunshine that had come to the covenant breakers... so also those who through the Spirit of God have believed in Christ may and must use all gifts of all men everywhere in order by means of them to perform the cultural task of mankind.”¹⁰⁶ While Van Til affirmed his appreciation for the contributions of non-Christians to the sciences and arts, he always

¹⁰⁴ Richard Pratt, “Common Misunderstandings of Van Til’s Apologetics,” *IJIM Magazine Online* 1, No. 40, (December 1999), accessed February 17, 2017, <http://www.thirdmill.org/files/english/html/th TH.h.Pratt.VanTil.1.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 148.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 118-9.

clarified that these advances are only the result of God's common grace working against the sinful tendencies of unbelievers.¹⁰⁷

Both in Van Til's day and since then, other Reformed theological voices have wondered if he took too negative a view of natural man.¹⁰⁸ Richard Mouw concedes that much of common grace is shrouded in mystery, but he resolutely maintains the importance of recognizing that despite the fallen-ness and perversion of creation, it is still clothed with God's excellent gifts.¹⁰⁹ Mouw quotes Kuyper with a powerful image to show how God's deep love for creation, made manifest through common grace, persists even when that created reality is marred by the ubiquitous effects of sin. The presence of defect within creation insults the love of the creator: "It is as though you took a child, and before the eyes of his mother struck him down, and maimed him for life. It is to defy the love of the Maker for his handiwork, willfully giving offense, and grieving the Maker in that about which His heart is most sensitive."¹¹⁰ God's love for his creation, including all human beings, endures despite sin's presence.

Miroslav Volf, like Mouw, is another contemporary thinker who pushes back against the pessimistic view of Van Til. Instead, Volf posits that biblical texts such as Revelation 21 indicate that the pure and noble achievements of non-

¹⁰⁷ Pratt, "Common Misunderstandings."

¹⁰⁸ Van Til, *Common Grace and the Gospel*, 148.

¹⁰⁹ Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 29.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 100.

Christians, as made possible by common grace, will be incorporated into the eschatological new creation. He writes:

If we affirm that Christ is the Lord of all humanity--indeed, of the whole universe--and not only of those who profess him as their Lord, and that he rules through the power of the Spirit, then we must also assume that the Spirit of God is active in some way in all people, not only in those who consciously live in the Spirit's life-giving power.¹¹¹

Here Volf is saying that common grace opens wide the windows to the Spirit's work in this world. For an evangelical culture which has maintained strong demarcation of insiders and outsiders and which has established functional practices to further solidify these divisions, conclusions like Mouw's and Volf's can be uncomfortable. For others, however, this belief in how the activity of God in all people promotes work for the common can help to correct false dichotomies. As New York pastor David Kim concludes, "Today, many Christians around the world feel torn between their calling to be faithful in the 'world' and their calling to be faithful in the 'church.' Unfortunately, these options are mistakenly presented as mutually exclusive categories."¹¹² On the basis of common grace theology, Kim wants to re-establish that good can be done not only in the church but also in the world.

The prevailing discomfort over the pervasiveness of the Spirit's influence through common grace is perhaps nowhere more pronounced than in church's uneasy relationship with the artistic disciplines. Practicing artist and professor Deborah Sokolove points out that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

¹¹¹ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 118.

¹¹² David Kim, "Sin and Grace in the City, Part 1," *Comment*. October 12, 2012, accessed December 23, 2012, <http://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/3572/sin-and-grace-in-the-city-part-1/>.

the arts became a substitute religion.¹¹³ Because they traffic not in the language of rational proposition, but much more so in the realm of the imagination, the arts are ignored, dismissed, or condemned out of hand by the church. What is needed is an approach to the arts informed by the Apostle Paul's interaction with the art of his day in Athens, as recorded in Acts 17. There, Paul observes 'altars to the unknown god' which he acknowledges as beautiful and compelling. Art critic Dan Siedell argues that many such altars exist today, as part of the repository of public art. He urges the church to receive these cultural artifacts of common grace "and to reveal and illuminate their insights into what they are only able to point to, not to name."¹¹⁴

Bavinck noted how common grace shapes the practice of the artistic disciplines and insisted that Christ came not to do away with the world but to restore and preserve it—including the arts.¹¹⁵ He explained that patterns of human artistry first developed from line of Cain¹¹⁶ and from early on God indicated that they could be sanctified by Holy Spirit. In establishing this Bavinck said, "The arts and sciences have their *principium* not in the special grace of regeneration and conversion, but in the natural gifts and talents that God in his common grace has also given nonbelievers."¹¹⁷ He cites various biblical examples like Moses learning the wisdom of the Egypt court, Solomon relying on

¹¹³ Sokolove, 135.

¹¹⁴ Siedell, 11.

¹¹⁵ Bavinck, "Common Grace," 64.

¹¹⁶ Genesis 5

¹¹⁷ Bavinck, "Common Grace," 64.

the refined craftsmanship of Hiram, Daniel studying under the best Chaldean teachers, and the wise men of the Orient testifying to the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ himself.

Jeremy Begbie, an English theologian now working at Duke University, has written a great deal on the intersection of common grace and the arts. While he is eager to establish a basis for common grace, he challenges the Dutch neo-Calvinist approach, albeit on different grounds than Van Til. Begbie acknowledges that Kuyper issued a "clarion call to awaken the devout from pietistic slumbers and remind them of the universal kingship of Christ. ... no withdrawal into the refuge of a religious ghetto."¹¹⁸ He also acknowledges that Kuyper and Bavinck demonstrate that the theological backing for such engagement only comes from Calvinist worldview.¹¹⁹ But Begbie eventually departs from the neo-Calvinist position, accusing the project of being too dependent on the idea of law and of not being christological enough. Extending back to the Dutch theologians, Begbie sees the typical defense of common grace rooted in God's legal justice rather than in his love. Instead Begbie counters by writing, "Responsible developing of the earth depends on refusing to see creation outside its relation to the divine love."¹²⁰ Furthermore, Begbie sees within many of these common grace discussions a chronic tendency to schematize grace.¹²¹ In an effort to correct this emphasis, Begbie suggests that common grace

¹¹⁸ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 82.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

theology should be built from a thoroughly trinitarian foundation, instead of God's naked omnipotence, which he names as the prevailing tendency in the neo-Calvinist position.¹²²

After summarizing the strengths and deficiencies in the neo-Calvinist position, Begbie, in his own positive statement on the role of common grace in supporting human artistry, relies heavily on the themes of divine love and not merely decree and a trinitarian, as opposed to merely fatherly, view of God. This trinitarian conviction is apparent as he writes, "Human creativity is supremely about sharing through the Spirit in the creative purpose of the Father as he draws all things to himself through the Son."¹²³

Like Kuyper and Bavinck before him, Begbie urges caution over drawing too sharp a demarcation between God's creative and redemptive activity, between sustaining and renewing work.¹²⁴ "The structures of the created world," he says, "are God's gifts of grace to be enjoyed; they are channels which enable true creativity."¹²⁵ Here he echoes the teachings of the Dutchmen who saw common grace and special grace working on the same terrain. Kuyper explores this theme through his theologizing on the role of the Holy Spirit, which is not confined to the elect, but is present as a quickening and life sustaining force in all creatures. "If we admit that He quickens life in that which is created by the Father and by the Son," Kuyper writes of the Holy Spirit, "what does He do in the re-

¹²² Ibid., 181.

¹²³ Ibid., 179.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 180

¹²⁵ Ibid., 179.

creation but once more quicken life in him that is called of the Father and redeemed by the Son.”¹²⁶ And as Bavinck wrote in *Our Reasonable Faith*, “Grace is something other and higher than nature, but it nevertheless joins up with nature, does not destroy it but restores it rather. Grace... [flows] on the river-bed which has been dug out in the natural relationships of the human race.”¹²⁷ Begbie develops this position with his christological emphasis. He states that the true purpose of humanity is only discovered in the incarnate son, Jesus, the true image of God. “In humankind, creation finds a voice; to use George Herbert’s word, each of us invited to be a ‘secretary’ of praise.”¹²⁸

Begbie’s christological revision of the neo-Calvinist view of common grace finds an analogue in the conclusions of Vincent Bacote, who reasserts the central place of the Holy Spirit as the “missing link” between common grace and public engagement in human culture. Bacote claims that Kuyper’s view of the cosmic activity of the Spirit is implicitly linked to common grace.¹²⁹ He writes:

Kuyper understood the cosmic work of the Spirit as that which seeks God’s glory in a perfected *telos*, upholds and maintains the world, and resists the sinful curse on creation so that creation may develop and move toward its intended end. This aligns with the purpose of common grace, revealing the Spirit’s role as the energizing force of these capacities.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1900), 46.

¹²⁷ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 93.

¹²⁸ Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise*, 177.

¹²⁹ Bacote, 114.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

Although they approach the topic from different directions, and come to their conclusions some decades apart, Begbie and Bacote provide a helpful nuance to the Dutch neo-Calvinist position on common grace; it is fully trinitarian, fully appreciative of the humanity of Christ, and fully cognizant of the activity of the Holy Spirit.

The *Imago Dei*

Another important dimension of the Reformed doctrine of common grace and its bearing on the nature of God's creation is how the church understands the concept of the *imago Dei*. Brief reflection on the *imago Dei* particularly will elucidate further ways that common grace informs church patronage of the arts.

Biblical theologies of common grace often begin with the creation accounts recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis, partly because the main purpose of God's common grace is the preservation of creation.¹³¹ These theologies must sooner rather than later reckon with the *imago Dei*, a term which as early as the New Testament period became an abbreviated way of talking about what Christians considered the original status and calling of humanity.¹³² The concept of the *imago Dei* derives from God's creation of humanity on the sixth creation day as recorded in Genesis:

So God created man [humankind] in his own image
in the image of God he created them
male and female he created them.¹³³

¹³¹ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 87.

¹³² Douglas John Hall, *Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 61.

¹³³ Genesis 1:27

From this verse, writer Andy Crouch explains what it means to be made in the image of God by looking backwards in the first chapter of Genesis to the picture of God presented there. “The God we meet in these verses,” Crouch writes, “so unlike the alternative gods on offer in the ancient Near East, is first of all a source of limitless, extraordinary creativity.”¹³⁴ Crouch goes on to posit that humanity’s *imago Dei* creation follows the pattern of God’s own creating and ordering of the world. As a result humans in the *imago Dei* are both creators and rulers.¹³⁵

Douglas John Hall, a Canadian theologian who wrote a lengthy exposition on the *imago Dei*, begins by outlining some of the historic approaches to understanding the doctrine. Some interpreters have believed that the *imago Dei* refers to a physical resemblance between the human creature and God.¹³⁶ Others have suggested that the *imago Dei* primarily concerns human dominion over other creatures.¹³⁷ Hall then cites twentieth century Swiss theologian Karl Barth who, in Hall’s words, “turns away from the tedious but entrenched practice of identifying the *imago* with some ‘quality of man’ and starts us thinking human beings in relational terms.”¹³⁸ Building from Barth’s suggestion, in his writing on the *imago Dei*, Hall is keen to emphasize its relational, responsive, and representative connotations.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 21.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³⁶ Hall, 70.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

From this foundation, Hall provides a positive rethinking of human nature and vocation by using the *imago Dei* in a way that rejects two common assumptions: 1) Western Christianity's assumption that humanity is above nature and 2) the romantic reaction that seeks to put humanity back into nature.¹⁴⁰ Hall's positive re-thinking instead argues that the image of God resides more in rightly relating to God than it does in any inherent substantialistic conception of the image of God that focuses on human qualities like rationality, morality, or spirituality.¹⁴¹ Building from Calvin's treatment of the *imago Dei*, Hall argues that the phrase is best understood in relational terms. Calvin uses a metaphor of a mirror to explain the image of God. English theologian T. F. Torrance summarizes Calvin's view as follows: "That is man's true rectitude: to be created in the image of God is to be opposite to or to respond to Him in such a way that God may be able to behold Himself in man as in a mirror."¹⁴²

Crouch's explication of the *imago Dei* hits similar notes. He writes, "When the human beings, male and female, are created 'in God's image,' surely the primary implication is that they will reflect the creative character of their Maker."¹⁴³ Additionally, he suggests human creativity that faithfully images God also requires cultivation; namely, ordering and dividing what exists so that the best cultural goods remain.¹⁴⁴ Crouch goes on to explain that the creative-ness

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 59.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 91.

¹⁴² quoted in Hall, 104.

¹⁴³ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 104.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 107.

embedded within the *imago Dei* has a relational aspect to it. Humans are more fully imaging God when their efforts at creativity both emerge from a lively, living community and participate in unlocking the promise of work that has gone before.¹⁴⁵ Once again Crouch arrives at conclusions that echo the work of Seerveld. Warning against a view of any human as independent and thinking particularly of the conception of the artist as “autonomous genius,” he explains how the *imago Dei* flows out of a communal human experience. Seerveld writes, “truly God-praising artistry can flourish only when the artists is deeply embedded both in an artistic community and in the wider, societal communion of sinning saints.”¹⁴⁶

This relational perspective on image is fruitful. It is a perceptive wide enough to promote consideration humankind’s relationship with the created world. Therefore, the exercise of dominion with which humanity is charged in Genesis 1 is not indiscriminate rule over, but expression of relationship within, the creation. The image of God is not meant to be a source of pride; rather, it is meant to lead humanity towards greater service to God and to the creation in which it finds itself embedded. The tasks of dominion are tasks of stewardship, representing God as his emissaries. Another dimension of the relational understanding of the *imago Dei* bears on how artists are viewed, particularly in light of the creator God. Begbie explains:

If artists and pastors want to begin to set an agenda together for the next few years... to rethink it along these Christ-centered and trinitarian lines...

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 105.

¹⁴⁶ Seerveld, 26.

It would mean we would speak a little less about the artist as creator (which so easily plays into images of artists as quasi gods creating out of nothing) and rather more about the artist as *re*-creator; a little less about creativity and more about *re*-creativity; a little less about creating new world and more about sharing by the Spirit God's re-creation of the world he has already made.¹⁴⁷

Begbie's point about focusing on the Spirit's work of re-creation in the world accords with what Bavinck claimed one hundred years earlier as he described the effects of common grace. Bavinck explained that Christ did not come just to restore the religious life of man while leaving the rest of life undisturbed. Rather, Bavinck said, "The love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion of the Holy Spirit extend even as far as sin has corrupted."¹⁴⁸ Thus, Begbie and Bavinck agree that the *imago Dei* is restored in the fullness of humanity's relationship to creation.

While Hall admits the relative paucity of explicit Old Testament uses of the phrase now translated *imago Dei*,¹⁴⁹ he explains how the idea is widely present in Jewish writings.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, he outlines how the idea is picked up by various New Testament Christians. These first Christians believed, according to Hall's explanation, that "in the man Jesus of Nazareth they had been given a decisive glimpse of true humanity."¹⁵¹ Hall is saying that the New Testament picks up the language of image and likeness from select references in Genesis and applies it to Jesus Christ: the second, the new, and the last Adam.

¹⁴⁷ Begbie, "The Future" in *For the Beauty of the Church*, 181.

¹⁴⁸ Bavinck, "Common Grace," 61.

¹⁴⁹ Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 5:9, and Genesis 9:1

¹⁵⁰ Hall, 74.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

The consistent teaching of the New Testament regarding the *imago Dei* is that Jesus Christ Himself bears the image.¹⁵² Jesus is true humanity. The apostle Paul states this clearly: “He [i.e. the beloved Son] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”¹⁵³ Jesus is the one through whom all things were created. He is the one in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. To understand the *imago Dei* one needs to look no further than Jesus Christ. Significantly, Hall points out, this New Testament teaching of Jesus as the image coincides with teaching about Jesus as a suffering human, the one who made peace by the blood of his cross.¹⁵⁴ For that reason, Hall explains, the image of God cannot consist of the most exalted human capacities, precisely because Jesus embodies the image in his humiliation.

Two other New Testament passages draw out these associations, both in describing Jesus as the image of God and in pointing towards his suffering and self-emptying as constitutive of how he bears that image. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul refers to “the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”¹⁵⁵ The larger context of Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians is an unflinching theology of the cross. Paul describes his ministry in terms that are unimpressive, by human standards, because they are mimicking the pattern of Christ: “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be

¹⁵² Ibid., 76.

¹⁵³ Colossians 1:15; in Greek: εικον του θεου του αορατουσ.

¹⁵⁴ Colossians 1:20

¹⁵⁵ Greek: εικον θεου

manifested in our bodies.”¹⁵⁶. Likewise in Philippians 2 Paul substitutes a different Greek word—μορφε—for εικον, but with essentially the same meaning: “Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God [μορφε θεου]... made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant [μορφεν δουλου].”¹⁵⁷ Hall points out that Jesus Christ is the image *par excellence*, who is also the servant *par excellence*.¹⁵⁸

Another emphasis within the New Testament’s teaching on the *imago Dei* describes how believers are being conformed to the image as it is embodied by Christ. This second emphasis, while dependent on the primary christological meaning of the *imago Dei* in the New Testament, is no less significant. Several passages describe how within humanity, the image of God has been lost and must be restored through a life of faith in Christ. In his letter to the Romans Paul writes, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image [εικονοσ] of the Son.”¹⁵⁹ In the letter to the church at Colossae, Paul reminds the Christians that they have “put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”¹⁶⁰ As Hall concludes, “the restoration of the ‘lost’ image is nothing more or less than the restoration of our human relationship with God.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:10

¹⁵⁷ Philippians 2:6-7

¹⁵⁸ Hall, 80.

¹⁵⁹Romans 8:29

¹⁶⁰ Colossians 3:9-10

¹⁶¹ Hall, 81.

Jeremy Begbie who earlier offered helpful critical interaction with the stream of Dutch neo-Calvinists on common grace, strives to approach creation and humanity from a christological perspective. As he does, he ends up aligning with Hall's reflections on the nature of the *imago Dei*. "Implicit in all I have tried to say," Begbie writes, "is that the core of being human is to be correctly related—whether to God, others or the natural order."¹⁶² It is only in Jesus Christ, Begbie continues, that men and women discover their true humanity as being appropriately related in three ways: to God, to each other, and to the non-human world.¹⁶³

Where Begbie urges a fully christological conception of common grace, Vincent Bacote urges a fully pneumatological conception of common grace.¹⁶⁴ In his study of Kuyper's common grace theology, Bacote identifies language resonates with work usually attributed to the Holy Spirit. The connection between common grace and the Holy Spirit that Bacote finds within Kuyper's work leads him to call for responsible stewardship in the world. Such emphasis on stewardship echoes the work of both Hall and Begbie on *imago Dei*.¹⁶⁵ Weaving together these themes, Bacote concludes, "Because of the Spirit's role in common grace, all persons are called to greater responsibility as stewards of creation. The recipients of particular grace have a greater motive for heeding the call to responsible stewardship, but common grace provides even the

¹⁶² Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 181.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁶⁴ Bacote, 115.

¹⁶⁵ Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise*, 179, and Hall, 195.

unregenerate with some capacity for developing creation to the glory of God.”¹⁶⁶

Created in the *imago Dei* and thus related to the triune God, all of humanity bears the capacity to exercise dominion in the world.

Some of that dominion will find expression in artistry. Contemporary philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff extends the conclusion about the *imago Dei*'s connection to stewardship to the arts particularly. Wolterstorff observes how artists, insofar as they cultivate the physical world in a way that benefits humanity through the influence of common grace, share in the fundamental human vocation of subduing the earth.¹⁶⁷ Wolterstorff drives at the inescapable materiality of the artistic expression of stewardship. Seerveld, too, discusses that theme, stressing a holistic conception of the human artist. “Art is always the act of a whole man or woman,” he says, “and no matter what form it takes—coloured shapes, pulsing tones, rhymed words, stylized gesture—if it be honestly done, the art embodies heart, soul, mind and strength of the artists as he or she responds knowingly to the world of God around him.”¹⁶⁸

In describing the kingdom of heaven, Bacote cites Van Ruler who said, “The image of the kingdom of God is not like a sea gull that—in the incarnation—swoops down and skims the surface of the water of temporal reality only to fly away and soar in the clouds.”¹⁶⁹ The Spirit doesn't skim the surface and depart. It hovers over creation. What Bacote is saying is that the long term presence of the

¹⁶⁶ Bacote, 141.

¹⁶⁷ Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 77.

¹⁶⁸ Seerveld, 27.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

Spirit in the created order through common grace enables a focus on this world.¹⁷⁰

Begbie agrees and particularly sees the arts, because of their inevitable materiality, as a dimension of a this-world focus that can direct humanity in its exercise of dominion. Begbie argues for “a recovery of a deeper sense of our embeddedness in creation, and of the physicality of artistic creation.”¹⁷¹ Catholic critic Gregory Wolfe comes to a similar conclusion, writing, “The artist works in an incarnational medium, profoundly aware of contingency and embodiedness. And yet art’s very greatness is the way that it can adumbrate the presence of grace in and through the messiness of our lives.”¹⁷²

What both Begbie and Wolfe are highlighting is the tendency to misunderstand the meaning of the *imago Dei* by distancing it from the physicality of human life. Persistence in this view leads to a false view of the incarnation—namely one that imagines Jesus holding his nose while taking human form. Several thinkers view the incarnation of Jesus—the eternal Son of God who took on real flesh and dwelt among humanity—as a corrective to such a misunderstanding. The incarnation is God’s great proof of his interest in and commitment to the stuff of the earth. As Hans Rookmaaker says, “We should remind ourselves that Christ did not come to make us Christians or to save our souls only but that he came to redeem us that we might be human in the full

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 123.

¹⁷¹ Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise*, 206.

¹⁷² Wolfe, *The Operation of Grace*, 51.

sense of that word.”¹⁷³ Bridging from the historical fact and the particular physicality of the incarnation, scholar Trevor Hart see the arts as “an echo of God’s own creative goodness.”¹⁷⁴

Wendell Berry—a writer of both non-fiction and fiction—provides a helpful example of the incarnational power of art through his stories about Port William, an imaginary community set in Kentucky. Berry’s characters are real. They are not “stained-glass people.”¹⁷⁵ They are flawed and messy. Their fingernails are not clean. Neither are their hearts. In showing the people of Port William, Berry is showing true humanity, confronted nowhere more obviously than the hulking human-ness of Berry’s protagonist, Ptolemy Proudfoot. Although a faithful Christian, like many others in Berry’s small town setting, Proudfoot is first a human being. Berry describes him in *Turn Back the Bed*: “To some, it seemed that Ptolemy Proudfoot didn’t laugh like a Christian. He laughed too loud and too long, and his merriment seemed a little too self-sufficient--as if, had there been enough funny stories and enough to breath to laugh at them with, he might not *need* to go to Heaven.”¹⁷⁶

Richard Mouw explains that the theology of common grace, with its underlying assumptions of a substantive humanness shared by all, provides the

¹⁷³ H.R. Rookmaaker, *Art Needs No Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1978), 20.

¹⁷⁴ Trevor Hart, "Through the Arts: Hearing, Seeing, and Touching the Truth" in *Beholding the Glory*, 3.

¹⁷⁵ Frederick Buechner, *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 273.

¹⁷⁶ Wendell Berry, *This Distant Land* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2005), 210.

ground for exploring human common-ness.¹⁷⁷ Hans Rookmaaker observed earlier, "Everyone lives in the same world as the Christian, bearing God's image. This is the point of contact between the Christian and the man of today."¹⁷⁸ Common grace, mediated through the *imago Dei* creates common ground and a point of contact for all artists and all people.

Contemporary Survey of Patronage

In order to investigate how artists might be supported in their work by patronage, it is necessary to offer a contemporary survey of the practice of patronage, particularly as it is understood by faith communities. Patronage has a long history. Church patronage—or more broadly, patronage provided by communities of faith—likewise has a long history. While a comprehensive study of the history of patronage is beyond the scope of this study, an introductory survey can provide a helpful context.

Deborah Sokolove, both an accomplished artist in her own right and a professor whose scholarship focuses on the intersection of art and religion, writes, "From the very beginning, the arts have had a tenuous place in the church."¹⁷⁹ She traces the church's ambivalent support of the arts and artists all the way back to the New Testament church. While acknowledging evidence of at least the presence of artistic disciplines in some of the earliest churches, Sokolove points out that the arts were given a hesitant reception because of their

¹⁷⁷ Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair*, 98.

¹⁷⁸ Rookmaaker, *The Creative Gift* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone Books, 1972), 134.

¹⁷⁹ Sokolove, 130.

connection to emotionalism and to idol worship.¹⁸⁰ Some of the early church's uneasiness with the arts can be attributed to the influence of ancient Greek thought that divided evil matter from spiritual good. Since the earliest Christian community this line of reasoning has fueled Christian opposition to art.¹⁸¹

The Protestant Reformation also played a significant role in shaping church patronage for the arts. Sokolove explains that since the Reformation, “for nearly 500 hundred years, visual art [has been] suspect in most Protestant churches.”¹⁸² Historically, part of the effort of the Protestant Reformation was the removal of ornamentation and a return to biblical practice of religion. As historian Leo Koerner writes in his seminal work *Reformation of the Image*, “faith’s renovation required the destruction of images.”¹⁸³ This renovation led, in many instances, to a form of iconoclasm that tore down the religious art present within the church out of fear that it threatened to distract believers from the central message of Christianity. The removal of much of this art was a reaction against the corrupt church economy of art that had emerged in which pictures were bought and brought to the church by individuals in hope or expectation of a spiritual benefit to that individual.¹⁸⁴ The result, however, was a church culture

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 130.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 131.

¹⁸² Sokolove, 2.

¹⁸³ Leo Koerner, *Reformation of the Image* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 27.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 40.

that, if it did not entirely remove art, merely tolerated it, insofar as it served to instruct believers in the doctrines of faith.¹⁸⁵

Therefore, an impact of Reformation practices on art within the church was a shift towards didacticism. The recovery of the centrality of the word brought about by Martin Luther and other theologians meant that artistry became subordinated to message. Through Luther art came to serve the word; it had only an educational purpose.¹⁸⁶ In its worst forms, this tendency towards didacticism resulted in “dogma painting,” a decidedly bad form of art. Despite their intentions of stripping away excesses from the Roman Catholic Church, Reformers became known as enemies of culture.¹⁸⁷ The impulse of the Reformation has exerted a steady influence on the church’s understanding of art for the last 500 years. As Dan Siedell explains, “Since the Reformation, the Protestant church in its myriad manifestations has attempted to strip itself of all but the most necessary of ingredients for worship, for fear that the purity and simplicity of the gospel is compromised.”¹⁸⁸

Even centuries later, an heir of the Reformation like Abraham Kuyper, repeats much of the suspicion towards art, echoing the gnostic tendency to view art as lower than the far more noble sphere of religion. In his Stone Lectures, delivered at Princeton Seminary in 1898, Kuyper explains why the church is at odds with art. He says that for Calvinism to develop its own art style would have

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 28.

¹⁸⁶ Siedell, 135.

¹⁸⁷ Koerner, 28.

¹⁸⁸ Siedell, 134.

been to slide back to a lower level of religious life. Instead, he argues that the church should strive to “release religion and divine worship more and more from its sensual form and to encourage its vigorous spirituality.”¹⁸⁹ The result of this approach, as practiced both by Kuyper himself and by neo-Kuyperians after him was a pillarizing of Christian art that prevented it from becoming an integral part of modern art world.¹⁹⁰

Jeremy Begbie, in his study of the church’s contemporary interaction with the art world, traces the impact of this influence of neo-Calvinists like Kuyper. Despite a hesitancy to over-generalize about something as complex as the place of art within society, Begbie sees within Western culture “a cast of mind which tends to alienate and isolate the arts from other spheres of human activity.”¹⁹¹ Art, he claims, has become discontinuous from the rest of human experience, serving only to reinforce the church’s already uneasy relationship to it. Elsewhere Begbie writes, “especially in the last two or three centuries, theology... has been wary of allowing the arts very much room.”¹⁹² Trevor Hart is a British scholar whose research explores the intersection of theology and art. He arrives at similar conclusions to Begbie. His review of protestantism observes that where creative pursuits have been tolerated by the church, they’ve been shackled and subordinated to reason and experience.¹⁹³ In Hart’s analysis works of creative

¹⁸⁹ Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 149.

¹⁹⁰ Siedell, 140.

¹⁹¹ Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise*, 186.

¹⁹² Begbie, *Beholding the Glory*, xii.

¹⁹³ Hart, 3.

imagination are treated with suspicion by communities of faith. At best, they are viewed as a distraction. At worst, they become a hindrance to a more serious engagement with theological truths.

Without denying the negative impact that the Reformation had on the church's understanding of and support for art, other scholars emphasize more recent historical developments as central to the decline of patronage. David Greusel is an accomplished architect who specializes in designing spaces where people gather. He explains that while the church had held the position as custodian of transcendence for nearly 2000 years, in the nineteenth century, Western culture decided it was time to move on.¹⁹⁴ Culture had grown tired of religion-fueled wars. The church was distracted with internal debates over liberalizing theology. As a result, "Art had become a category quite separate from religion," Greusel writes, and "the church lost interest in it, and art, in turn, lost interest in the church."¹⁹⁵ Sokolove traces a similar distancing between art and religion, relying on the arguments of noted cultural historian Jacques Barzun. As Western society became increasingly secular through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Sokolove writes, "Art came to serve as a substitute religion for many people who rejected institutional religion yet had strong spiritual yearnings."¹⁹⁶

The twentieth century Dutch philosopher of art Hans Rookmaaker similarly notes a development in society's view of artists during the Renaissance and into

¹⁹⁴ Greusel, "After Church."

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Sokolove, 135.

the Age of Reason. Where artists once had been primarily craftsmen making beautiful things, they became something more rarified. Rookmaaker explains, “The artist became a genius, someone with very special gifts which could be used to give humankind something of almost religious importance, the work of art. Art in a way took the place of religion.”¹⁹⁷ In the face of these changes, the response of the church was retreat, manifesting in spiritual pietism which began to drive beauty in all its forms out of the church.¹⁹⁸ Confronting a society that made art into “an irreligious religion,” the church responded with an exclusive focus on pietism, producing “a ghostlike spirituality without a body.”¹⁹⁹ Rookmaaker arrived at a similar conclusion to others before him. He saw that Christians tend to regard the arts as the very epitome of the non-Christian spirit of the age. Rookmaaker identified two subsequent responses from Christians: “either one abstains from the arts altogether...or one enters the art world hesitantly and with many questions and doubts.”²⁰⁰

The result of this trend, rooted in the Reformation and blossoming into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has not been good. As Sokolove puts it, “This alienation between the arts and the church is to the detriment of both.”²⁰¹ She goes on to delineate various forms that the alienation between the arts and the church have taken. When art is instrumentalized, the church only sees didactic

¹⁹⁷ Rookmaaker, *Art Needs No Justification*, 9.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁰⁰ Rookmaaker, *Creative Gift*, 112.

²⁰¹ Sokolove, 166.

possibilities. When art is commercialized, the church pragmatizes art and sees only through a cost/benefit analysis. When the church demonizes art, it responds out of fear and is unable to see the value of art. When art is trivialized, the church sees it only as childish and ancillary to the more important work of the church. And finally, when art is spiritualized, it is divorced from its embedded-ness with concrete materiality.²⁰² Thus it is evident how historical trends bear on the contemporary dislocation of the arts and the church, and more specifically on how the church conceives of patronage for artists.

David Taylor, a former arts pastor and now a theologian who studies the relationship between arts and the church, likewise cites pragmatism and confusion over tradition as problems that have plagued the church's typical interaction with artists.²⁰³ In his own experience leading churches to interaction with the arts, Taylor felt a lack of a comprehensive, systematic, integrating, and grounding vision. The church's posture towards art spills over to artists' own self-perception, particularly as it relates to the utility of their art. Sokolove explains that many artists, despite their sense of call, "continually ask themselves how they can spend their time painting/dancing/singing/composing/writing poems or participating in any other art form, when the world is filled with so much need."²⁰⁴

Despite the church's at best, ambivalent, and at worst, hostile, relationship with the arts, some recent positive development is noticeable. Over the last twenty-five years, according to Sokolove, artists are beginning to see their work

²⁰² Ibid., 167.

²⁰³ Taylor, *For the Beauty of the Church*, 21.

²⁰⁴ Sokolove, 134.

more consistently as a response to God's call on their lives.²⁰⁵ Similarly, churches are increasingly reassessing the role that artistry can play in worship, community life, and outreach.²⁰⁶ At the same time, a chorus of voices calling for a renewal of church patronage for the arts is emerging. Siedell, offering his observations primarily from the discipline of the visual arts, both diagnoses and prescribes, "The loss of church patronage has drastically diminished Christian presence in the visual arts. An effective way to rectify this situation is for the church to once again to play a major role in artistic patronage."²⁰⁷ Siedell's comments about the visual arts could be extended into other artistic disciplines as well.

Mako Fujimura, himself a working abstract painter, is another contemporary voice prophesying about the role of church patronage for the arts, specifically as he calls for the establishment of generative cultures in support of artists. Fujimura argues that part of what the world particularly needs is beauty. He shares an anecdote about how, as poor newlyweds struggling to make ends meet, one evening in his wife bought an extravagant bouquet of flowers. He was upset and questioned why his wife would buy flowers when they barely had money for food. He writes, "Judy's reply has been etched in my heart for over thirty years now: 'We need to feed our souls, too.'"²⁰⁸ Fujimura's conclusion aligns with Seerveld's explanation of what happens when people capitulate to a distinction between secular and sacred, at the expense of art. He says,

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 131.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Siedell, 138.

²⁰⁸ Fujimura, "Culture Care," 16.

“We have split man into a soul plus a body and have tended to shun working with the ‘sensuous body’ to spend time on the ‘purely spiritual soul.’ We have believed that without faith in Jesus Christ you perish and without digestion, you normally expire, but without art you get along tolerably well.”²⁰⁹

In the moment of buying flowers, Fujimura says, his wife was a patron of beauty. Her act has become a touchstone to him, of the sort of support of artistic good that the church needs to foster. Fujimura has spent his career advocating for "a generative approach to culture that brings bouquets of flowers into a culture bereft of beauty."²¹⁰ Elsewhere, Fujimura further describes the need for Christians and others of good will to create generative cultures as seedbeds in which beauty can bloom and grow. He writes, “May our cultural garden, our cultural orchard, become a place of shelter for many creatures.”²¹¹

Fujimura also describes the generative approach to the arts through the language of cultural estuaries. An estuary is a place, like the Hudson River near Fujimura’s Manhattan home, where fresh water and salt water meet, creating a rich and diverse ecosystem. Cultural estuaries result from effective and faithful stewardship. Such stewardship is another name for patronage. As Fujimura explains, "Patronage is a particular, distinctive facet of stewardship that is essential for cultural formation. We are *all* patrons."²¹²

²⁰⁹ Seerveld, 34.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Fujimura, “Generative Culture,” 33.

²¹² Fujimura, “Culture Care,” 14.

Fujimura's call to patronage as stewardship fits nicely with what Seerveld understands about how an aesthetic life should be nurtured. Echoing Fujimura's call that all people need to act as patrons, he explains, "While not every believer needs to specialize in art, every believer does need to support its ongoing christian production."²¹³ This view also aligns with the observations of Trevor Hart, another philosopher who has written on the arts. Although not thinking specifically about patronage, Hart sees the church's patronage of the arts as dependent on and derivative from God's prior patronage of humanity. He writes, "The God of Scripture...is the first and last patron of the arts."²¹⁴

Fujimura and Hart are not alone in mobilizing the language of stewardship to illuminate the concept of patronage for the contemporary church. Greusel writes:

The church needs to re-engage with the arts in a profound way. This goes way beyond the hiring of talented musicians—the one stewardship that the church never really lost—to re-engaging with all the arts: dance, drama, painting, and sculpture included. But most especially with the visual arts—the kind of stuff that people go to see in museums. Re-engagement can take many forms, but as Andy Crouch has pointed out, critique as a form of engagement has limited value. More positive forms of engagement include patronage, participation, and performance. The church needs more of all three.²¹⁵

Greusel helpfully provides an initial roadmap for what contemporary patronage of the arts can look like for the church. While leaving room for a multiplicity of forms, he argues that the church must rediscover its role as participant in and patron of the arts.

²¹³ Seerveld, 37.

²¹⁴ Hart, 15.

²¹⁵ Greusel, "After Church."

Most of the thinkers who are advocating for a rediscovery of patronage of the arts within the church do so not only because of the benefits it provides for the church. They explain that just as the church needs art, artists need the church. There exists a reciprocal mutuality within patronage. Siedell, for instance, points out that artists need the theological and liturgical practices of the church, in order to truly make church art.²¹⁶ While the language of patronage can vary, artists benefit from advocacy from the church, support by the church, and infrastructure from the church. In order to faithfully carry out their work in response to God's call artists need money, space, community, celebration, and even theological resources. It is only through a holistic relationship of mutuality between the church and artists that patronage can begin to restore the church to a meaningful role within art as a whole. As Greusel writes, "To move back toward the centre of culture will require that we befriend (and become) museum curators, art history professors, critics, journalists, and publishers. This will require a generation of wise, spiritually grounded and theologically nimble missionaries."²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Siedell, 140.

²¹⁷ Greusel, "After Church."

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore how artists receive support for their work through patronage. To identify opportunities and strategies for fostering common good through the vocational life of its community, an understanding of how and in what patterns artists receive support for their work is necessary. In the present study, the following research questions structure such an assessment:

1. In what ways and in what patterns do artists receive support for their work by patronage?
2. In what ways are the artists' understandings of their work as contributing to the common good relevant to their receiving support for their work through patronage?
3. What obstacles to receiving support for their work through patronage do these artists encounter?
4. In what ways and to what extent can artists imagine receiving support for their work through church patronage?

Before churches speak, they must listen. Before churches can offer definitive recommendations to artists, they must establish a baseline understanding of their experiences. To that end, the present study used the

discipline of qualitative research to cull data from Richmond area artists on how they receive support for their work through patronage and what obstacles to patronage (especially from churches) they encounter.

The present chapter will introduce the methodology of qualitative research, outline the parameters of the study, indicate aspects of bias related to the researcher's position, and offer some limitations to the study itself.

Design of the Study

Qualitative research is, according to Merriam's definition in *Qualitative Research*, an effort at understanding the meaning people have constructed for themselves to make sense of the world around them and their experiences in it.²¹⁸ Rather than depending on an outsider's view of a situation, qualitative research depends on an insider's view. In this case, the insiders are the artists themselves, who every day carry out their work with certain assumptions, guiding beliefs, and default habits. By listening to their experiences, a framework for better understanding how artists receive support for their work can be identified. The aim of the study is to observe one aspect of the artistic vocation from the inside out, through the perspective of individuals who are faithfully working in their discipline of concentration in, and in some sense for, Richmond.

The study was designed using qualitative research techniques because of the benefits such an approach offers. Qualitative research is flexible, iterative, and continuous²¹⁹ and thus allows for gradual development of an interpretative

²¹⁸ Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2009), 13.

²¹⁹ Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 43.

framework. A repeatable methodology is valuable in a situation like this where the baseline provided by initial research can be extended easily for future study. The pool of participating practitioners can be deepened and the scope of questioning broadened, so that its utility to the church (and the cities in which they are located) can be maximized. The recursive and fluid aspects of qualitative research are particularly valuable to pastors and churches, which find themselves in dynamic contexts amidst the flow of ongoing ministry.

Qualitative research proceeds inductively.²²⁰ As data are gathered, concepts and theories are developed, reconsidered, and adjusted. Qualitative research also allows for mid-stream modification to the model and theory, which proves helpful in a fluid context. In researchers Herbert and Irene Rubin's metaphor, designing a project is like planning a vacation; an overall idea for travel exists, but there is no locked down itinerary.²²¹ Thus, one can imagine this study as an artistic vacation through Richmond, a guided tour that visits remarkable sites of common good contribution and stops for firsthand reflection from the artists themselves on what has supported them in their work.

Interview Protocol

Data for this study were collected through a semi-structured research interview protocol. This protocol provides structure without imposing a rigidity that would prevent useful follow-up probes and yield fruitful findings. The semi-

²²⁰ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 15.

²²¹ Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 42.

structured approach also allows the researcher to build a narrative around each subject.

Interviews were scheduled with research subjects at their convenience and took place (primarily) at the researcher's office. The interviews typically lasted sixty minutes. All of the interviews were recorded using the iPhone application Voice Memos. They were then transcribed to provide an accurate and efficient transcript of each interview.

The general skeleton of the specific interview protocol used these questions: What caused you to pursue this art in Richmond? How does your understanding of the world influence the way you make this art? How does your understanding of people influence the way you make this art? Who have you found to be important patrons in the development of your art? What obstacles have you encountered in partnering with these patrons? What could a relationship between the Church and your art be like?

Because qualitative research follows an iterative process, the interview protocol was adjusted throughout the study to bring clarity and produce richer results. This recursive model also allowed for brief, follow-up interviews to fill in gaps or to address fertile interest topics brought to the surface by other research subjects.

Participant Sample Selection

Six research participants were chosen who have made several public artistic contributions in Richmond, Virginia within the past two years and have been recognized by local media. These artists self-reported that their art serves

the common good. These criteria provide for rich descriptions of recent experiences within the narrow context of a single city. Artists were selected from multiple artistic disciplines to offer representative reflection on different types of public artistic life within the city. Because support for specific disciplines can vary within a particular city and because some artistic forms may lend themselves more readily to patronage, a diverse pool of participants was favored. In this study, the researcher interviewed muralists, painters, musicians, and community art event producers.

To facilitate illustrative assessment of the ways and patterns by which artists receive support for their work, the researcher interviewed some participants who self-identify as Christian believers and others who do not. Faith identification can show how familiarity with the resources of faith affects artists' understanding of their work as contributing to the common good — particularly how art is informed by an understanding of anthropology. Similarly, given the long history of patronage within the Christian community, faith identification is a useful category for understanding its impact on access to patronage, particularly from churches. Irrespective of religious identification, all the participants demonstrated some self-understanding of how their work contributes to the common good. While each may articulate this contribution differently, it is both self-described and externally confirmed by the public audience of the city, as reported by local media.

Gender, age, and racial variation among interview subjects provide another dimension for assessment. Those differences affect artists' perception of

their work, current challenges, and the types of support available to them within Richmond.

Participants were identified through the researcher's knowledge of the artistic scene in Richmond, Virginia, and informed by stories in local media. Some participants were also suggested through conversations with existing patrons of the arts. The participants were initially contacted by email to gauge their availability and interest in taking part in the study. Each artist signed a Research Participant Consent Form before participating in the study to respect and protect the human rights of the participants.

Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured interviews for primary data gathering. The semi-structured interview protocol fosters a conversational dynamic between researcher and subject. Since the questions solicit narrative, the answers provide stories helpful in providing rich and substantive concrete data. Because it employs multiple types of questions (main questions, probes, and follow-ups),²²² it generates framework, clarity, and depth of content.

For the present study, six participants were interviewed in conversations that lasted about sixty minutes each. During the interviews, the researcher took descriptive notes based on observation of the subjects. Effort was made to attend closely to the emotional and affective output of the subjects, as well as the content of their responses. Such holistic observation presents a comprehensive and descriptive picture of the phenomena under analysis, through the eyes of the

²²² Ibid., 145.

subject rather than through the perspective of the interviewer. The goal is to understand their meaning making techniques from an emic (insider's) view as opposed to an etic (outsider's) view of the phenomenon under study.²²³

Qualitative research favors richly descriptive data. It probes for story, anecdote, and example. It is living and pulsating with humanity. As Merriam writes, "Stories are how we make sense of our experiences, how we communicate with others, and through which we understand the world around us."²²⁴ To this end, interview subjects are repeatedly asked to provide examples and to elucidate overarching summaries with specific anchored anecdotes. The fact that the interviewer has prior professional relationships with some of the subjects in this study proved helpful. The context provided by that relationship allowed the interviewer to press for further detail when needed and to suggest additional avenues for exploration. The qualitative research technique was also aided by the peculiar gifts and artistic vocations of the interview subjects. As a whole, the participants are skilled storytellers and communicators in their various media.

To further provoke descriptive data, the study uses open-ended, non-leading questions. Certain terms or concepts are left undefined so that the participants themselves control the direction of the conversation and developed their own interpretative grids. Only as necessary, clarification is offered by the interviewer. Following this protocol, Merriam says, allows for "observational data

²²³ Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, 14.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

[to] represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview.”²²⁵

Data Analysis

Each conversation was also recorded after permission was granted by the subjects. Soon after the interviews, the recordings were transcribed to provide a written record of the interview. The typed transcripts were thus more easily analyzed for themes running through the interviews; they were coded by key term and concept. Because qualitative research utilizes a constant comparative method the interviews were transcribed quickly so that interview data could be analyzed in the context of both subsequent and future interviews. Congruence and discrepancy among the data were noted. As Merriam explains, “The overall object [of qualitative research] is to identify patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationship to each other.”²²⁶ The process of data analysis involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract theories and between description and interpretation.²²⁷ Data analysis is aimed at determining how the participants make sense of their worlds, specifically within the context of their vocational pursuit.

Researcher Position

In the qualitative research methodology, the researcher is the primary means of data collection.²²⁸ Therefore the researcher must acknowledge biases,

²²⁵ Ibid., 117.

²²⁶ Ibid., 30.

²²⁷ Ibid., 176.

²²⁸ Ibid., 52.

backgrounds, and worldview which may color the research collection and analysis. As an ordained pastor within the Presbyterian Church in America and a student at an evangelical theological seminary, the researcher was aware of obvious bias. Participants in the study knowing the researcher's vocation might have felt inhibited during a conversation with a pastor and shaped their responses accordingly. To counteract such tendencies, the researcher strived to develop rapport with the participants so that they would answer honestly and freely. A prior professional relationship with some of the participants provided the researcher with an advantage in the interview process, by more quickly establishing rapport and in adducing more honest commentary.

Another dimension to the researcher's position was a lack of formal training in art disciplines and art critique. Thus, the researcher operated more as a layperson with interest in the field of art than as an educated and keen-eyed professional. Moreover, as the pastor of a congregation with artist members, the researcher brought expectations and prior theological conceptions of how the Christian revelation shapes artistic work. Formal training in biblical and theological reflection also attuned the researcher to certain assumptions about how art is made, and the role the church ought to play in supporting artists in their work for the common good. Coupled with an insider's awareness of the church's often uneasy relationship with artists over the past two decades, the researcher recognized the difficulties of remaining value-neutral through the data gathering and analysis process.

Study Limitations

The present study is focused in its scope. It makes no claims to be exhaustive, either in its review of literature or its sample of artists contributing to the common good of Richmond. However, it is a carefully selected sample of practicing artists who share a commitment to contributing art for the common good and who can provide data towards best practices. The study is focused on artists within Richmond, Virginia. It does not attempt to observe and collate best practices on a regional or national scale. Rather, understanding the contextualized embedded-ness of most art, it seeks to report on the creative experience of artists in a single place. The study also is focused by the sampling of artistic disciplines it examines. Future research could be broadened to include other disciplines and a greater representation of artists. Such further investigation into a wider range of disciplines is warranted and would provide greater help to individuals and institutions eager to support other creative endeavors in their cities.

Some of this study's findings may be transferred to other similar artists producing self-reported art for the common good of their cities. Readers who desire to generalize some of the aspects of these conclusions on the situations of artists within their own cities should test those aspects in their context. As with all qualitative studies of this nature, the readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context.²²⁹

²²⁹ Sharan Merriam, *Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2002), 179.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore how artists receive support for their work through patronage. This study relied on six interviews with different artists in Richmond, Virginia, who are working for the common good of the city. The artists work in different disciplines: two fine art painters, one muralist, one musician, and two who have focused their work on producing musical events. These artists are both men and women, of various ethnicities, ranging across an age spectrum from mid twenties to mid fifties. They possess a variety of experience within Richmond and various art training backgrounds. Some operate within a faith community, others without. Together they provide a diverse picture of how patronage can work. The diversity of the research subjects was preferred to develop a broad perspective on the role church patronage has played and could play within Richmond's art scene. Pseudonyms were assigned to all of the artists in order to maintain confidentiality. Throughout the findings they will be referred to as Amanda, John-Mark, Hunter, Barrett, Spencer, and Tanya.

The interviews with these six artists endeavored to address the following four research questions:

1. In what ways and in what patterns do artists receive support for their work by patronage?

2. In what ways are the artists' understandings of their work as contributing to the common good relevant to their receiving support for their work through patronage?
3. What obstacles to receiving support for their work through patronage do these artists encounter?
4. In what ways and to what extent can artists imagine receiving support for their work through church patronage?

The first research question considered how and to what extent artists have experienced patronage in support of their work. As Spencer, answering a question about patronage, explained, "People don't quite know what to do with that word, or they're uncomfortable with it. They just want to be a supporter of something." The discomfort is not limited to potential patrons; it affects artists, too. Most of the research participants struggled initially to describe sources of patronage within their artistic experience. However, as they were prompted and given space to reflect common dimensions of patronage began to emerge.

Common Themes Among the Patronage Received by Artists

Relational Support

The patronage that the participants most readily identified focused on relationships of support and nurture.

Family and Friends: "None of this would have happened without him."

The primary areas from which this relational patronage derives is family and friends. People relationally close to the artists, from their immediate social circle, were frequently cited as important patrons, particularly early on in the

artists' careers. Whether it be parents or in-laws or friends from a shared social group, people who knew the artists usually provided initial support.

Amanda's experience is typical. She said, "I've had lots of people be really supportive...and these have been people I've already been friends with." Existing relationships through which trust was built offered seminal source of patronage. As a younger artist in the early years of her career, Amanda also observed that many of her friends likewise are trying to establish their careers. Therefore, many of them lack the resources to purchase art.

Instead she has found that the generation above her often are better endowed with the financial resources to provide patronage. Describing the patrons of her own art career, Amanda says, "A lot have been my parents' friends." A significant amount of Amanda's initial sales have come not through her own friends, but through friends within her parents' generation.

Spencer outlined a similar path to patronage, but, in his case, through the support of his in-laws. As his career was beginning, his primary commercial process involved producing art in Richmond and selling it in Atlanta, largely through the social network of his wife's parents. "Without their patronage," Spencer admitted, "I would not have started." Early on, Spencer continued, "they were advocates for us, opening their home and putting us in touch with their network of people." This initial patronage from his in-laws provided both an avenue for painting sales and the encouragement to move forward vocationally as an artist.

As beneficial (in fact, essential) as this experience of relational patronage was, Spencer also identified its drawbacks. He explained, “My receiving end of patronage has been really significant, but really narrow.” When patronage comes from family or from a small coterie of previously existing friends, it is, by definition, limited to the size of the family or friend group.

Pressing out a bit further from that support supplied by immediate family members, John-Mark, who co-founded and owns a record label and production company in Richmond, identified patronage in the form of a close friend’s initial financial investment. “None of this would have happened without [him],” he said, ten years after the friend provided some start-up cash. That investment was necessary in order for the artistic enterprise to get off the ground. Without that financial contribution, John-Mark acknowledged that he was not sure his production company would have come to fruition. In his case, patronage was born out of a relationship that dated back to high school and was sustained beyond college through ongoing conversations about the vision for the music label.

Tanya, who for two years produced and promoted a community-wide Big Band Christmas concert, did not rely on patronage from family or from longtime friends. Instead, she identified her immediate spiritual community as an source of support. Because of her part-time role on staff at a local church, Tanya’s promotion work, particularly in the concert’s first year, was underwritten by that church. She explained, “It was great to have the support of the church... for us to say, ‘This is how much we think it’s gonna cost.’ And they said, ‘Okay,’ without

any understanding of whether we were going to be financially successful.” In Tanya’s case, it was institutional patronage, rather than individual patronage that seeded the development of the art. Thus, patronage was still rooted in a pre-existing relationship, only one between Tanya and her church as a whole.

Even for Hunter, his earliest experience of patronage (and in many ways the break that led him to become a full-time muralist) flowed out of a relationship. In his case it was not family, but friendship. “I was asked by a gentleman here to do [a mural], Hunter explained, “And I did it.” What was most interesting about Hunter’s first experience of patronage was that it came from a relatively new friendship. Even though he had only known Hunter for about a month, a business owner, possessing an entrepreneur’s mentality and the flexibility of a start-up company, gave Hunter free rein to create a mural that, in many ways, launched his career in Richmond.

Local Art Community: “An ecosystem”

While the artists in this study were generally quick to identify friends and family as an initial source of patronage, they also pointed commonly to the formative support they received from the wider local art community in Richmond.

The support and nurture of the wider arts community was particularly evident for the musicians interviewed. Barrett, a jazz musician and an early member of a now successful brass band, described how the Richmond scene shaped his band, saying, “There’s a really rich community of artists, there’s VCU [Virginia Commonwealth University], and the School of Arts.” It is hard to overstate the influence of VCU’s music program on the musicians interviewed in

this study. That community served as an incubator for their artistic work. Barrett explained the germination of the brass band: “Most of us went to VCU together, maybe over the span of about five or six years. I was one of the oldest people and a couple people in the band now, were students of mine at VCU.”

VCU, and the School of Music particularly, also had a pivotal role in launching John-Mark’s record label and production studio. As he reflected on early sources of patronage John-Mark talked about the relational resources provided by the community of musicians whom he met and with whom he interacted at VCU. The vision from the beginning was to use, in his words, “the resources that we had here, as far as an abundance of really good musicians.” John-Mark continued by explaining that it was not the mere presence of good musicians, but their frequent overlap and interaction that became a resource in the development of the record label. It was not merely a community, but a community that played music and worked collaboratively. The very nature of the Richmond music with its overlapping circles of bands and musicians sharing in gigs, fostered a generative culture. The founders of the label realized that while they may have been drawn to Richmond initially because of a small and somewhat insular jazz music scene, there was an opportunity for something more. Once they began making their own music within this community and promoting their own shows, the momentum began to snowball and they realized, in John-Mark’s words: “Hey, we can make some really cool records with all of these people.”

For the record label and production company, the community of artists not only provided catalytic patronage, it became central to their artistic approach. As a controlling value, the company favored the same musicians playing together on all the records, creating a distinct sound that would get better and better with repetition. John Mark summarized the vision as “having this community here, and building kind of an ecosystem for the musicians to thrive.”

Perhaps because that consistency is essential in musical arts, Barrett identifies similar factors at work in the development and maturing of the brass band. According to him membership within the band over its twelve year existence has been “remarkably consistent.” The local arts community was integral in birthing the art; it remains integral is sustaining it.

In addition to the community of musicians who helped to form and galvanize the brass band early on, other aspects of the ancillary music community in Richmond also provided initial patronage. Barrett identified a music writer for a local weekly magazine who provided beneficial patronage because of his knowledge of, and connections within, the larger artistic community. Barrett said, “He’s known us all since we were students at VCU. But he’s done a lot in terms of writing articles or publicizing what we’ve done that we didn’t necessarily warrant at the time.”

Pivoting from the musical arts to other disciplines nonetheless reveals a common thread of patronage flowing from the larger Richmond artistic community. Within the visual arts, several study participants suggested that the Visual Arts Center of Richmond provides an important community resource for

young artists, beginning their careers. In addition to providing part-time teaching opportunities for emerging artists to supplement their income, the Visual Arts Center offers a supportive community of encouragement and feedback for artists. Amanda described what she found there: “Through VisArts I realized just how many artists were here. It’s not as cutthroat as you would find in New York and these people are really looking out for one another.”

While several of the artists identified the role that the wider arts community in Richmond provided in supporting their work, that experience is not universal. Spencer, a painter, offered a dissenting voice, by critiquing aspects of the Richmond art scene, particularly as it relates to the influence of VCU and the Art School. Despite Richmond’s resources as an “amazing city” with a well-developed art culture, Spencer is frustrated by the wider art community which does not have a place for art like his. He observed, “I really have been completely cut off from the main art community here. I showed once in a gallery on Main Street, but never marketed here and existed off the map as a painter.”

Part of the experience to which Spencer is giving voice is that of an outsider to the core Richmond art community. Although he has lived in Richmond for twenty-five years, Spencer is not a Richmond native, nor did he attend school at VCU. Whereas other artists reap the benefit of patronage from a community of which they are insiders, artists like Spencer can feel excluded; on the outside looking in. Amanda, who moved to Richmond within the last year, similarly acknowledged that while she is confident artist support groups exists, she is still

trying to find them. She confessed, “I still have really not become part of the artist community and that’s something I really want to work on.”

Material Support

A second common theme related to patronage identified by artists involves material support of their work. This material support can take various forms, although money is the most obvious. Material support of artists working for the common good can also include money, supplies, and exhibition or performance space.

Money

Based on the interviews conducted for this study, the default understanding of patronage among artists is that it comes most readily in the form of money. Amanda is representative. When asked who she had found to be important patrons in the development of her art, she said, “Well, patron.... I envision it as someone who is consistently buying your work, who is investing in your world repeatedly. And really, kind of my vision of that is they’re dropping just these ridiculous amounts for these massive paintings.”

Financial support was also a critical component of patronage for Tanya in producing the Big Band Christmas Concert. A concert of the scale she executed is an expensive and risky undertaking. As already indicated, the monetary backing of a church allowed her team to plan an excellent musical event without fear of failing to recoup expenses. As it turned out, in both years the concert was produced, Tanya and her team covered expenses and made a donation to a local charity. But the financial support of their church allowed them to plan without

hesitancy and fear. Other individuals serving in ancillary roles — like a graphic designer and a videographer — donated their services *pro bono*, providing further material patronage to the project.

For Hunter, the muralist, patronage through material resources may be most pertinent. As he made his initial transition from a career in architecture to full-time artist, he received his first act of patronage from a friend who asked him to paint the back wall of a building he owned. A muralist relies quite literally on brick and mortar. Soon after that first mural and because of the publicity it generated, Hunter was invited by another more established Richmond muralist to participate in a city-wide mural project called the Great American Clean-up, funded by the locally headquartered Altria Corporation. Because of the scale of their work, for muralists like Hunter patronage often comes through corporate sponsors. In the Richmond area several larger employers frequently provide grants in support of mural projects. When asked about specific corporate patrons, Hunter quickly listed several: “I think the heavy donors are the ones that well-known: like Dominion. I’m told Carmax does stuff; Capital One, definitely. And, I’m sure, Genworth. And I’m sure there are others.”

Space: “Giving us a space”

The experience of receiving material patronage is not limited to money. Space is another valuable material resource that has benefited multiple artists in this study. The musical artists emphasized this form of patronage. Both the brass band and the record label were aided by people who provided space for their musical sound to be honed and showcased. Talking about a music booker for a

local Richmond restaurant/music club, John-Mark said “You know, he was a huge supporter...and giving us a space....You know, to kind of give over your space to curate whatever we wanted to do because he believed in [us] and liked what the vision was.” Barrett likewise highlighted this same music booker for the ways that he opened his event space to the brass band and related musical projects. That opportunity to play gigs, to get their art in front of audiences was invaluable. As Barrett said, “He’s a patron of the arts in a way.”

Space is also a crucial resource to the painters interviewed for this project — not for making the art but for displaying it. Both Amanda and Spencer detailed how showing their art in people’s homes is a valuable act of patronage. Amanda described a process in which friends of hers (or her parents) offered to host art shows in their houses. Amanda would send out invitations to friends of the hosts and set up her work throughout their homes, ready to sell it to interested buyers. For artists without connections to galleries or without the established reputations necessary to sell there, home shows are an effective form of patronage. Exhibiting art within home space also engenders a more direct connection between the artist and potential buyers. As Amanda said, “People who have a personal connection to you are more likely to buy your art.” Similarly, Spencer sees home shows as breaking down some of the pretension and artifice present in the art gallery culture. He concluded, “I would love to help other artists and really the church community more broadly, to think about home shows and these more network driven [models].”

*Non-Material***Social Networks: “A foot in the door”**

A third theme identified by the artists as an essential component of the patronage, and one sharing significant overlap with the home shows just described, is the leveraging of social networks. There is some resonance here with the first theme mentioned, that is, patronage flowing relationally from family and friends. But where that first theme describes the who of patronage, this third theme describes the what. A widely acknowledged dimension of patronage is individuals opening their social networks in service of artists. The home shows described by Spencer provide a perfect example. He describes how these homes rely on the hosts' relationships with guests, saying, “It takes someone who has the space and the depth of social network just to get to that first level of getting 40, or 50, or 60 people in the door to look and engage with the objects.” Spencer is sober enough to realize that people attend these home shows not because they are so wowed by the single representative photo of the artist's work on an invitation, but because of the “social relationship.”

Barrett — a musician — mentioned the power of social networks in patronage, too. He described a wealthy individual who came to one of the brass band's shows, heard their music, and said, “You guys are great. I'd like to hire you for such and such or connect you with other people.” Barrett also outlined the snowball effect of one opportunity leading to others, as social and industry networks are leveraged. He explained, “People who are connected and have means—either financially or in connections—in giving us a leg up or getting us a

foot in the door that didn't necessarily deserve." After a member of the brass band was invited on a national tour in support of a well-known pop artist, it opened doors that had previously been closed. Without discounting the difficulty of having a key band member gone from Richmond on tour for long stretches of time, Barrett admitted the benefit of the networking he accomplished, saying, "There's a huge residual." That national exposure led to connections made within the industry that have been crucial to the band's overall success.

John-Mark described similar value added to the production company as initial success led to wider exposure within the industry. In their case, it led to connections with a couple from the West Coast who had decade-long experience running a successful label releasing independent music. Because this couple already was plugged in with distribution channels and had worked in the industry for years, they were able to leverage connections in service of the nascent Richmond label. This couple's experience and wisdom on the business side of music was instrumental patronage in the early phases of the production company's growth.

Encouragement: "Just go for it"

A final theme addressed by artists as central to their experience of patronage is the non-material support they have received from others, specifically support that has come in the form of encouragement.

"I've had a lot of people be really supportive as far as mentors and friends," Amanda said, alluding to the vocational encouragement she has received over the last couple years. She specifically identified an older artist

named James who has served as an unofficial mentor and sponsor of her work. While James is an artist in Amanda's North Carolina hometown, not Richmond, he provided an important dimension of patronage. From early on he provided her with the encouragement to keep working as an artist.

He's been all over kingdom come and he looks exactly like Santa Claus. And he took me under his wing when I was in high school and I walked into his little shop, or gallery, in Salisbury, and we just sort of became friends; sort of like an adoptive grandfather. We're pretty close. And he's definitely been a patron in the sense of encouraging me to be passionate about art and really just go for it and challenge myself.

Spencer agreed as he described the effect of encouragement given to artists:

"It's about the relationship of support and connection as much as the money being paid for this piece of art. The relationships are the primary way that we can connect and encourage." This non-material support is soft and can be vague, but that should not diminish its importance. It often comes from those closest to the artists. Hunter, for example, alluded to the non-material patronage he received from his mother, saying, "My mother had always preached to me that your talent is what God give you to survive. I can remember being 7 or 8 and her saying that to me. The second that I started doing this full-time, she said it to me again, and I was just in tears." A mother, a spouse, or a friend, saying the right thing at the right time provides patronage that sustains artists in their work for the common good.

Throughout this description of common themes of patronage received by artists making public art in Richmond one attribute is easily overlooked, but worth noting. Much of the patronage experienced by artists — whether relational, material, or non-material — occurs on a small scale. Spencer put it succinctly:

People think patrons... have to buy this huge painting or you have to have a lot of money when, in reality, just small acts, small things really add up. Patronage is as much about social support, feeling connected— included—as it is about buying a big painting.

He went on to describe an example of how this small scale patronage can work. A painter can work out a long-term payment plan for a piece of art with a patron. The payment plan becomes a form of extended lay-away. Laughing (and only half-joking) Spencer explained the process: “This is the way to do it: you give someone a painting when they can’t afford it and then when they reach their prime earning years you say, ‘Let’s talk about paying for that now.’” Spencer has used this model with some of his paintings. He charged the patrons a fixed amount each month, kept track of how much they owed, and let them know when they owned a painting free and clear. Not only did this method lower the bar to patronage for the art buyer, it also benefited Spencer because he saw the joy the painting brought to the buyers. In this way patronage was symbiotic, benefiting both parties. A financial benefit for the buyers intersects with a benefit of emotional encouragement for the artist. As Spencer concluded, “It’s a little less depressing that way, then having them [i.e. the paintings] all sit in the studio.”

Common Themes of How Artists’ Understandings of their Work as Contributing to Common Good is Relevant to Patronage

Because the present study is focused on the work of artists whose work is both self-identified and recognized within the Richmond community as art for the common good, the second research question mined artists’ own understanding of how their work contributes to the common good. The literature indicated that an important dimension of receiving patronage is how artists’ work benefits the

larger society. The findings around this question proved difficult because of how elastic the idea of common good can be. Different artists conceive of common good differently; they use different language to describe it. Also, at times modesty can prevent artists from claiming the good impact of their art within the community. Nevertheless, certain patterns emerged in the relevance of artists' understanding of how their work aids the common good and the patronage they received.

How Artists Understand the World

The first theme related to artists' understanding of the common good and its relevance to patronage concerns how they understand the world.

The World is Relational: “Murals live in communities”

An understanding of the world as relational is important to several of the artists in this study. Pushback that he received from neighbors regarding his first mural revealed this fundamental relationality to Hunter. Rather than talking directly with him — the artist — and rather than talking to the business owner on whose building he painted, disgruntled community members called a meeting to express their dislike. That meeting generated some bad press, but it also had an impact on Hunter, clarifying his understanding of the world in which he produces his art. “That actually opened my eyes even more and put more of a fire behind me because I didn't realize that people were watching me, or watching my art.” Hunter went on to describe how this new realization created in him a sense of responsibility and accountability for his art. In other words, Hunter realized that his art was made, and subsequently lived, within a larger human community.

That initial experience, perhaps combined with the specific nature of large-scale mural projects, has given shape to how Hunter conceives of his art. “Murals live in communities,” he said, “they live in neighborhoods.” While Hunter has learned to accept the act that not everyone in a given community will receive a mural with equal enthusiasm, the community-based location of his art influences the way he tries to paint within a larger relational web. He explained the process in greater length:

The way I’ve found to be more successful, is you find the projects, you figure out what you can offer this corporation in doing it, that may involve them. It may not, but it’s better if it involves them. If they can come out and paint, they can do something. Because everybody wants to do something. Everybody wants to get something out of what you are doing.

Although Spencer works in a different medium as a fine-art painter, a relational view of the world still exerts significant influence on his understanding of art for the common good. His view of art is rooted in how he as the artists created work that connects with other people’s experience of the world. As he said, “What I love about being a painter is that I can bring stories that understand being part of a community. I can provide images and objects that are telling my story but then that I know other people’s stories connect with, too.” Viewing the world in all its intersectionality is foundational to the ways Spencer sees his work as aiding the common good. When it works right, his painting is an expression of who he is, but one that becomes fully realized when it is also an expression of who someone else is. His is a deeply communal and collaborative process, depending on a relational world.

Within a different medium, other participants mentioned similar factors at play. John-Mark described jazz music as a collaborative art form; one that manifests the world's inherent relationality. The model for their production company rests on relationships of trust. He elaborated, "It's based on relationships.... We trust each other. Those guys trust each other. It's all based on trust....And the same goes with the horn players and the string players. We've been working on building these relationships."

Also working within the musical arts, Barrett confirmed what John-Mark observed. Barrett's brass band did a lot of early gigs that were community events; at times, even showing up at street festivals to busk. "We've done a lot of playing free or really low-paying things just to play for the community." Some of the flexibility in this approach was facilitated by the specific practicalities of a brass band: their ability to play outside without amplification, their ability to march around while playing, the general accessibility of their art form. But a driving component to their musical expression is how they as artists are situated within a web of relationships.

How Artists Understand People

In addition to their understanding of the world at large, artists' understanding of who people are is another key element of how they see their work contributing to the common good. Certain themes can be identified in how the artists understand themselves and how artists understand people more generally.

How Artists Understand Themselves: “Gift I’ve been given”

Foundational to the way artists understand people is how they understand themselves. These artists’ self-conception informs how they make art for the common good and how that art might be supported by patronage.

Several of the artists used the language of ‘gift’ to describe their artistic talent. As they explained how they ended up as artists, they said they were compelled by something bigger than themselves. Sometime they landed as vocational artists after digressions into other fields, often after they had resisted an internal pull to the arts.

In describing his own path from architect to muralist, Hunter is emblematic, saying: “Not to be cheesy, but this was destiny.” He described his own circuitous route to art by way of architecture school, largely because he had been influenced by the stereotype that there is no money in art. By his second year of architecture school he knew he did not want to be an architect because the only parts of it he relished were the ‘artsy’ parts, like design. He explained, “I got through architecture school just being an artist, to be honest.”

Eventually, Hunter yielded to his “destiny” being a full-time vocational muralist and he now recognizes that it is the right fit; the natural outworking of his talents. “It is work,” he said. “It’s not an easy thing, but it’s what I’m passionate about. It’s what I like doing.”

Similarly, Spencer was quick to identify his core identity as an artist. As he discussed the start of his own twenty-five career as a painter, he described an

almost inevitable implication to make art: “I’ve always just done it, wherever I was.”

Amanda, while much younger in her career, nonetheless traced a familiar path. After several years of resisting the idea that she should be a vocational artist she kept circling back to painting, unable to shake the feeling that art is what she had to do. She described her capitulation, saying, “I eventually found that art itself and the process of giving it to people was the most valuable way I could use this gift that I have been given. It’s really the most effective way I can give back to the world.”

In this reflection, Amanda also hints at another dimension of the artists’ self-understanding, the notion of stewardship. She understands herself not only as the possessor of a gift for art, but also as a steward of that gift for the sake of the world.

Tanya explained how her boss’s encouragement to steward her specific talents led her to produce a community concert: “One of the things that he wanted us to do was use our gifts or specific calling, to see how we could do that. So between [my husband’s] musicianship and my administrative—it seemed like a concert of some kind would be appropriate.”

How Artists Understand Others: “A sense of belonging”

When it comes to how artists understand people other than themselves and the ways that understanding, in turn, bears on their conception of the common good, overlap with their relational understanding of the world is necessarily encountered. Because people reside in the world, these are not hard

and fast categories. However, for several of the research participants, their understanding of other people influences how they make art for the common good.

Undergirding the music of Barrett's brass band—both in the type of music played and how that music is played—is the conviction that people within Richmond are longing to be part of something bigger than themselves. Many musicians are eager to play in a big band format because many musical gigs provide opportunities only for individual players or small groups. The variety and dynamism of the big band is unique. Jazz music as a style, likewise necessitates forms of collaboration and interdependence that are often missing from other musical jobs. At its best, the brass band sound offers a participative experience not just for the players, but also for the audience. As Barrett said, “people are dying to have a sense of belonging and community. So, almost like having a sports team, the brass band can serve that role really well.”

When tracing themes within artists' understanding of other people as they are situated within the world and the connection of that understanding to patronage, it is important to consider not only people as a whole, but the people as individuals. Several of the participants interviewed, especially those who produce musical events, acknowledged how important it is to them that the artists they work with are treated fairly and assigned value for their art. They believe that artists are shown dignity when they are paid a market price for their contribution to common good art. John-Mark, in his role as the financial administrator at the record company, appreciates when he is able to pay their in-

house musicians equitably. This arrangement engenders a reciprocal commitment from the musicians who are grateful to have the consistent work. As John-Mark put it: “We’re creating this ecosystem: we’re going to call you, we’re going to pay you to do this session, and it’s going to happen every month, maybe for a year.”

The same dynamic of conferring value on artists by paying them for musical work was also referenced by Tanya, as she reflected on the Big Band Christmas show. Among the early parameters that she and her team set as they envisioned producing the show was that it would be a place where they could employ musicians from Richmond. “We paid them a fair price,” Tanya said, basing their pay structure on the recommendation of a professional musician.

How Artists Understand Art

In addition to how artists understand the world and how they understand people (both themselves and others) in that world, a third common theme that influences artists’ experience of patronage is how they understand the place of art within the world. What unites these artists in their understanding of art’s role within the world is that it provides an authentic account of the world in a form that is accessible to all people without being explicitly didactic.

Barrett was one of the artists who described authenticity as a defining characteristic of the art made by the brass band in which he plays. Commenting on forms of art that feel produced and manipulated, Barrett said, “People really hate that kind of artifice....People won’t connect as much with music where the motivation is kind of artificial.” That’s one reason why the band doesn’t play many

cover songs. In contrast, Barrett believes that an authenticity of form will compensate even for unfamiliarity with big band music as a genre. As he explained, “Even when we’re playing for an audience that has never heard a brass band... they still get where we’re coming from because that sincerity comes across.” What Barrett and other participants in this study communicated was that art, when done well, speaks in a real way to its audience.

Tanya, who was also commenting on the art form of live music, arrived at a similar place as Barrett. In her view, making live music for an audience is a genuine form of art that cannot be reproduced by the common mass-market approach to art. Describing the Big Band Christmas Concert, Tanya explained, “There is a depth to good music and the musicians, the composer. So many of them bring so much depth to what they create. And I feel like sometimes in our culture of quick manufacturing, that is lost.” She continued, “We don’t hear enough live music in our culture. So much of it, when it is produced, is auto-tuned and corrected, that authenticity is lost. So we wanted it to be live. It’s so direct for them to play and you to hear it. And then it’s gone.”

The authentic qualities of music-making that Tanya describes are not unlike Hunter’s process of painting murals. For him, the process of creating a mural is as important as the final product. He said, “The process is what’s fun to me. Learning new things and making those mistakes. If not, this would be boring, very, very boring.” Often part of Hunter’s process of engagement involves other people. In many of his mural projects he works with volunteers from companies or schools to produce a mural. Those are the murals about which he expressed

the most enthusiasm, saying, “There was some involvement by more than just the artists that made this come about. Some kids learning from this. Some kids were inspired by this. There were life lessons.”

The experience of artists in different art forms offers a valuable counterpoint to that of the musician Barrett and the muralist Hunter, whose art relies — to one degree or another — on the live experience of making the art. Painters Spencer and Amanda, whose work is often finished and framed before an audience engages with it, cannot rely on the experience of art-making in the way that live musicians or muralists can. Nonetheless, they both recognize the need for their art to connect emotionally with a place, or a memory, or an experience of their viewing audience. That is one reason why commissions, while a potentially lucrative source of income for painters, can be problematic. When they simply feel like reproductions, the commissions lack the emotional connectivity and raw vulnerability of non-commissioned art. Spencer explained this dynamic:

Even though you'd think ideally the commissioned work would be the perfect example of when you're all thinking about this together. Wow! Those are super hard. Sometimes you do it and you're trying to figure out how to give the people what they want and be true to what you're doing. Sometimes it just doesn't work as well. I've found that it's better for me to have full control of something and provide art that connects with people because I am in a similar though pattern or community or something like that. Maybe that's the magic of it. That's the surprise when something that I've done really resonates with someone else without me intending that.

Here Spencer is explaining the need to connect with viewers of his art. Ideally a serendipitous connection between artist and audience occurs when the art expresses something the viewer recognizes as true about the world. He believes

that when a painting is not done in a merely decorative or “schmaltzy” way, it possess the power to reveal truths about the world and human condition

Amanda gave voice to a similar experience in her painting. She described a “balancing act” between commission work and her own work. She said, “I lose a lot of time growing as an artist taking their commissions which feed the business, but doesn’t necessarily feed me, and my ability to be a better artist.”

Amanda believes that while painting commissions of familiar objects may provide a superficial level of connection with people, a deeper satisfaction (both for her and her audience) derives from her own inspiration. Particularly in her abstract painting, Amanda sees opportunity to elicit a more powerful reaction from viewers. She discovered that abstract painting “affected people more strongly because it’s about a feeling versus a tangible object or a place, which can take people so much further in their thought process and how they’re digesting what they’re seeing and how they can relate to it.” Together these artists recognize that their art has the capacity to communicate the deepest truths of the universe in ways that people other than themselves can understand, even when they may not articulate those truths explicitly. Tanya, in explaining her hopes for the Big Band Christmas Concert, summarized this approach to art, saying, “it is gospel-centered, but nobody would preach.”

Another dimension to how art operates in the world that displays how artists understand the world is its ability to be trans-cultural. While art always is embedded in a particular culture, it is not imprisoned there. Art, therefore, is able to communicate to a variety of different people without a cultural captivity. Tanya,

once again describing the big band sound, said, “It’s not a Euro-Centric art form, so that also is appealing to us; that it’s an American art form, that it’s black American music, really.” The resulting art form—born out of the black American experience of slavery, racism, and discrimination—is “really rich.” While the audience may not be aware of an art form’s specific cultural lineage, the form itself carries inherent trans-cultural qualities that enhances its currency with a diverse audience.

Common Obstacles to Receiving Patronage

The third primary research aim of this study was to identify common obstacles to patronage that artists have encountered in their work. These obstacles can be grouped as obstacles within people’s understanding of patronage, obstacles within the church, and obstacles within the artists themselves.

Obstacles within People’s Understanding of Patronage

People’s understanding of patronage can be an obstacle to artists receiving support for their work to the extent that patronage is too narrowly defined. Artists may be viewed as outside the purview of patronage, either by themselves or by others.

The Academy Culture: “I Didn’t See a Place for Me”

The first group of obstacles within people’s understanding of patronage comes from the influence of the art academy. While the academy affects each form of art differently, its influence is widely felt. The influence of the academy is felt variously depending on the geographical location of artists, too. The presence

of this obstacle for the artists in the present study depends on the particularities of Richmond, largely because of Virginia Commonwealth University and its nationally recognized School of the Arts.

In Spencer's experience, the influence of VCU has been problematic in that it disseminates an academic theory of art that squeezes out many working artists like himself. He said, "This is my complaint about the mainline art world as it is now: it has become highly academicized where the primary conversation about art is to be among other artists and art historians." As Spencer shared, pain was evident in his voice. He returned to the theme more than once, marked by longing and disappointment. He elaborated:

Here you have this really amazing city and it's got this art culture and yet I find it really frustrating. There are these wonderful spots. It's not dead, but culturally it seemed so driven by the academic model that I didn't really see a place for my own art because...my aesthetic and my sense of what it can really do in people's lives was out of step with the art community here.

Spencer went on to explain that the academic and gallery-driven art scene divides art into the *avant garde* (which it celebrates) and the purely decorative (which it generally derides). That leaves artists who are not *avant garde* without a place and without recourse to some of the most typical forms of patronage.

Amanda, a painter who studied art at a private, secular university, likewise encountered ways the academy can dissuade patronage for certain forms of art. She remembered, "My professors kept pushing me to do abstract and I wanted to do landscapes for my thesis and they were like, 'Amanda, that's not challenging you. We really want you to work on this.'" The experience of hearing from art

authorities, be they professors or gallery owners, that certain types of art are not worthy of attention, can act as a strong disincentive for patronage.

The musicians in this study offer a helpful counterpoint to the experience of the painters with regard to the academy's impact on receiving support through patronage. Both of the musicians identify VCU and its School of Music as instrumental in shaping their art. For them, an academic setting provided positive support for the emergence of their artistry. Several of the principal founding members of the production studio initially came to Richmond because of VCU's jazz school. Bryan Jones—"the godfather of Richmond music, jazz and *avant grade* jazz," as John Mark put it—taught at VCU and many musicians came to study with him. Likewise, most of the members of the big brass band also attended VCU together over the span of five or six years. Clearly the formal training of the academy and its deep musical resources helped to shape these artists.

Whereas the academic environment felt constricting to Spencer, it was a magnet for talent that proved formative for the musicians interviewed. However, the musicians did indicate ways that they had to develop beyond the narrow music scene they found around the VCU jazz school. John-Mark remarked that the "little scene—however insular it was"—was the launching pad for the production studio. Similarly, Barrett described how the brass band found success by growing out of soil made fertile by VCU's academy program:

I feel like the brass band is a really good fit for the Richmond scene. There's a lot of different styles of music that you can play. The eclecticism of it kind of fits Richmond in away because Richmond has this really serious punk and rock scene, but also there's a lot of hip-hop going on

here; and then, of course, jazz and blues. So the brass band kind of sits at the nexus of all of that.

Potential Patrons: “With strings attached”

Even potential patrons can present artists with obstacles to effective support for their work because of how they view patronage. In earlier discussions around the artistic commissioning process, some of these obstacles already have been outlined. The primary obstacle potential patrons create has to do with control. Artists who receive support for their work can inevitably end up feeling like the patronage comes “with strings attached.”

Reflecting on drawbacks to receiving support for one’s art, Barrett offered, “I wonder if the idea of patronage makes you now beholden to them in some way.” After describing how Beethoven was one of the first examples in music history of an artist who bucked the controlling patronage paradigm, Barrett admitted that it takes singular force of personality to resist the exerted influence of patrons. He went on to acknowledge, “I think that is a drawback. You start wondering, ‘What do they want me to do? I really want to please this person who is opening this for for me.’”

John-Mark also alluded to the problem of control among potential patrons, when he, with the pain of a split from some early supporters still apparent, said, “They wanted to come on as kind of directors.... We didn’t think it was a good fit.” Later in the conversation as we circled back to the role those early patrons played, he explained further, “There were not enough roles for everybody to have a role.... [There were] too many cooks in the kitchen.” Whether it be too many

cooks controlling the idea for a painting, the expression of a mural, or the direction of a production studio, desire for control in potential patrons was a common obstacle for patronage. The obstacle of tension over artistic control can become intractable. Concluding his remarks about his erstwhile patrons, John-Mark said, “They had their aesthetic in their label, and they wanted to bring it and meld the two together. And we already had a vision. We already had an aesthetic, and it was something we were pretty passionate about.”

Another dimension of control exerted by potential donors involves how art interacts within a person’s home. As she described how patrons influence what she creates, Amanda said, “I think that people want to buy something that is not that expensive, and will go with a lot of things in their house, and usually is not that intense. It’s going to be rare that you find a patron that wants to buy a difficult piece of art to digest — one that has a little bit of darkness to it.”

Spencer echoed a similar theme, even though he approached it from a different perspective. Noting that potential patrons are influenced by gallery culture in their viewing of art, he nonetheless observed that ultimately, paintings end up residing in people’s homes. “Even the high modernist stuff,” he concluded, “I bet it goes with the sofa. Of course, it goes with the sofa.” The dynamic that Spencer alludes to is the clash between a potential patron’s high art gallery aspirations and the reality that the art purchased fits within a decorating scheme. That need to control aesthetic within one’s home can be a barrier to artists receiving support for their work.

Obstacles within the Church

A second common obstacle artists have experienced in receiving patronage derives from the church itself, particularly the church's understanding of both art and patronage.

How the Church Understands Art: "The pretty bits around the edges"

A consistent obstacle to artists experience of patronage comes from the diminished way that much of the church can view art. An obstacle to patronage, especially church patronage, that many artists encounter is that the church has a malnourished view of what art is and can be.

The painter cum advocate for the arts, Spencer observed, "There's still a lot of work within the evangelical church to see the arts as more than just the pretty bits around the edges." Spencer's phrase is as haunting as it is descriptive. Much of the Western church does not know what to do with the arts, other than to tolerate it as a sort of decorative enhancement at the margins of spiritual life. Spencer does not lay all the blame on the church. Rather he suggests that translation work most take place between churches and artists because both have wrong notions of what patronage is, what art is, what the role of the church (should be). Spencer challenges communities of faith, saying, "The evangelical church needs to hopefully move past its thing that art is just decoration or it's dangerous."

Tanya agreed. Although historically the church has been a center of vibrant art culture and appreciation, it is no longer. She explained, "The church used to be where good music happened. You think of Bach and Handel.

Everybody wrote for the church. It was the place where culture — in European culture — where great art was made. And we've lost that." Somehow the church yielded the terrain of good art, quality musicianship, and the best of human creativity. To a large extent, people no longer think that there is a connection between the church and the arts. Tanya described how in marketing their Big Band Christmas event they eschewed mentioning that it was church-sponsored in any way because the church has lost so much respect in cultural fields. She explained this worry succinctly, saying: "People would think, 'Oh, it's church jazz. That's lame.'"

What is needed, these artists suggest, is a more robust understanding of art that will facilitate space for more rigorous conversations between artists and those within the church. A lack of trust between church and artists even around something as foundational as the role art can play within a community is a barrier to artists receiving support from the church for their work. To remedy this situation Spencer envisions an atmosphere where the church engages creatives so that they "are not just artists in the art ghetto, but that their work is significant."

Tanya believes that a big part of the problem is that people in congregations lack consistent exposure to good art and lack the ability to appreciate it. She explained, "Part of it is training. People haven't been trained to listen or see. And I think that's where the work of the church can be." But the problem goes deeper than just training in art consumption. The problem resides in the church's very conception of what art is. Again Tanya explained, in words eerily reminiscent to what Spencer said about art occupying only the edges of

church life, saying, “Art tends to get pushed out because it doesn’t feel innately necessary, even though it is. But it is not the food pantry, and it is not Sunday School.”

The obstacle of misunderstanding art is not limited to the church, of course. Any institution with the capacity to provide patronage for the arts is susceptible to these sort of misconceptions. In the course of seeking support for his mural work, Hunter has encountered this same obstacle from corporate patrons who have failed to understand the artistic process. Recounting his interaction with the sponsors of one mural for which he was contracted, Hunter first described not being included in planning meetings for the project. Then, he encountered an unrealistic schedule that showed a lack of awareness about mural-making. He remembered thinking: “This is horrible. I only have a day to do this? Really?” In that case, the corporation’s patronage, while well-meaning, betrayed a lack of understanding about how art works, both in its conception and in its execution.

How the Church Understands Patronage

Not only does the church have a diminished view of what art is, it also has a malnourished view of patronage. Its anemic understanding of patronage creates another obstacle for the church in its efforts to support artists.

At its most basic level the church brings a functional mindset to its patronage of artists, saying, in effect, the church will provide resources and the artist will provide acceptable art. Instead, the church needs to be okay with art occupying a middle space. A space that heightens awareness, provokes

conversations. Spencer: “Ideally [the church] would be so strong in our center that we can allow our edges to be a little porous and we can invite people in to be there, but that’s been hard culturally for the past few decades.”

Of course, it is not only the church as an institution that struggles because of a faulty understanding of patronage. Hunter, the muralist who has not received patronage directly from a church community, cites similar challenges in his work with corporate patrons. A corporation, like a church, can have a fixed expectation for how support of artists should go. He explains: “Corporations have a model, right? They have ‘This is how we do things.’ Usually those things are not, understandably so, considerate of the artist. It’s like ‘This is how we do things. If you want this money, you do things like this.’” Similarly, Barrett conceded that the church’s less than fully formed perspective on patronage hinders its interaction with artists. Instead, he wishes the church was more committed to engaging musicians in the community, offering them a feeling of inclusiveness. He said, “This makes the church seem so much more attractive and engaged and authentic.”

Obstacles within the Artists Themselves

A third obstacle commonly cited as adversely affecting artists’ experience of receiving patronage has to do with factors related to the artists themselves, and especially their self-conception as artists. This self-conception bears on the role of the artist in two ways: as an autonomous creative and as a business person.

The Myth of Autonomy: “If I’m going to make it, I’ll just be discovered.”

The prevailing understanding of artists as autonomous, self-made geniuses becomes an obstacle to the practice of patronage. This prevailing understanding affects both artists and their potential patrons.

Spencer defines the problem: “I think artists have that sort of independent artist thing that is deeply written into pretty much every context of art education these days that people are just not wanting to be beholden to someone.” Artists adopt a recalcitrant posture that limits their willingness to receive help in their craft. They want to make it on their own merits and never feel like their success came because someone took an interest in them or because someone did something for them. As Spencer concluded: “There’s this whole perceived meritocracy. If I’m going to make it, I’ll just be discovered.”

That artists are autonomous geniuses is generally dismissed as a myth, but its shaping power remains. Hunter appeared eager to preserve some notion of himself as autonomous artist, whose successful transition from architecture to art inevitably happened by sheer force of his commitment to his art. It manifested in the advice he offered for other artists, seeking to make a name for themselves. He said, “Run to the place where it’s not because that’s where you’re going to be looked at as a specialist for that.”

In contrast, Spencer explained that “everyone has always depended on being connected to the right people at the right time and finding someone who is their advocate.” Similarly, in describing one of the earliest breaks that his brass band got, Barrett admitted “it was an opportunity that we had not yet earned.”

Most of the artists interviewed admitted, in some form or other, that they were loathe to acknowledge support because it could diminish the idea of their creativity.

Related to artists' self-conception as autonomous, self-made geniuses is their unwillingness to conceive of themselves in the role of servant. This hesitance can also be an obstacle to patronage. Spencer said, "There's this servanthood element that artist's need to understand." And Tanya agreed, saying, "It feels like really good music has some kind of deep sacrifice involved, whether it's hours in the practice room or constant writing or turmoil." They are claiming that if artists conceived of themselves as servants rather than self-made geniuses, the process of patronage could be more robust.

The Business of Art

The second way that artists's self-conception can prevent them from receiving support via patronage concerns the intersection of art and business. Many artists flounder in an uneasy tension between their conception as creatives and the realities of running a business to market and sell their art. Some of this struggle results from the pressure to be financially successful; a pressure that begins to build from an early age. Hunter described how from childhood he grew up dogged by a stereotypical refrain he often heard: "You're not going to make any money doing art." One of Amanda's mentors, someone she identifies as a patron, reinforced that stereotype, warning her, "If you're not making X amount by this amount of time, you need to call it quits."

Artists as artists often avoid the hard work of developing the business side to their art. Spencer described himself as “someone who really, really hates to self-market.” His aversion to self-promotion partly explains his transition to focus more on art advocacy for others over the course of his career. He has found it easier to tout the good of other artists than to market himself. Amanda agreed. She confessed, “One of the hardest things for me being self-employed as an artist is that it’s all about you.” While she chafes at the dimensions of being artist that require self-promotion, she is pragmatic enough to admit that it is hard to be successful without a commitment to showcasing what she can do.

Amanda, likewise, has an uneasy relationship with social media, despite the positive impact it has had on publicizing her art career. She described a recent painting that generated the most positive social media response she has ever had, saying, “I’ve finally been putting them on Instagram and things like that, which is not my favorite thing but something I have to do.” Her hesitant resignation to the necessity of self-marketing is evident in her words. While from a personal standpoint Amanda identifies a lot of problems with social media, from a business standpoint, its positive impact is undeniable. She sees ways that the business of her art career which necessarily requires her to focus on her phone or her computer is at odds with her calling as an artist seeking to be attentive to the wider world around her.

Common Ideas for How Artists Could Receive Patronage from the Church

The final research question in this project explored common ideas for how artists could receive patronage from the church. There is some inevitable overlap

here with the first question of how artists do, in fact, receive patronage. However, this last area of questioning provided artists an opportunity to imagine “blue-sky” scenarios for support of their work.

On the whole, artists had a difficult time answering this line of questioning about how they could receive patronage from the church. Given all the obstacles to patronage already discussed—both those within the church and those within artists—it was hard for the study participants to imagine a situation of fertile support for their work. Not unexpectedly, the artists who do not self-identify as Christian believers, particularly struggled to identify ways the church could provide support through patronage. Three themes of possible patronage emerged from the conversations with artists: material patronage, relational patronage, and intellectual patronage.

Material Patronage

Not surprisingly, the primary source of potential patronage identified by the artists interviewed involved material support. Whether it was money, space to perform or display their art, or an embodied audience to engage with it, artists’ first inclination when it came to patronage was to think in material terms.

Money

Tanya replied succinctly: “Patronage feels really tied to money.” Other artists were likewise quick to identify financial support as a way that the church could support their work, partly because it fits their historical experience of patronage and partly because underwriting is a crucial need for many artists. Barrett explained from a musician’s perspective, “Money seems like such a

simplistic thing, but that is a thing. A club is basically never going to pay you a guarantee until you've already made it. It becomes a chicken or egg thing." He imagined ways the church could move into a void within the existing business model of music performance.

Amanda is representative when she said, "I envision [patronage] as someone who is consistently buying your work, who is investing in your work repeatedly." In the absence of that narrowly defined patronage through financial support, she doubted whether patronage existed. She lacked the imagination to conceive of patronage in other ways.

It was evident that Amanda also sees the potential in financial support from a church, but she hesitated to say so. She was uncomfortable with the idea of the church paying for her art work; or, at least, paying full market value. Because she possess a commitment to philanthropy through her art, Amanda had trouble conceiving of doing art for the church in any way that was not *pro bono*. Clearly Amanda preferred to maintain stark lines of distinction between her art and money from the church, saying: "That seems kind of wrong to me when money is involved."

Space

Beyond financial backing, artists also identified the potential for material support from the church in the form of providing space. The musical artists were quick to identify this need. John-Mark's first instinct was to encourage the church to consider opening its doors for shows, partly because he recognized "not everybody wants to go to a show at a bar." While cities usually have a variety of

music venues, it can be challenging for emerging artists to book gigs. Churches often possess beautiful sanctuaries that are beneficial spaces for both audiences and performers. Brass band member Barrett agreed: “The opportunity to play live music for people is pretty limited to on the weekends or late at night. The church has an audience and has connections with people and has a space that they could open up and create opportunities for performing arts or visual art or whatever.” While Barrett here mentions more than just material patronage, space is the focus of his attention.

Spencer, the painter and art advocate, also talked about space as a way the church could serve as a patron for artists. In his conception, space is more than just a physical building. Spencer thinks it is important for the church to provide space to artists because of the subsequent space for conversation and discovery that they provide to others. He said that he frequently thinks, “How can I invite artists into this conversation not because they have the answer, but because they create a space around some of these ideas? By looking at processes or images or something, they create space for where people who disagree can find some common ground.”

In this way, Spencer agrees with Hunter, whose work primarily as a muralist depends on people providing physical space for his art. Like Spencer, he has found that communities willing to invite artists into their space provoke conversations that aid both the artists and the community. When Hunter realized “people are watching me” his art was transformed. The recognition that his murals occupied physical space within a community produced a type of

accountability within Hunter. He described his epiphany, saying, “Wait! I can do this and people will watch and they will look and they listen and I just kind of found my voice in that.” Space is an important aspect of material patronage that has an effect on the audience in that space as well as the artist.

“Art in Different Spaces”

A final related example of material patronage that also bridges into relational patronage was provided by Spencer. It is an idea that he has had for some time about would it could be like for the church to be a patron of the arts in the Richmond. He envisions the church carrying out this support not in its institutional capacity, but through its individual members, many of whom possess the material asset of their own homes which can be leveraged in support of the arts. Here is his description:

And the deal is: You get this painting (or whatever the object is) in your house for a couple months, but you have to have the artist and some neighbors over to talk about life and art and all that stuff. What kind of programmatic thing would we do that is paying artists to produce art, but also showing them the power of art in different spaces—not galleries—and connecting them to the community?

Spencer’s idea is innovative because of the way that it results in a benefit to all three parties involved—the artist whose work is shown, the patron whose home is adorned with good art for some period of time, and the community that is invited to view and engage with the art and artist. It is material patronage that yields a profit well beyond material gain.

Relational Patronage

A second potential source of patronage the church can offer to artists is relational. Such communal support has already been hinted at and is widely recognized as a profound need among artists.

Barrett, quoted above in the discussion about financial support from the church, also identified the connections with people that the church has. Churches do not simply provide pre-existing buildings; they also offer pre-existing relationships. Astute readers will already have noted that Spencer has talked repeatedly about the need for artists to be integrated into larger communities, for their own good and for the good of those communities. Churches possess that sort of nurturing community.

Amanda wondered about the possibility of creating an artist group—what she called a “mini-community of artists” within the church, to offer support, encouragement, and perhaps even a context for working on projects together. Tanya acknowledged that her church has tried in the past to facilitate artist discussion groups, but admitted that opportunity for more exists. She imagined that they could meet to “talk about the arts, share each other’s art, to do a gallery tour together and discuss.” However, what Tanya and others have discovered about some of these avenues of relational patronage is that they can be difficult to sustain. One-off events are often easier than providing ongoing space for artists to interact with each other as artists.

As artists envisioned different forms that relational patronage from the church could take, they often reverted back to experiences they have already

had outside of the church. It was common to hear artists mention patronage they had received and then soon thereafter they would talk about patronage they extended to others. The artists in this study demonstrated a readiness to extend to others what they previously received through relationships. They were keenly aware of how because doors had been opened for them, they ought to open doors for others. They were familiar with practicing a form of “pay it forward” relational patronage.

John-Mark, though not part of a faith community, talked about the possibility of patronage in relational terms. Specifically, he described the recording studio as an “ecosystem;” a living environment of different parts sustained by their relationships with one another. It is clear that community is a central aspect of what the studio strives to be and of whatever patronage it might receive. As John-Mark said, “For the musicians themselves, and for the viewer watching it, there is something about it. That you’re seeing six, seven people come together and form this one kind of body of work that’s pretty special.” In effect, he is saying that to the extent the church appreciates the relational dependence of jazz musicians, it will be better equipped to support them in their art.

Intellectual Patronage

The final area of potential patronage from the church that was identified by the interview subjects in this study is admittedly slippery. It is hard to pin down in concrete terms. There remains a general sense that artists could be supported

through intellectual patronage that would help them better frame their art work in the world.

Artists are aware that they are deficient in understanding how their art can serve the common good of their cities. As they give voice to their struggle to conceptualize how their art can function within the larger world, they are betraying the need they have for intellectual patronage. Amanda gets at this dynamic when she said, “Sometimes [art] expresses things I can’t say, but then sometimes I get really frustrated with it because it doesn’t express what I can say.” Barrett also articulated the need for intellectual patronage around the nature of art. His thought is worthing at length:

Somehow this idea of separating the church from the world, this sacred/ secular divide. I get what they means. I understand what the means intellectually, but I’m not really sure that it actually makes sense. If we’re followers of Christ, then all of our lives are sacred right? This idea that there’s this part of your life that is not relating to God doesn’t make sense: “The world is out there. We’ve got to block ourselves off from the world.”

Shared from a Christian perspective, Barrett’s description of the divide between sacred and secular is crucial to understanding some of the ways the church could support artists with intellectual patronage.

John-Mark provided one example of the potential impact of this sort of intellectual and theological patronage. He described how his secular record production studio recently signed an *a cappella* gospel act. Some industry heads scoffed, saying, “Too much Jesus. We can’t work with this.” John Mark and his partners struggled with how to respond because they felt that it would not be right to ask the group to change who they are. John-Mark noted how a robust and

nuanced understanding of art's place within the world provided by the church's intellectual patronage could support the studio in such a real world scenario.

Of course, the need for intellectual and theological understanding is not limited to the artists themselves. This avenue for patronage from the church must also be directed at the church itself, specifically its members. Tanya explained that the church needs training in order to appreciate art as facilitating a way to see the world in unique ways. As she imagined an expanded place for art patronage within her own church, she hesitated. "The idea of incorporating other forms of art into worship besides music feels difficult. Spoken word, dance, visual art—those feel like there would be a lot of people to say, 'Hey, why do we need to do that?' ...Does that really point is to the gospel or is it just performance?" What Tanya is getting at is that people within the church need to be formed by a more rigorous understanding of art, just as artists themselves do.

This need for a deeper rationale supporting art's place within the church and within the city was also evident from Hunter's story. As an artist who is not formally connected to any church community, Hunter understandably struggled to imagine what patronage from a church could look like. But even through his desultory answer, he demonstrated how both he and the community more broadly could benefit from intellectual patronage. As he grappled with what opportunities might exist for the church to support his art, Hunter focused on finding the need that his art would address for the church. He said, "I think looking past what art ends up being, not just this piece on the wall, or wherever it ends up, but finding the needs as far as it being a functional thing." Because

Hunter lacked a mindset that his art would have value for church other than its utility in meeting a need or serving a function, he reverted to the value his art could bring through the process of making a mural. He concluded that purpose could be discovered as community-building tool for the church rather than the actual art itself.

Thus, it is clear from multiple vantage points that one of the ways the church could provide support to artists is through intellectual patronage that would further elucidate the place of art for both artists and the church community.

Summary of Findings

This chapter summarized the findings of this study focused on how artists receive support for their work through patronage. A compare and contrast method was used to yield results that touched on all four of the study's primary research questions. The following chapter will sketch some conclusions based on synthesizing the literary research of chapter two with the findings presented here based on the interviews conducted with artists seeking patronage for their work for the common good.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore how artists receive support for their work through patronage. Towards that purpose, the following four research questions were used to shape the study:

1. In what ways and in what patterns do artists receive support for their work by patronage?
2. In what ways are the artists' understandings of their work as contributing to the common good relevant to their receiving support for their work through patronage.
3. What obstacles to receiving support for their work through patronage do these artists encounter?
4. What obstacles to receiving support for their work through patronage do these artists encounter?

This concluding chapter will summarize, synthesize, and discuss the findings generated by the review of relevant literature as well as the findings generated from research interviews conducted with six practicing artists from Richmond, Virginia. The findings of the literature will be placed in conversation with the findings from the interviews with practitioners. Both will be amplified by the researcher's own perspective on these data.

After the findings have been summarized, synthesized, and discussed, recommendations for practice based on these findings will be presented. These recommendations will address both artists and the wider community of the church and city. Finally, the chapter will conclude with some indications of further research that will benefit those institutions and individuals providing patronage for artists working for the common good.

Summary of Study and Findings

This study reviewed literature in several areas relevant to how artists receive patronage for their work, and it analyzed interview data provided by six different artists working in Richmond, Virginia. The literature review described a recent surge in attention to the idea of the common good and the specific role art serves in contributing to that good. The literature review also worked toward a definition of common grace, including its biblical and theological grounding in the Christian tradition. Finally, the literature review included a survey of the contemporary practice of patronage to help identify opportunities and obstacles facing the church as it supports artists.

The interview data provided in this study concentrated on the study's research questions. First, the data established patterns of how artists have received patronage for their work, specifically through relational connections, through financial means, and through encouragement in their artistic endeavors. Second, the data revealed how artists' understanding of the world, of people in the world, and of the role of art in the world can contribute to their receiving patronage. Third, several obstacles to the practice of patronage were described

in the interview data; obstacles which exist both within the church and within the artists themselves. Lastly, the data sketched out some potential opportunities identified by the artists for the church to provide material, relational, and intellectual patronage.

Discussion of Findings

The most salient findings of the present study are straightforward. Artists need and want material, relational, and intellectual patronage to support their work for the common good. The church possesses material, relational, and intellectual resources that could be mobilized to provide patronage of the arts. Despite this alignment between artists' areas of need and the church's areas of resource, the way forward in providing contemporary patronage for the arts is not easy because of a host of reasons affecting both artists and the church.

Before describing the particular types of patronage that artists need and that the church might provide, something must be said about the word patronage. When people encounter the word patronage they often think reflexively of the Medici family in Renaissance Italy, or they think of a single, wealthy benefactor sustaining the production of an individual artist. While both of those images are examples of patronage, they are caricatures which fail to do justice to the broader term. As the literature shows, recent attempts have been made to recover a more robust understanding of patronage, from both individual and institutional sources. Nonetheless, patronage remains a troublesome word. It is, as Spencer aptly put it, an "idea that people don't quite know what to do with." The artists themselves struggled to define it or provide examples of it in practice.

A general uneasiness surrounds the word and artists wonder how it could fit with their work.

That is why reinvigorating the idea of patronage is a first step towards denouement between the church and the arts. Patronage remains a good word; a useful word. Artist Mako Fujimura is one voice re-asserting the idea of patronage into the church's vocabulary. He does so in a way that meshes with the church's existing theological categories. Fujimura calls patronage "a particular, distinctive facet of stewardship that is essential for cultural formation."²³⁰ By linking it to stewardship—a category familiar to and already largely accepted by the church—Fujimura shows how patronage is simply a facet of faithful discipleship in the world.

Material Patronage

Artists need material patronage to sustain their work. The artists interviewed for this study were quick to explain their need for material resources like money, space, and people. The church, meanwhile, possess many of these material resources. Most churches own buildings that are under-used during the week. Many of these same congregations have operating budgets with money allocated for the purpose of developing partnerships with various common good entities within their communities. People are the most undeniable resource that churches have. Even churches that lack their physical space or significant discretionary budgets have people. The disconnect between the artists' needs

²³⁰ Fujimura, "Culture Care," 14.

and the church's resources is rooted in the church's uneasy relationship with the arts.

The church—especially the contemporary American protestant church—is handicapped in its approach to art, precisely because of art's materiality. Throughout its history, the church has struggled with gnostic tendencies that over-value the “spiritual” while denigrating the material. The interview data bore this out, as Barrett, a musician, referenced the persistent influence of a divide between secular and sacred purposes. The literature review established art's inescapable materiality, whether it be the painter's acrylics, the muralist's brick walls, or the musician's fingers stretched across the fret of an instrument. As Gregory Wolfe said, “The artist works in an incarnational medium, profoundly aware of contingency and embodied-ness.”²³¹ Artists, precisely because of the inevitable materiality of their work, model human dominion in the realm of God's undeniably physical creation.

Enter the church's doctrine of common grace. Common grace concerns itself with the stuff of the created world and humanity's interaction with it. Thus, right under its nose, the church possesses a rich, anti-gnostic theological tradition that values materiality. Calvin, recognized as the pioneer of common grace theology in the Reformed Protestant tradition, described it as an aspect of God's providence that governs human life and culture within the created order. Embedded in Calvin's seminal articulation of common grace is the idea that it

²³¹ Wolfe, *Operation of Grace*, 51.

establishes the continuing imprint of God's image through all sorts of human activities, chief among them music and the arts.²³²

While there are many theological reasons for the church to have a favorable view of the physical stuff of the world (chief among them, the biblical creation account and Jesus' incarnation), the doctrine of common grace has particular resonance with the church's support of artists. Common grace establishes not just that there is good physical stuff in the world, but that God has granted all of humanity an ability to steward the resources of the world in a positive way. Thus, common grace can justify support for all artists, whether they come from backgrounds of faith or not.

It is to the church's detriment that greater effort has not been extended to recover common grace theology. Without common grace, the church can far too easily flee from the world into the dis-embodied ether of spirituality. The results of such a flight are manifest in certain extreme views of pietism, wherein the arts are dismissed because of their inherent physicality.

Relational Patronage

Artists also need relational patronage in order to thrive. Again and again, the participants in the study talked about the need they felt for community. Spencer, particularly, described his feeling of isolation, saying, "I really have been completely cut off from the main art community." It is not surprising, therefore, that Spencer was also adamant about the need for artists to be rooted within supportive communities. On multiple occasions he opined on the importance for

²³² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:276.

artists to be “integrated within communities.” Likewise, Hunter described how his work as a muralist benefits from the “responsibility” and “accountability” provided by a larger community paying attention to his art. As he explained, “murals live in communities.”

Artists also described relational patronage as essential not just in fostering their creative output, but in providing a context for the reception of their art. Both Amanda and Spencer described how home art shows have been a key dimension of patronage during their careers. These shows rely on family and friends willing to leverage their relational capital in service to artists. Reflecting on these home shows, Spencer said, “patronage is as much about social support, feeling connected, included” as it is about providing material resources.

The literature also delineated the importance of community for artists. Fostering relationships of nurture for artists is particularly necessary given the church’s past ambivalence to the arts. Artists are tentative around the church. They have felt burned or betrayed by the church, particularly the Protestant church which, since the Reformation restated the primacy of the preached word, has tried to strip itself of any art that might compromise the purity and simplicity of the gospel.²³³ The result is a landscape in which Christians either abstain from the arts entirely or enter the world of art tentatively and suspiciously. Meanwhile artists, sensing alienation from the church, are tempted to capitulate completely to a view of themselves as autonomous geniuses, serving as the priests of a rival religion. Common ground is needed. As Seerveld explains, “truly God-praising

²³³ Siedell, 134.

artistry can flourish only when the artists is deeply embedded both in an artistic community and in the wider, societal communion of sinning saints.”²³⁴

Only recently have some voices re-issued a call to the church to create the sorts of communities that will nurture artists.²³⁵ The cultural estuaries envisioned by Fujimura are an example. He describes the need for Christians and others of good will to create generative seedbeds in which beauty can flourish.²³⁶ The call for the church to cultivate these generative cultures must be matched by a call to artists to sow themselves into them.

The importance of creating and sustaining a culture that can incubate the arts was a resounding theme echoed in the interviews. It was most notable in conversation with John-Mark, the co-founder and owner of a music studio and production company, because he does not self-identify as a Christian. Nonetheless, he explained his desire to create a musical ecosystem that yields benefit for both the music produced and the musicians. He explained that “the vision with having this community here, and building kind of an ecosystem for these musicians” aimed at creating a place where the musicians could thrive and, thus, make excellent art. The overall goal is an symbiotic environment: better artistic output, better experience for the artists who make a living through their art, and better effect on the city as a whole.

²³⁴ Seerveld, 26.

²³⁵ Sorina Higgins, “The Church’s Role in Art,” *Comment*. May 27, 2011, accessed March 26, 2017, https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/2792/the-churchs-role-in-art/?utm_medium=email

²³⁶ Fujimura, “Generative Culture,” 33.

The church possesses relational resources that could be employed to support generative communities which foster the arts. At its core the church's identity is a community that exists to support the gifts of its members and foster abundant human life. Foundational biblical descriptions of the kingdom of God—of which the church is a proleptic form—are rooted in the language of ecosystems.

Whereas the theological resources to undergird material patronage of artists are found in the church's historical understanding of common grace, similar resources to undergird relational patronage of artists are found in the church's doctrine of the *imago Dei*. The literature reviewed in this study noted Douglas John Hall's conviction that the *imago Dei* is best understood in relational terms. Andy Crouch explained, humans more fully image God when their efforts at creativity emerge from a "lively, living community."²³⁷ In their reflections on the *imago Dei*, these thinkers emphasize that humanity properly images God corporately, that is, together in community. Thus, to the extent that artistry is a dimension of image-bearing in the world, it ought to be undertaken in relationship with others.

Art as reflection of the *imago Dei* will be more complete when it is produced from a communal incubator. Therefore, artists need to abandon the mentality that their work should be produced in isolation. Meanwhile, the church needs to work to provide contexts where artists can do their work by bearing the image of God in community, through relationships, with God himself, and with

²³⁷ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 104.

other image-bearers. The result of such relational patronage will be self-evident. It will yield art and life aligned with the way God created them to be. As John-Mark explained the effects of the communitarian ecosystem the production studio is cultivating, he said, “there is something about it. That you’re seeing six, seven people come together and form this one kind of body of work.” Without referencing the Christian theological background to the idea, John-Mark is hinting at humanity’s fundamental constitution as bearing God’s image.

In this way, John-Mark’s vision of a little music studio in Richmond, Virginia, is “Christ-haunted.”²³⁸ In no way did he and his co-founders set out to create a Christian music production company. Nor did they self-consciously set up the studio with Christian principles. Perhaps, the Spirit of Christ haunts their art making because several of principle architects grew up in church community despite having minimal connection to it today. Or perhaps they were responding simply to what works. They were creating an artistic ethos in which they, as musicians, could thrive and from which, in their opinion, the best music could flow. They were making art in harmony with the truest truths of the universe.

The example of the recording studio is particularly pertinent in the discussion about patronage for common good art because it is a secular enterprise. The foundations for their way of making art are not moored explicitly in the Christian tradition. Yet it resonates with a richly textured biblical understanding of the image of God. The *imago Dei*, however it has been affected by sin (and surely it has), remains an essential human possession. As such, it

²³⁸ This borrows a phrase used by Flannery O'Connor in *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970).

provides common ground for discussion among believers and non-believers, affirming God's design for all of humanity (not just Christians) and outlining a positive manner of how art should be pursued in the world from deeply embedded relationships.

Intellectual Patronage

Third, artists need intellectual patronage. In the preceding discussions of material patronage and relational patronage, it has already been demonstrated how the church's rich theological heritage can foster a fuller appreciation of art and the community from which it is generated. Ideas such as common grace and the *imago Dei*, which have been crafted over centuries through the church's efforts to understand God's world and the role of responsible human agents within it, bolster the role of artists in working towards the common good. This is a form of intellectual patronage. But more than that is both possible and required.

Finding the right language to describe this third form of patronage is challenging. For those within the church, intellectual patronage may not be the right phrase, but it has the benefit of at least being a phrase that artists themselves would recognize. More precisely described, intellectual patronage refers to using theological resources to more fully form people. It should not be viewed as enriching disembodied intellects irrespective of their connection to the physical world. Intellectual patronage leverages the church's understanding of the created world and humans in it, to support artists in their work for the common good.

It is also necessary that this intellectual patronage be extended towards the church community itself. It is not only artists who need to be formed theologically. Many Christians—members and attenders of the church—have an anemic understanding of how art enriches human existence.

The participants in this study described the need for intellectual patronage primarily through the language of “understanding.” Spencer said the church needs to “actually understand different ways of what the arts do.” Likewise, he argued that artists needed to see that they were not “just artists in the art ghetto,” but that their work had significance within the church. Tanya touched on similar themes, observing that many people within the church have not been trained to listen or to see art. She thinks they need to be equipped intellectually to appreciate art and its contribution to one’s faith experience. Such training should not be limited to art history or comparative art analysis. The training should be a type of formation that is theologically rooted, and produces people better able to view the creative arts as derivative of the first creator, God.

Furthermore, intellectual patronage can equip artists and churches to appreciate that art is “innately necessary,” in Tanya’s words. Tanya experienced suspicion towards the arts in her church context because, as she put it, “it’s not the food pantry.” She voiced the very issue that writer Lauren Winner encountered in critics who lamented how she spent valuable resources on art when “there are poor people to be fed.”²³⁹ In their own ways, both articulate a point made by Seerveld when he writes, “we have believed that without faith in

²³⁹ Winner, *For the Beauty*, 77.

Jesus Christ you perish and without digestion, you normally expire, but without art you get along tolerably well.”²⁴⁰ Intellectual patronage can correct these false beliefs.

Barrett also underscored the need for intellectual patronage through his allusion to the persistent “scared/secular divide” within music (and other art forms). Although he acknowledged that such a divide does not make sense intellectually for followers of Christ whose entire lives are lived in the presence of God. He also saw that the dichotomy is so pervasive that it must be continually counteracted. Barrett evidenced the challenge of consistently and comprehensively seeing the world in an integrated way. At one point, he described his desire to create jazz that is “Christ-honoring but that is musically so good that non-believers and community member would think it was a normal thing to go to.” Embedded in his comment is the assumption that in order for music to be Christ-honoring, it must have explicit Christian content. He is saying, in effect, that as a jazz musician, the lyrics of a piece must convey a truth that is only secondarily supported (and especially not hindered) by the music. In this way of thinking, Barrett demonstrates a slippage towards didacticism. He reveals the need for intellectual patronage within the church that would include a deeper recognition of good music as Christ-honoring in and of itself. Music may be reckoned good simply as the product of artists made in the image of God, sustained by common grace, and stewarding their gifts in service to the common good.

²⁴⁰ Seerveld, 34.

The church owns a rich store of theological resources that could provide intellectual patronage in support of the arts. If common grace provides the theological justification for material patronage and if the *imago Dei* provides the theological justification for relational patronage, then the Christian understanding of stewardship for the common good provides the theological underpinning for intellectual patronage.

The literature review briefly sketched how the historic Christian understanding of stewardship for the arts eroded over time. On the one hand, Reformation's elevation of the printed word produced suspicion towards the arts. The church stripped ornamentation from its worship and space. Art suffered in the Christian understanding. It was, quite literally, out of sight, out of mind. Then, distracted by internecine debates about theology, the church ceded discussions of the arts to the emerging academy, effectively permitting art to become a category quite separate from religion. Without explicitly condoning gnosticism, the church functionally adopted a divide between the sacred interests of the church and the secular concerns of the art world. Meanwhile, many artists were content to perpetuate this development, realizing that they could assume a quasi-transcendent quality to their work, nurturing what one historian called an "irreligious religion."²⁴¹

The potential corrective for both artists and the church in their capitulation to this separation comes from a rediscovery of how a robust form of patronage encourages faithful stewardship, which, in turn, fosters the common good. Such

²⁴¹ Rookmaaker, *Art Needs No Justification*, 18.

a rediscovery can provide each side with resources for understanding art's rightful place within the world. A broadly conceived system of patronage that promotes the stewardship of all human giftedness in service to the larger community and in service to God's intentions for creation is the type of grounding vision that both artists and the church need.

The intellectual patronage that the church can offer and that artists need, in its most basic articulation, begins with God's prior patronage of all human creative endeavors. As Trevor Hart says, God is "the first and last patron of the arts."²⁴² Therefore, any act of patronage becomes a form of imaging God as the first true patron. But similarly, every act of artistry also becomes a form of imaging God as the first true artist. These are important statements that validate the work of both patron and artist. Because so many artists struggle to find validation in a vocation that can feel purely materialistic, an understanding that their professional purpose derives from a calling as stewards of God's gifts would be stabilizing.

What artists offer is not peripheral. It addresses a fundamental human need—the need for beauty. As Fujimura helped explain, artists are feeding souls which are themselves inextricably located within bodies. Seeing their art in this way could provide artists a fuller self-conception of what it means to be a vocational artist—okay with being paid, okay with the business side of vocation, and equipped to understand what patronage can look like in all its forms.

²⁴² Hart, 15.

Meanwhile, artists will need to embed themselves, to one degree or another, within the worshiping communities and liturgical rhythms of the church. Artists—whether Christian or not—will benefit from regular interaction with a community of faith that is living out dependence on God, recognizing the diversity of his gifting to humanity, and committed to the common good. There will be challenges to such an approach to community life. Particularly the church will need to find ways to make room for artists who do not share their fundamental faith commitments, but who nonetheless can help the church express and communicate truths about the world and about people. The church will need to exercise the full extent of its hospitality, as it welcomes all image bearers of good will who are committed to bringing about the common good. Out of this community of artists and patrons together will emerge a proximate kingdom, better able to bridge the gap between the shadow world that is and the world of comprehensive flourishing to come.²⁴³ As Kuyper said, “With trembling hand, as it were, art reaches toward the glory that through Christ will one day fill heaven and earth.”²⁴⁴

The church needs to realize that any of these efforts at intellectual translation will need to be guided by an intentional and iterative process. Old conceptions die hard. Both artists and the church will need to be continually disabused of false notions of art and its connection to life and faith. But trust

²⁴³ Jethani, “Planting Gardens in Prison.”

²⁴⁴ Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder*, 144.

begins with understanding—a way of seeing the world that is not built on suspicion.

The findings of this study show that how the church's existing resources can mesh with the needs that many artists feel as they endeavor to make art for the common good. The church can leverage its strengths in support of artists through material, relational, and intellectual patronage. Such a comprehensive vision for patronage of the arts unites several important streams of the church's theological heritage—common grace, the *imago Dei*, and stewardship. Though left dormant or untapped for too long, these resources nonetheless have the potential to re-invigorate artists and to re-engage the church in the arts, as they are recovered and put into practice.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study suggest several important practical recommendations for the church. Put most simply, the church could provide for what artists need in the form of material, relational, and intellectual patronage. But how?

To provide artists with material patronage will require open doors, open wallets, and open churches. The church must come to view its buildings not merely as sanctuaries but also as estuaries. Whether fellowship halls, atriums, or offices, the church must open the doors of its physical spaces so that art can be displayed and performed, witnessed and discussed. The church must also be ready to give generous financial support to the arts—whether in the form of

commissions, grants, or stipends. Finally, the church must be open to receiving art as integral, not incidental, to the life with God.

To provide artists with relational patronage, the church will need to extend its commitment to hospitality beyond the fellowship hour after worship. Artists need, and art benefits from, sustained long-term relationships. Because the church possesses a wide web of social connection, it can serve artists by inviting them into that network.

Lastly, to provide artists with intellectual patronage the church will need to enter into dialogue with artists. While it has deep resources for understanding the world and people that may be brought to bear on art's place in the common good, the church must begin from a posture of listening.

The most salient specific recommendation for the church resides at the nexus of material, relational, and intellectual patronage: that church members open their homes for artists' work to be shown. Home shows provide physical space for art work to be exhibited or performed outside of the rarified air of the gallery or academy. They also provide a safe context for the artist to both showcase work and interact with community members or potential buyers. Finally, they provide an environment for intentional conversation around the arts—a direct dialogue between artist and viewer, oxygenated by common grace. In short, community-based art has a triple bottom line: yielding profit to the artist, the community, and the church.

The nature of the home space is porous and thus adds great value as a venue for artists to display their work. While the home is a private space on the

one hand, it also is a familiar space of hospitality and interchange. Homes are places where meaningful conversations take place—among families, between friends, with neighbors, and even with guests and strangers. Like faith itself, homes are personal but not private. Art positioned in a home space can become formative for everyone involved.

A second recommendation is that the church identify ways to host open-ended conversations around the arts. To do so, the church will need to renounce a prevailing view of art that says it is “just the pretty bits around the edges.” The church will also need to move beyond a view of church art that expects it always to wear a Bible-verse name tag.²⁴⁵ Instead, the church must intentionally recognize the integral role art plays in advancing the common good whether it is beautiful or vexing, comforting or troubling. The church should seek opportunities to facilitate discussions around the arts. In so doing, the church must be willing first to issue invitations to artists and then, to cede control.

Hosting conversations around the arts would be an initial step to developing generative ecosystems for artists. These conversations would provide an initial foray into what Fujimura calls “generative cultures.”²⁴⁶ These generative cultures must be sturdy enough to embrace uncertainty so themes that are difficult to engage still have a place. The church will need to acknowledge that it does not have all of the answers; or, at least, that answers sometimes appear opaque. The church will need to abandon didacticism and embrace mystery. It

²⁴⁵ Higgins, “The Church’s Role in Art.”

²⁴⁶ Fujimura, “Generative Culture,” 33.

will need to work to accept that truthful expression is often discovered in the dark dimensions of life—depravity as well as grace, the fall as well as redemption. The church would do well to heed the sage advice of 20th century Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor, who said, "To the hard of hearing you shout, for the almost-blind you have to draw large and startling figures and sometimes you create exquisite miniatures."²⁴⁷ Art, sometimes by sketching a God-shaped silhouette, will help the church discover life at the fuzzy edges.

A third recommendation is that the church recalibrate the scale by which it measures patronage. Patronage can (and should) vary greatly. Today is not the age of the Medicis and their grandiose support of Renaissance art. In the age of Kickstarter, a little bit of patronage can go a long way. The church would do well to heed one artist's example of selling a painting to a patron committed to a payment plan that extends over several years. While people have no qualms with financing other purchases (cars, furniture, et cetera), the idea of financing art may be novel, but it makes sense financially and aesthetically. Art is an appreciating asset that can also be appreciated. A plan like this is a benefit to the artist and to the patron because the art resides in a home and becomes a source of conversation, if not part of the everyday liturgy of the home.

A church need not commit thousands of dollars, but it needs to commit some. A church need not do it all, but it needs to do something. To put it

²⁴⁷ Gregory Wolfe, *Operation of Grace*, 35.

succinctly, “We are *all* patrons.”²⁴⁸ The church needs to reframe the question from whether it is a patron to what is it a patron of.

In addition to offering specific recommendations to the church (as individuals and as an institution), this study also yields some recommendations for artists working for the common good. First, these artists need to know that faithfulness to their art in the world is, in fact, faithfulness to the church. If the sacred/secular divide is false and all of life is lived in God’s presence, then artists exercise faithfulness in the studio or in front of a mural as much as they do in a church’s sanctuary.

Second, these artists need to embed themselves within communities. Integrated within the community of a church, artists will be able to create in response to the faithful proclamation and embodiment of the gospel. Discarding the mindset of autonomous self-made creatives, artists will need to surrender their idea of independence. They will make better art when anchoring their work within relationships of mutuality. In this way, artists will act as servants, willing to mediate between the art world and the community of faith. They will discover their important capacity as translators between spheres too often kept separate. As bridges between the art world and the church world, they will need to know it is likely they will get walked on by people from either side.

Finally, artists also need to embrace the ways their art can act as an ice cutter for the gospel. The beauty they create feeds the soul of the church, as well as of the world. As one of the interview subjects put it, explaining why the church

²⁴⁸ Fujimura, “Culture Care,” 14.

has been hesitant to provide financial support, “art is not Sunday school.” That is precisely why the church needs artists. The arts have the capacity to preach the gospel without saying the name of Jesus. When people cease to believe in good and evil, beauty will save them

Recovering a program of patronage within the church for the arts will take time (generations) and resources (beyond mere finances). A mutual project like this one will require patience from the church to learn about the context of art and, in turn, better understand it as a form of communication.²⁴⁹ It will require patience from artists, too. Finally, it will require efforts of translation from those versed in both the theological resources of the church and the historical dimensions of art.

Recommendations for Further Research

The present study was intentionally focused in its scope. It only begins to scratch the surface of research into how artists can receive support through patronage from the church. Some immediate opportunities for further research include interviewing a wider sampling of artists across various artistic disciplines in one city or interviewing artists in other cities to assess how context influences artists’ experience of receiving patronage. Discipline specific studies would also be beneficial in efforts to better home in on the types of patronage that would best serve painters, musicians, art event promoters, and a whole host of other artistic disciplines. Those reading the findings of this study, as well as those conducting future research on the subject, would do well to remember that art is

²⁴⁹ Siedell, 140.

not monolithic. It is foolish to expect every artist to need the same resources, particularly artists who are working in different disciplines. An awareness of the diversity of needs faced by various artists helps to place the church in the posture of listening first, before it acts to serve.

Another fertile opportunity for further research lies in focused study of church communities that are currently providing patronage to artists—both Christian and non-Christian—within their local contexts. Over the course of this study, the researcher was made aware frequently of churches carrying out exemplary practices of patronage for the arts. The temptation to further investigate those churches by asking questions about their experiences and culling best practices from their approaches was real. Undoubtedly, art advocates, like Spencer, have amassed a lifetime of practical wisdom that could serve the church. An eventual comparison of the extent to which artists' view of patronage aligns with churches' practice of patronage would also be beneficial to the church.

This study also is limited in the breadth and depth of the literature reviewed and considered. Undoubtedly lacunae exist. Future researchers will serve the church by rounding out the theological underpinnings for the practice of patronage by the church. For instance, further study of into the historic practice of patronage—what worked and what did not—would be beneficial. The contemporary church should learn from those situations where patrons, whether intentionally or not, proved controlling or manipulative. Today's church should

also learn from those positive examples in history where artists were better equipped in their common good efforts by support from the faith community.

At the conclusion of this study, I must urge the church to develop further its intellectual understanding of ideas like patronage, the *imago Dei*, and common grace and to apply them in real life. These are ideas that should diffuse beyond the rarified air of theologians and pastors. They must be inhaled by Christians in the pew, those every day patrons interacting with artists through purchasing their work, inviting them into their homes, and integrating them into the living ecosystem of the church community.

Such patronage of artists working for the common good is not ancillary to the church's witness to the gospel. Art is integral to God's mission in the world. By fostering greater faithfulness to artists and more inventive pathways to patronage, Christians may come to discover that God's saving grace flows on a riverbed first hewn by art. And when ears have grown deaf to other sounds of truth, they may discover that beauty will call to them and save them.

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