THE ART OF DIAKONIA

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Abstract

The Art of Diakonia

This paper explores diakonia, as it has been practiced over the centuries, as an art form with parallel development to the practice of the fine arts. In the early Christian Church, the Middle Ages, and the twentieth century, art forms and diakonia developed in response to the reality of the world and the visions of hope held by the people.

The fine arts seek to represent reality in a different way than that which the naked eye can see. They challenge the imagination to experience another vision of reality. Art invites people into a spiritual pilgrimage. It invites people to see, with eyes of imagination, what is the essence of a scene, an object or an emotion. Diakonia seeks to engage people in the search for spiritual and physical wholeness and health. It invites people into a spiritual pilgrimage on which they may envision the possibilities for a healthy world and then imagine the means to achieve that vision. It invites people to partner their faith with their actions, and to seek God's justice for all people.

The elements that fine artists work with are physical: paint, musical notes, words, fabric, stone, metal, and others. They create representations of reality that the physical eye may not perceive. The elements that diakonia works with are spiritual: gifts and abilities, desires, needs, hopes, fears. It encourages individuals and communities to mold and shape reality to better represent the ideals of justice, beauty, wholeness and health.

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Diaconal folk in the Christian tradition who have struggled, through the centuries, to live their faith and make the world a better place give me courage, strength and purpose.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the beginning was God, and God was an artist with a passion for life. S/he created the world and painted the colours of life upon it. S/he formed a human from the clay and breathed the Spirit of life into it. Then God stood back and looked at the work and saw that it was good. And so it took on a life of its own. Physical and Spiritual intertwined with one another in perfect harmony. But the human changed and grew, found a need for structures and systems and explanations, asked many questions of the universe and found few answers. Ever since, humankind has sought to recapture that harmony of body and soul — of the Physical and Spiritual nature of its being — something of the passion for life with which God charged the earth...

Human artists through the ages have attempted to capture that passion: to create, using the elements of the earth, a link to the inner elements of the soul: to see that which many eyes cannot (or will not) and to use it as a tool in their own spiritual journey as well as offering it as an aid to the enlightenment of others. Artists often believe that in partnership with God, or the "eternal spirit" or the "cosmos", energy is created, and through that energy, beauty and life and hope. The artists' work too, takes on its own life as it is viewed and interpreted by others through their own experience and truth. The artist tries to see what is spiritual and give it a physical form. H.W.Janson, in A Basic History of Art, reflects on the creative process of the artist:

> [It is a]series of leaps of the imagination and the artist's attempts to give them form by shaping his [sic] materials. It is a strange and risky business in which the maker never quite knows what he is making until he

> has actually made it. To put it another way, it is a game of hide and seek in which the seeker is not sure what he is looking for until he has found it.[1]

Artists working with media such as wood or stone often describe the experience of creating a statue or carving as one in which they simply chip away the outside and allow the figure that is already there to be seen. Michelangelo's "David", for example, was inside the stone waiting to be found.

...Eventually, God gave the world another example. Jesus, the word made flesh, taught that humans cannot live abundantly if they rely only on the physical — humans do not live by bread alone. He was suggesting that there must be a spiritual dimension to life — one that offered food for the soul. He offered his friends and followers the opportunity to look at life differently than they had seen it before, and suggested that they remove the scales from their eyes so that they could see clearly. He called the disciples to became "fishers of men" — to catch up the imagination and excitement and passion for life that exists in every person. He told them that he had come among them not to be a leader in the ways they had already devised, but to be one who serves the whole people — *diakonos*.

Diakonia, service or ministry to the world, was to be the physical manifestation of the spiritual life in union with God. It was to be the way humans learned to live in the world and create *shalom* — wholeness, peace, oneness with the world. Jesus' early followers embraced diakonia and lived their understanding of it in communities gathered for support, nurture, education and worship. They taught about the life and work of Jesus and what it could mean for the world. They cared for those less fortunate. They lived with one another in community, and they

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[1] H.W. Janson, A Basic History of Art Second Edition, Revised by Anthony F. Janson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1988) pp.10 - 11

encouraged one another to live in the way of God. They challenged the authorities and powers when the systems they had devised were unjust for any segment of the population.

The word *diakonia* comes from the Greek root *diakon*. The New Testament uses the root in three ways. First *diakoneo*, meaning to serve, is distinct from *douleuo* meaning to serve as a slave, or *therapeuo* meaning to serve willingly. Second it is distinct from *latreuo*, to serve for wages and *leitourgeo*, to do public service, both refer to aspects of personal service. Third, *diakonos* refers to a servant or deacon, and is connected to *diakonia*, or service itself.[2] The use of this last form of the word for servant in Christian writings emphasizes service as one who waits on others at the table. These servants would bring food and drink to those who sat in one's home. Jaap van Klinken says, "There seems to be no etymological agreement about whether the two words *dia* (through) and *konis* (dust) constitute *diakonein*, but the combination of the two emphasizes humility."[3] That humility was shown by Jesus in his washing of the disciples' feet and the leadership that he offered them.

Jesus did not work in isolation, nor was he ignorant of the forces that led his people to this place in history and that led him to offer his vision and ministry to them. He understood those forces had led them to their place in time, and he knew that change was possible for even those most blind to the possibilities. One of the aspects of Jesus' work and life was that of artist. His art was his ability to see the potential for growth and peaceful living that existed already among the people. He named the blocks to that growth and called people to open their spiritual eyes to not only the beauty of God's creation, but also to the possibilities of beauty that existed around

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[2] Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., Theological dictionary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985) p.152

[3] Jaap van Klinken, Diakonia: Mutual Helping with Justice and Compassion (Grand Rapids: Williamm. B. Eerdmans, 1989) p.27

them. He called them to use their skills and energy, as he did, to make a new community reality come into being.

Like the artist who works by "liberating" an image from a piece of stone or wood, a similar process occurs when diaconal folk work with groups or individuals to discern their call and to act it out in the world. It is a process of chipping away at the outside biases or blinders until the inherent skills, desires and dreams — as well as possibilities of that group — can be seen and owned by the whole group.

This study explores diakonia as a form of art, taught by Jesus, that has been at work in the church and the world for the last 2000 years. The concept of servanthood was, of course not unique to the emerging Christian church, for it had been an important part of the Hebrew tradition, but exploring that aspect is an undertaking for another time. Diakonia, in the Christian tradition, is a reflection of God's work in the world and intention for humanity, and often has parallels in the history of other art forms. I propose to examine diakonia and the artistic development of early Christianity, the Middle Ages, and the late twentieth century, and the experience of the institutional church in those times.

Common to all three time periods is the need of the people to re-imagine the future. In each of these times, the world is in the midst of change, and questions are being asked about the nature of life and death and community. It is certain that life for the next generation of people will not be what the last has grown up to expect. In the early church, the immanently expected *parousia* did not occur. In the Middle Ages, the world did not end as expected at the change of the millennium, and the population of Europe in particular was rethinking the assumptions they

had made about church and state. In the twentieth century, rapid discoveries in science and technology have challenged many of our commonly held myths about the origins of creation, our place in the universe and the nature, purpose and future of humanity. It has left many people without a spiritual centre from which to draw energy.

Common also to each time period is the need for humans to interact with their environment. Everyone does this in their own style, according to their perspective and their abilities. Some are pragmatists, some are visionaries. Some express their interaction with the universe in philosophical ways, in the world of ideas, while some express it in physical, tangible ways. To achieve some form of balance in life, both these ways of expressing our connections to each other and the universe must be valued and trusted.

Diakonia and the fine arts have, throughout the ages, been ways to express the hopes, desires and realities of the world, and to respond to them in physical, tangible ways. Felix Marti-Ibanez says about art that it is "...neither a game nor just a luxury."[4] He goes on to say that art is "a noble, spiritual relationship resulting from the interaction of man [sic] with his environment."[5] Artists see their environment with an eye to its spirit rather than simply its functionality or practicality, then attempt to interpret that spirit in some physical medium, be it paint, clay, musical notes or words, so that others may also catch a glimpse of their vision. When the human mind uses only the practical, linear side, it sees very well the details that are necessary to survival, but not necessarily the possibilities for growth or beauty. For example, it may see that four walls and a roof will provide shelter from the weather, but not that a little trim or colourful curtains or a bed made of down rather than wood, will make the dwelling more pleasing to the spirit.

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[4]Felix Marti-Ibanez, The Adventure of Art (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1966) p.3

[5]Ibid.

In the twentieth century, Ellen Gates-Starr, one of the women of Hull House in Chicago, understood that beauty and imagination were necessary to life. She worked to bring creativity and art to children in the inner city. She maintained that "if the world is to get better, we need to reclaim art."[6] She taught art to inner city children at Hull House and worked with their parents for justice in the workplace and in the home. She knew that creative problem solving, seeking solutions for the difficulties in our lives and the turmoil of our world, can only happen when we allow ourselves to consider both what is seen and what is unseen, and when we care about one another enough to risk punishment or exile from our communities.

In an attempt to explain the particular gift of the artistic eye, Cynthia Pearl Maus tells this story:

> It is the artist's function to portray what the camera cannot give and what the eyes of others often do not see. A woman looking once with the English painter, Turner, at one of his marvellous landscapes, said to him, "Mr. Turner, I cannot see in nature what you put into your pictures." The artist, with quiet dignity, replied: "Don't you wish you could, madam?" Precisely this is the artists' mission, to help all of us to see, in nature and in human life, what the physical eye, unaided, could never discern.[7]

Over many centuries, art has fed the souls of those looking for beauty and depth. It has given hope to those who despair. It has stretched and challenged the assumptions and practices of those who were stuck in ruts of dogma and behaviour. In the beginning, God saw that the work of creating the world was good, and it took on a life of its own. For human artists the experience is similar. Once a work has been created it must take on life of its own in other peoples' experience of the work.

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[6] Quoted in The Women of Hull House: A Study in Spirituality, Vocation, and Friendship by Eleanor Stebner. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997) p. 87f

[7] Cynthia Pearl Maus, Christ and the Fine Arts: An Anthology of Pictures, Poetry, Music, and Stories Centering in the Life of Christ. (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1938) p. 7

This is also the mission of those engaged in diakonia. It is a ministry of education and service and pastoral care, seeking to help people to see what they might otherwise not discern. It is neither a game nor a luxury, but an interaction of the human with the divine in the context of the world's reality. It also seeks to express the beauty in life and works to engage others in the process of working for justice — for the community and its mission to take on a life of its own. Jill Pinnock speaks of service to the world as the specific ministry of the diaconate, which exits in "exemplifying, extending and personifying the Church's proclamation of the Gospel in word and deed."[8] She understands this kind of service as providing a radical model in our current society.

> We live in a society in which people are increasingly seen either as having a product to market, or as consumer: against this background deacons...stand out. They are witnesses to a very different world order in which Christ himself is among us as "one who serves" and where ambition is turned on its head.[9]

Although Pinnock is writing about the twentieth century, this perspective is acted out in each of the time periods to be discussed. Those involved in service in the Church strive not for status, but for the nurture of their own spirits and those of others around them. In this sense, ambition is turned on its head. It is service that looks to both the spirit and the body of a community, recognizing, as Jesus taught his disciples, that one cannot survive without the other.

The church must find new ways of defining our mission in the world, for the sake of equipping the people of God to move forward in the service of God. Diakonia has been part of the church

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[8] Jill Pinnock, "The History of the Diaconate" in The Deacon's Ministry, ed. Christine Hall (Herefordshire: Fowler Wright Books, 1992) p.9

[9] Ibid.

since its very beginning, attempting to be a visible physical presence in a world of uncertainty. Just as artists seek to express spiritual ideas and thoughts in physical form, so diakonia seeks to express the love of God, and God's vision of shalom in physical ways. As art has sought to fuse body and soul, so diakonia has sought to bring together the needs of the person with the needs and will of God.

How we move forward depends on our experience of change, what we believe about change, and how we see ourselves as either agents or victims of change. It depends strongly on what skills we have developed and are able to share. Diakonia is an art form in and of itself which seeks to incorporate the earthly and the divine, to meld a consciousness of mission and ministry, to shape the world in the image of God's *shalom*. Von Ogden Vogt believes that the arts are a direct reflection of the way in which the people understand the world around them and that the people's spiritual life is perfectly depicted in those arts. In his view:

> [A] spiritual movement that does not find expression in the arts cannot attain self consciousness or dominance or survival. An age or a people that does not reach any self-realization or any unity of thought or feeling that breaks forth into artistic expression is nondescript.[10]

The Christian church has supported and encouraged arts of many forms precisely as a way for individuals to explore their spiritual connections with the world, and to seek out a stronger relationship with God. It has offered — in its architecture, its decoration of shrines and cathedrals, its musical traditions — ways in which people can see beyond the earthly to the spirit of the earth. The diaconate has offered the ministry of service, diakonia, as a help to the search for ways to live with earthly and spiritual integrity, in church and community. Even when the

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[10] Von Ogden Vogt, Art and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921) p. 9

institution of the church was at odds with the practice of diakonia, individuals found ways to promote the necessary work of service.

Diakonia gained its primary impetus from the work and vision of women. In the early centuries, women found Jesus' teachings and then Paul's "ethic of the interim" to be liberating news — it was truly gospel spoken for them. In the Middle Ages, women saw that the church was not fulfilling its role as caretakers of the population, and so they sought out ways in which they could work faithfully serving the people. While men were out on crusades to convert the pagans, Jews and infidels, women founded schools and hospitals with little support from the hierarchy of the church. Even in the so-called enlightened twentieth century, diakonia is often viewed as a lower form of service, and is practiced primarily by women. Diakonia was not and is not exclusively the domain of women, and many men have chosen to live out their call to ministry in this way. We have a long way to go, however, before diakonia is once again seen by those in authority and power as the way of Christ.

Passion, energy and commitment have driven diaconal folk who work within even oppressive structures to create, co-create and re-create with God a community of justice and hope. These ideals and activities point to a different reality than what may exist before us, where every person has the same access to the necessities of life — to living water and bread and roses. In the struggle for life, God calls diaconal and other artists to create it with abundance.

Artists are driven by passion, energy and commitment to create a new reality — or to recreate for others a vision of the world not just as it is, but as it might be, or as they see it. They create a third eye, an eye of the spirit, that sees not just physical beauty, but the inherent beauty of the

environment. Diaconal folks are likewise driven by passion — by a vision of God's *shalom* and a commitment to bring that vision into reality. They strive to see the inherent beauty in every person, and to nurture the holy in each one.

A passion for justice, a disappointment at lack of movement, a need for spiritual enlightenment, a search for truth and beauty and existential questions about humanity's place in the universe are common themes shared by art and diakonia in the early church, the Middle Ages, and the twentieth century. Nothing happens in isolation. The reality of a moment and one's experience of it are dependant on all that has come before. Everyone views the world through the lenses of their own knowledge and experience and understanding of life. Art and diakonia emerge out of the context of a society's understanding of itself and its experience of life, culture and tradition. J.C.Sikkel in 1890 observed that diakonia brought that perspective to a church that sorely needed to look outside its own walls to see its responsibility to the rest of the world. He said, "The church can live without buildings. Without diakonia the church dies."[11]

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[11] Quoted in Diakonia: Mutual Helping with Justice and Compassion by Jaap van Klinken. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989) p.26

Chapter One

The Early Church

In 202 B.C.E., at the final destruction of Carthage, Rome was established as a major power in the world scene. The Greco-Roman culture exhibited structural and administrative skill and good communication design. It constructed highways and controlled transportation. Therefore the leaders of Rome controlled trade and the distribution of goods. Their skill in large scale warfare enabled Rome to take over virtually any new territory that it wanted, and so had control over most of the population of the Mediterranean and the near East.

Particularly in the land traditionally occupied by the Hebrew people, Roman rule had established itself and life had become relatively stable, if filled with tension. The Jews quite naturally harboured deep resentment over the Roman appropriation of law, custom and government. Tax collectors were dishonest, soldiers were everywhere, and people were unhappy. The Jewish people had a long history of strength and power, even though they had also known captivity and slavery. Jewish religious authorities were still allowed to lead their people in worship and the practice of their faith, and there existed a tenuous alliance between the church and state. The history of the Jewish people had included kings and prophets who led the people in political and economic matters as well as in the practice of their faith. Spirituality and politics were understood very differently by the Romans and the Jews, and these differences served to fuel greater tension between the two peoples. The Jews were forced to separate their politics from their spirituality,

once inextricably linked. There were, then, many facets to the tension in the relationship between Jews and Romans. Some Jewish leaders were anxious to maintain the status quo, in order that no more violence and unrest should occur. While complicit in the occupation of the land, they saw themselves as working with the Roman authorities to keep peace among the people.

The majority of the Jews were uneducated and lived in villages and cities as labourers and business people. They continued to study the Torah and to worship and pray, and they looked to their scriptures for a message from God that they would find relief from their oppressors. The scriptures foretold that God would send a Messiah to right the wrongs done to the chosen people, and re-establish them as a mighty and free people. They anticipated that the Messiah would come as a military leader or king, like one of the great leaders who had come before — Moses or Abraham or Joshua — and deliver them from the Romans. Into this milieu of fear and tension, Jesus of Nazareth was born. He grew up in the occupied territories, studied with other young boys of his age, went to the synagogue with his family to learn the faith of his people, and often (according to the records of the gospels) discussed his faith with the rabbis. As he began his adult life and ministry, he taught others the word of God that he learned in the Law and the Prophets. He gathered around him people who would learn, travel, teach and heal with him, and share their energy and support for his work. His grounding in the history and tradition of his people gave his life and his message a ring of truth and solidity for the people who listened. His message was not much different from the prophets of God who had come before, but he spoke it in a new way to a different people who were frustrated and eager to hear words of social change.

Jesus reiterated the need for a personal relationship with God and a personal responsibility to God and one another. He taught the people that it was time to ask different questions, to make

different observations, to live faithfulness to God in the world, rather than just in the religious institution. He taught them that the law of God was not just an external document, but should be written on their hearts. He taught them that God lived within each and every one of them, and called them to be responsible for the welfare of one another and never to cast a person out on the basis of their gender or nationality. He affirmed women's participation in the community, and ate with tax collectors and other sinners.

He suggested that people look at the world through eyes of faith. He suggested that faithful living means not just ritual practice, but seeking justice in everyday life. He taught the people about caring for the poor and the sick, about teaching and forgiving and celebrating life. He taught people to judge themselves — to look to their own lives before condemning any other. He taught people that God's vision of justice was not necessarily the same as their code of laws. He told his followers and others that they had some mistaken notions about the nature of power and authority.

This was not the kind of Messiah for which the people had been waiting and hoping. But many heard the message and found truth in it. Expectations were high that this was indeed the one sent by God to save the people. The numbers of people who followed and listened to him grew rapidly. Jesus was taken into custody by the Romans, condemned by both religious and political leaders for opposing their authority and killed on a cross with other criminals. After he died, his body could not be properly prepared for burial because of the Jewish sabbath, so it was laid in a borrowed tomb. When women went to prepare his body after the sabbath, they found that the tomb was empty. After the initial confusion, expectations were again high that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and that he had risen from the dead. His followers believed that he would reappear, and in the flash of a moment would bring the Kingdom of God into being. After some time had

passed. the small but growing community of followers of Jesus realized that this was not going to happen as they had expected. They were faced with the necessity of realigning their theology and practice to fit what they now knew was not the future. They baptized many initiates. they taught and prayed and reenacted the last supper and they formed communities of the faithful.

Because the community believed that the dead would be raised to life. they ceased the Roman practice of cremation and the women learned to embalm bodies. The Christians began to create catacombs — complex burial places where the Christian dead would rest until reincarnated. These underground tunnels and worship places also served as secret places for Christians to gather for prayer and praise. safe from the watchful eyes of the Roman government and the Jewish authorities. both of whom found Christianity to be offensive and dangerous to the status quo.

Christians soon needed to make some decisions about their future and the structure of what was not just a community anymore but a rapidly growing movement — soon to become an institution. Karl Kautsky. a Marxist historian of socialism. comments that the early Christian community was created out of the chaos of the time and quickly moved to establish a sense of order.

> The first Christian community in Jerusalem gave expression to its proletarian character and what appears to have been the social gospel of Jesus in the communism it practiced in its early years. This communism was abandoned as Christianity became more conservative. attracting people from the administrative classes of the Empire. Whereas it had begun as a revolutionary movement against the rulers. it now began to develop in a new way under the influence of its own ruling class. in which the office of bishop was the most significant feature.[1]

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[1]Abraham J. Malherbe. Social Aspects of Early Christianity (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. 1977) pp.8-9

And so the leaders of the movement began to establish "offices", specifically those of bishop, presbyter and deacon. People holding these positions were authorized to do the work and hold the authority of the Church. Henry Wheeler studied the institution of diakonia in the late nineteenth century and considered the work and practice of the early church to have been a model for later times. He reflected on the growing order that separated women and men in the early Church:

> It seems to have been the order of God that men and women should work side by side in advancing the interests of his kingdom and in bringing the blessed ministries of the Gospel of Christ to the hearts and homes of men.... None can tell how much good the world has lost, or how much evil it has suffered, by the infringement of the order of God in setting aside this arrangement, founded in reason and demanded by the nature and condition of mankind.[2]

Out of their experience of culture, tradition and physical reality, people responded spiritually and artistically in many ways. In Art History, Marilyn Stokstad says that examples of Christian art are rare in the first few centuries. The early Christians lived in a cultural and social milieu that was Roman and Judaic, and influenced by outside cultures as well, and their art was a reflection of their experience in the world.[3] They shared language, culture, trade and commerce, and trained in the same crafts. In short, they had the same influences in their lives as the rest of the Mediterranean.

There are many factors that affect the arts and literature of a people. Among them are freedom, the need for spiritual connectedness, an appreciation for the beauty of the earth, and the leisure time in which to allow one's imagination to create. For the early Christians, there was little time for creating paintings and murals and sculptures. Their creativity was strained by finding ways

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[2]Henry Wheeler, Deaconesses Ancient and Modern, (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1889) p.56

[3]Marilyn Stokstad, Art History (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1995) p.291

in which to identify one another, places in which to meet together secretly, and methods of caring for one another in the midst of the chaos and confusion. The common forms of art among the Romans were grand-scale statues and architecture with sweeping lines. Busts of prominent Roman citizens promoted the strength of families (much as family portraits do today), and held up the traditions of Emperors. The lines in busts of the leaders and emperors were generally strong and sure, but the faces were relatively general in appearance, probably an attempt to connect human power with the power of the gods.

The earliest Christian art is seen in the catacombs. Designed for burial of the dead until Jesus returned, the catacombs were decorated with depictions of the peoples' faith story. Paintings of Jesus' teachings and stories of his life adorned ceilings and walls of worship and burial spaces. Painting was difficult to accomplish, given the lack of adequate light, cramped work space for the artist, high humidity and lack of air flow — not to mention the smell of decaying bodies. Nevertheless, beautiful, simple art was created to adorn the space, used also for secret worship gatherings. The pictures were intended not simply to beautify, but to instruct new converts in the faith and in its practice. As Christianity was accepted by a larger and larger segment of society, it became a recognized and legal religion as well, and decoration of public worship spaces for Christians developed. As well as painting and sculpture, mosaic representations of the stories of faith appeared.

> Mosaic, worked in the Early Christian manner, is not intended for the subtle changes of tone that a naturalistic painter's approach would require: although... tonality is well within the mosaicist reach. But in mosaic, colour is placed not blended; and bright, hard, glittering texture, set within a rigorously simplified pattern, becomes the rule.[4]

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[4]Gardner's Art Through the Ages, Fifth Edition, revised by Horst de la Croix and Richard Tansey (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1970) p.243

Mosaic art forms tend to describe also the existence of Christianity in the mix of Roman and Hebraic culture. It had a hard, glittering quality to it, all new and brightly placed, rather than blended. It was set within the rigorously simplified pattern of Roman rule. It was looking with hope to the social changes that Jesus' teachings would bring, and held a vision of a new future supported by Paul and the apostles.

The power of polytheistic religions of the time led Christian artists to borrow from that imagery and to use it to create different symbols and images of the new tradition. Gardner's Art Through the Ages says that this borrowing of themes and motifs "inevitably brings about the transformation of the naturalistic tradition."[5]

As Greco-Roman society was in a process of transformation, becoming officially Christian by the fourth century, so was the style and pattern of the art of the people. It evolved from wall paintings in the catacombs to statues and mosaics decorating the places of worship, to grand architectural monuments built to glorify God and the Christ and Mary. Art tended to exist as architecture and decoration of buildings and sacred spaces, although the Semitic tradition forbade the placing of graven images in sacred spaces. The influence of other mediterranean cultures is evident as early Christians took up representing Jesus and the disciples in their statuary. Christian leaders then began to develop theology to support the practice of art in their community. The two most common reasons given for Christian art concerned education and incarnation:

> The use of pictures and statues could be justified on the grounds that they instructed the illiterate in the mysteries and stories of the faith...(this) was later supplemented by the theological argument that since Jesus was "made flesh and dwelt among us" he had a human nature and human likeness that could be represented in art.[6]

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[5]Ibid, p.234

[6]Ibid, p.248

None of these art forms are unique to the Christians, nor are they new to the community. Out of culture and tradition, Christian communities developed their own stories and spiritual understandings for others to be inspired. In a predominantly oral culture, they told the stories of Jesus' life and ministry and drew images and literary patterns out of their own experiences, history, and tradition.

Diakonia, a ministry of service, also evolved out of the people's experience of life in the world, and was, within the growing and settling of the Christian community, also an example of glittering brightness. Deacons and deaconesses were excited about their call to ministry and eager to fulfil the duties and responsibilities of their faith. They worked hard in a very simple pattern of Christian community to instruct others in the faith and promote the spiritual and physical well being of all its members.

The life and growth of the Christian community and diakonia parallels the arts of the time. At first, when Jesus was alive, the movement of followers was defiant and excited. They met openly, they defied the authorities, they travelled, taught and healed. Then, when the powers of the time reacted to Jesus' ministry in fear and violence, the movement went underground. It continued to nurture and nourish its members, but it was largely unseen by the general public and certainly by the political authorities. They were certainly not unknown, nor were the authorities unaware of their existence, but they were not public about the practice of their faith.

As the movement grew in numbers and influence, and after Constantine issued the edict of Milan in 313, Christianity moved into the open. Large and powerful pieces of art began to be created, often with the financial support of the Roman Empire. Magnificent frescoes told the stories of the people of God. Enormous buildings with great domes and larger than life statuary

drew the people to hear the stories and believe in the coming of the Christ.

The theology of Christianity also changed. Because the new life offered in Christ was not immediate, Christians began to develop a theology of the afterlife: an eternal heaven where all believers would live with Jesus when their earthly lives were over. As mosaics became more popular in the culture, so diakonia became more popular. The office of deacon became a powerful one. Deacons generally had control of the assets of a community in order to provide for the sick and needy among them. Once deacons became identified as office rather than as function, the powers of the emerging institutional church determined that the office could not be held by women.[7] The church continued to create theology to explain and define the needs and practices of the church and to stabilize the energy and enthusiasm of the masses.

The catacombs and their paintings are a helpful image to use when thinking of diakonia in the early church. During times when secrecy was of the essence, diakonia did not die. It continued to act according to Jesus' teachings. It was largely unseen by the public, but nonetheless continued to serve the people. When power became a greater issue for communities and their leaders, there was a great deal of wealth and power to be had, and the church ceased to value the role of servant. As more people who were well educated and influential joined the movement, they demanded that a well educated and intellectual leadership control the growth of the church. It happened that, in the style of the Greeks and Romans, power and influence was a male dominated field.[8]

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[7]See Karen Jo Torjesen, When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity (San Francisco: Harper Collins: 1993)

[8]Ibid.

Diakonia grew out of the call and the prophecy of Jesus and the tradition of faithfulness in a God who would lead an oppressed people out of slavery. It grew out of a deep sense of justice, alive in the Hebrew people for generations. Among Christians, it began among the initial followers of Jesus. Those followers became leaders in their communities, teaching the themes and actions that they had learned. In his travels, Jesus performed miracles of healing, he told the stories of his people, and he told them parables to help them understand things in a new way. He challenged those with whom he came in contact to use new eyes and new ears to encounter their world. He commissioned his followers and all who would listen to go and do likewise in the name of a God who loved them deeply and wanted justice for the world.

Jesus taught his followers that the structure under which they had lived was not the way of God. He gave his own life as an example. He washed the feet of those who followed him, an act unheard of for a great leader and teacher. He told them that he was not there to be a leader who ruled over them, but one who would serve them. Even when the disciples professed to understand his message, they came asking who would sit on his right and left when the Kingdom of God was brought into being. He reminded the disciples that they were not ready to be servants to the world after his pattern. Jesus' leadership style was active, but not coercive or power-seeking. His approach was fresh news to his followers, but struck at the heart of those in authority who saw only that their power was in jeopardy. The only way the authorities could deal with this message was to kill the messenger. Persecutions of declared Christians continued sporadically for the next two centuries.

In the years following Jesus' death, communities formed around his teachings. It gave people under the Romans a new sense of hope and optimism that they might live well and faithfully. It made them realize once again that their faith was not dependant on their leaders, but dependant

on their hearts and their actions. And so the communities that formed shared leadership and responsibility for one another. They tried to put into practice the things they had learned from Jesus. They formed the principles of their faith over the years that followed by relying on their memories and the collective stories and memories of the Hebrew people. The first deaconesses were attached to specific churches, living and working among them, having been called from within the community of faith to offer their energy and skills. The ministry of widows, present in the pre-Christian community continued to be an important part of the ministry of service in early Christianity.

Paul and other leaders travelled, taught and converted many people to Christianity in villages and towns throughout the Mediterranean. They preached and talked with people along the way. They also wrote letters of encouragement to communities they had visited. Paul taught an "ethics of the interim" to communities that were confused, struggling and seeking direction in this new vision of faith. He taught that for those who lived in Jesus there was no longer any distinction between people: neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave nor free. In this atmosphere, diakonia flourished. There was now a strong and important place for women in the movement, as well as the freedom to see life differently for slaves and "outsiders" from the Jewish community.

Karen Jo Torjesen translates the word *diakonos* as minister and *presbyter* as priest. She says:

> in either case, a fully ordained clergyperson is meant. When a woman's name is associated with a title, both Catholic and Protestant translators tend to minimize the office.Instead of translating *diakonos* as 'minister' as they do for male office holders, they translate it as 'deaconess'[1]

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[1]Karen Jo Torjesen, When Women Were Priests, p.5

In any case, the diaconate held the responsibilities of spiritual services and rites of the Church. They baptized, educated the catechumens, lead in worship, and when a bishop or presbyter was not present, read a homily. They cared for the spiritual as well as the physical needs of the people in the community, especially the orphans and widows, the poor and the sick.[10]

The function of diakonia was in direct, personal service to the community. There was a large community of workers in diakonia, populated by men and women, widows, virgins, and all who professed their desire to be involved in this way. Deaconesses were primarily called by the church to minister to women in the community, as it would be improper for men to do so. Within the Greco-Roman culture, women and men lived quite separate social lives. While men could preach to women, it was not acceptable for men to anoint or baptize women. The numbers of deacons and deaconesses grew in proportion to the Christian community itself. Henry Wheeler, for example, suggests that one hundred deacons and forty deaconesses became attached to the Church of Constantinople in early times.[11]

The work and calling of deacons and deaconesses are alluded to in the writings of several of the Church Fathers. Most upheld their duty as centering on charity. Charity became one of the most attractive features of early Christianity.

> The practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment 'See how these Christians love one another' (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in

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[10] Henry Wheeler, Deaconesses Ancient and Modern p.64-65

[11] Ibid. p.116

> visits to brethren in prison or condemned to the living death of labour in the mines, and in social action in time of calamity like famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war.[12]

Sociologist Rodney Stark, in his reconsideration of early Christian history, writes of the acts of Christian charity in times of epidemics as being the most significant factor in the rapid growth of the faith. Those who cared for the sick and the dying did so with cheerfulness and compassion, and seemed to escape the enormous mortality rate of the general population. He suggests that classical society had been disrupted and demoralized by the sheer number of deaths, and Christianity moved in to offer care for the present and hope for the future.[13]

Once the hierarchy of the church was established, the office of diakonia became a stepping stone to the Priesthood. It became open only to men who would later be ordained and take their place among the regular clergy. The function of diakonia then became primarily a women's task. As the church asserted it's dominance in culture and politics, women were allowed to do charitable work, but only after their responsibilities to home and family were carried out. Women's work in institutional religion was no longer deemed "seemly", although women still offered their resources to the work of the church. St. Chrysostum was befriended and supported by members of the diaconal community, and in time of persecution was pleased and comforted by their spiritual and physical presence with him. "The most noted of all the deaconesses of the early church was Olympias, a friend and admirer of Chrysostum."[14] Olympias was from a wealthy family, and inherited that wealth while still young. She proceeded to consecrate her life and her holdings to the work of Christ, and distributed her money to charitable works.

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[12] Henry Chadwick, The Early Church (Middlesex, England: Pelican Books, 1967) p.56

[13] Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996) Chapter 4 "Epidemics, Networks, and Conversion"

[14] Henry Wheeler, Deaconesses Ancient and Modern p.119

The influence of deaconesses declined as the church created structure and solidified its hold on the ancient world. Wheeler laments that the growing "[c]hurch departed from the truth, giving honour and importance to ministers which God never designed they should have, and which has no parallel or precedent in apostolic times."[15] In the initial decades of Christianity, diakonia and the roles of deacons and deaconesses had prominence. But as the church achieved social and political acceptance, deaconesses became more and more scrutinized and were finally rejected.

There are many theories as to the reason for the decline of the office of deacons. The changes in the practice of baptism from adult to infant meant that women were no longer needed to prepare other women for the rite. The growing "ambition of the clergy (and) the superstition associated with the idea of ordination"[16] made maleness an essential attribute for the clergy and effectively eliminated the place of women in the institutional church. It may also be that the growth of convents and monasteries provided an opportunity for the church hierarchy to provide a lesser occupation for those who challenged their authority.

By the sixth century, the office of diakonia had disappeared.

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[15] Henry Wheeler, Deaconesses Ancient and Modern , p. 72

[16] Ibid, p.132

Chapter Two

The Middle Ages

The period from approximately the fourth to the fourteenth centuries in Europe is known as the Middle Ages. It is a time that is shrouded for many in the magic and folklore of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, courtly love and chivalry, as well as the horror of the Crusades and the Inquisition. We may have mental images of tapestries and suits of armour, huge dark castles and rich stained glass windows. We have stories of lords holding great parcels of land and many peasants working in the fields and paying their rents to their masters. In many minds, it is either a time of idealistic gentleness and courage or a time of mysterious darkness and ignorance.

The first centuries of this period (up until 1000 C.E.) are often thought of as the Dark Ages, as there it seemed, at least to later historians, to be a long period of little change or discovery in the world. After the rapid growth of the first three centuries C.E., the change in the Middle Ages was gradual but steady. The feudal system established itself and lords of estates aligned themselves with kings to overthrow neighbouring estates and build up principalities. Political marriages were made to join one landowner's holdings to another and to cement alliances. The knights and armies of soldiers fought one another throughout Europe and the peasantry paid taxes to support the wars. Over the course of those years, nation-states established themselves with citizens, music and folk tales. Musicians and bards travelled from place to place to spread the news of the land and to keep people's morale up to support their particular lord or king. Villages

and towns stabilized and grew. Like-minded and like-skilled groups came together to build up the practice of their crafts and to provide some security amongst themselves.

Craft guilds established themselves in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in fairly loose associations. They were made up mostly of people who had some particular skill in common and lived in the same areas. As the guilds became more popular, they formalized their structures and banded together to ensure the quality of their goods, consistent pricing, hours of work and hiring practices. They apprenticed young people to learn a trade. People began to identify themselves by not only their geographic area, but also by their skills, abilities, and membership in specific communities. It was a time of some stability and settling, although we cannot simply understand the Middle Ages with our late twentieth century perspectives. Margaret Wade Labarge, an historian of the Middle Ages, writes:

> One of the problems in discussing medieval culture is that it does not fit comfortably into present day categories. We now draw sharp divisions between religious and secular art, between fine arts and crafts, and between oral popular culture and serious literature in a way which medieval people would not have understood.[1]

The divisions between religious and secular affairs did not exist for people of medieval Europe. Virtually the centre of every town and village was the local chapel or church, and monasteries and convents dotted the landscape. People were involved in the support of the work of the church, and the church fulfilled many of the functions of government that we associate with today's society. The church was the keeper of all records of birth and death, marriage and family. It administered great wealth for the maintenance of the churches themselves as well as for the less fortunate in the community such as widows and orphans. Wealth was also used to build

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[1]Margaret Wade Labarge, Women in Medieval Life: A small sound of the Trumpet (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986) p. 219

cathedrals and monasteries, shrines and monuments to God and to support artists who decorated these buildings and depicted the glory of God. It educated the children of the wealthy, and with a scholarly clergy, was the keeper of knowledge, liturgy, and ritual, as well as of the scripture. As the differing needs of the administration of the church emerged, so did different ways of serving the church. Monasteries and convents grew in response to individuals needs to serve in occupations other than clergy, and to live in ways other than the prevailing culture. Men and women who sought to be members of a worshipping community and forge a deeper relationship with God and strengthen their spiritual lives, found homes in these places. Men might enter a monastery for many reasons, among them, the need to devote themselves wholly to a devout life.

> The chief role of the monk was to set up a research institute for specialized service. Its distinctive specialism was prayer to God. When no instrumental considerations obtruded themselves, this community of spiritual researchers benefited all mankind by intercessory prayers and vicarious efforts arising from it. They did not have to prove the validity for the world of their 'monastic withdrawal.' Their validation was in their dedicated community of service to God — first, last, and always.[2]

When choosing to enter a convent, women gained a sense of power over their own lives. Few choices were available to women, and in spiritual life, with the backing of the church, women in monasteries were able to challenge the authority of their families and devote their lives to spiritual pursuits. Some women came for practical reasons. The convent might be a place of retirement, a place to give birth, a place to recover from illness. Or, if they were able to supply an endowment, it might be a place to live without the restrictions of the order or the watchful eyes of the public. Families might also pledge one or more of their children to a convent or monastery to ensure their own salvation, or to provide a place for unmarried daughters. The

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[2]Ray C. Petry, ed. A History of Christianity: Readings in the History of the Early and Medieval Church (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962) p.129

model for the monastic movement was the family, and the abbots and abbesses took on the role of spiritual parent, offering guidance and authority to those within their walls.

The Roman Empire had fallen, but after having paved the way for cultures to travel broadly, there was a great deal of exchange of information and experience. Christianity had grown strong and was being spread throughout Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Although Rome's political dominance in the world had come to an end, the Bishop of Rome was the head of the Roman Catholic Church. In the Middle Ages, the Pope emerged as a religious and political leader, and Rome became the undisputed capital of Christendom. The church had become a focal point of life and society in many places.

By the end of the first millennium, there was a growing belief that the world would come to an end with the change of the millennia and that Jesus would return and take unto himself all the faithful. There was a great outpouring of goods from individuals into the church. Some people gave everything that they had to the church in the belief that it would gain them entrance into the kingdom of heaven when the end came. When the end did not come, many scrambled to rebuild their lives, and so came to question the established order of society. The church then struggled more fiercely to maintain their power. The now entrenched values of the Christian church were not only dominating Europe, but invading areas where it felt encroached upon. From 1096, C.E. a series of crusades was fought against those who would not embrace the political, social and religious values of the medieval church.

> In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Christian Europe, previously on the defense against the expanding forces of Islam, became the aggressor. In Spain, the armies of the Christian north were increasingly successful against the Islamic south.[3]

During the late Middle Ages, the church turned its attention to those within the Christian tradition
[3]Marilyn Stokstad, Art History, p.510

who espoused differing notions of the faith. The Inquisition actively sought out and destroyed any threat, implied or otherwise, to the dogma of the Christian church. Jews, women, homosexuals, and any other who would not declare complete obedience to the Roman Catholic Church and its rule were attacked. As it was mostly women who were challenging the authority of the church, it was mostly women who were questioned, tortured, and forced to confess to sins they had not committed. Thousands of women, and some men and children were burned at the stake as heretics. The *Malleus Malleficarum* was written as a guide book for all those who sought signs of the heretical acts of dissenters, known by now as witches. It was claimed by the church, and the Dominicans, who supported the Inquisition, that those who were killed were guilty of consorting with the devil and leading other innocents to do likewise. A frenzy enveloped much of the world at this time, and neighbours who sought vengeance for any kind of slight against them could report to the authorities and have others tried for crimes of heresy.

As these centuries went on, through religious and social turmoil, the Roman Catholic Church's consolidation of power was weakening. There was greater dissension among church members and clergy, as well as an infusion of human philosophy into the systematic theology of the church. Out of all these events and movements, leaders emerged to lead religious rebellion and form communities of faith that were both ideologically and theologically separate from the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually these leaders and their followers made public declaration that they would no longer obey the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope. They drew great crowds of people who were dissatisfied with the Catholic hierarchy. They developed new working norms for themselves and their congregations and explored their theology in the context of a new structure. Worshipping communities took charge of their own religious lives for the first time since the end of the early church period.

Through the Middle Ages, many churches became quite wealthy in their own right, and commissioned much of the art that we know today. Those who created art did so for the glory of God and the church, and sent messages of inspiration and faith to those who viewed the work. Out of the turmoil of those times, artists told the folk stories of the people, and attempted to create works of beauty that represented the life they knew and inspired others. In art history, the Late Middle Ages is often known as the Romanesque period because it "reflects influences from many sources, including Byzantine, Islamic and early medieval Europe, as well as Roman."[4] Until the twentieth century, labels for the various periods of art history have been borrowed from other aspects of the history of civilization. The term Romanesque refers principally to the architecture of the time, which was "round-arched, solid, and heavy, rather like the ancient Roman style of building."[5] From the eleventh century on, towns in the Western Roman Empire began to grow and rebuild as the populace recovered from wars and epidemics. Craftspeople and merchants expanded their trade and rediscovered urban life.

Large stone sculpture had not been seen much in the years from about the fourth century on, but had a revival in the Late Middle Ages, moving from mere adornment of architectural structures or reliefs and friezes to stand alone pieces. Such pieces were popular at pilgrimage sites, supplying life-size or larger-than-life-size replicas of the saints for those who sought the patronage of the saints. Roads to the more popular pilgrimages might be lined with such statues. It may be that earlier in the Middle Ages statues were thought to be connected to the false gods of the pagans, but now were accepted by the church as tools to strengthen the faith of the people.

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[4] Marilyn Stokstad, Art History p.509

[5] Janson, A Basic History of Art p.106

Unlike architecture and sculpture. Romanesque painting shows no sudden revolutionary developments that set it apart immediately from previous styles. The naturistic style of painting was beginning to be seen in stand alone paintings. in oil and on canvas. It had previously been seen primarily as decoration on other objects such as books. urns. doorways and walls. This does not mean that painting was less important than it had been before; it merely emphasizes the greater continuity of the pictorial tradition. especially in manuscript illumination. Nevertheless. soon after the year 1000 we find the beginnings of a painting style which corresponds to — and often anticipates — the monumental qualities of Romanesque sculpture.

> The prevalent tendency of Romanesque painting toward uncompromising linearity has here been softened.... The linearity and the simple. closed contours of a painting style such as... ([that] found in illuminated manuscripts) lend themselves very well to other mediums and to changes in scale (murals. tapestries. stained-glass windows. sculptured reliefs). Firm outlines and a strong sense of pattern are equally characteristic of Romanesque painting.[6]

These forms did indeed lend themselves well to other media. The art of stained glass making took its cue from the painting artists and was featured as well in churches and cathedrals. Because of the difficulty of working with the glass and lead pieces. the designs were simple in nature. made with large pieces of glass. using deep colours and powerful lines. Examples of this style still exist in a number of cathedrals in Europe.

Because the Early Middle Ages were still mainly an oral culture. the art of storytelling. whether in prose or music. remained a very important skill. much loved and respected by the general population. The Later Middle Ages. with greater education for children from many backgrounds. brought a transition to a written culture. Previously. only the learned few (generally corresponding

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[6]Janson. A Basic History of Art. pp.116-117

to the wealthy or the clergy) were able to read and write, so what was written in books had been translated into song or spoken word for the telling. Books, and the knowledge to be gained by them, were increasing in popularity and availability. It was not until the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century that books and pamphlets became commonly available to the population. Most monasteries for women or convents would, like their male counterparts, have a scriptorium, a place for copying books and illuminating them, primarily for the use of the clergy. Illustrated manuscripts to illuminate stories and help the illiterate to understand the words became very popular, and the artistry in the work became very elaborate. Particular artists were sought after to lend their creativity to the decoration of the manuscripts.

The fabric arts were almost entirely the domain of women. The spinning of yarn and the weaving and dying of fabric had for centuries been relegated to women. In the Middle Ages, craft guilds, which were generally open only to men, were formed around fabric making and were open only to women. Among wealthier women and women of convents, new forms of stitching, embroidery and tapestries gained appeal. Woven or stitched tapestries filled chapels and depicted scriptural stories, local history and folklore. They also told the tales of God leading men into battle against the forces of evil. One of the greatest examples of such work is the Bayeux Tapestry (which circles the chapel at Bayeux, France) created to depict the Battle of Hastings in 1066. It is a long and complex piece of work that tells the whole story of the invasion in the centre piece of the work, bordered on the bottom with strips showing the dead, fallen in battle, and on the top with various images of saints, angels and eagles.

Poetry was one of the courtly arts. The careful sculpting of words and images was dedicated to romantic love, to the love of Christ and to the search for spiritual truth. Chaucer's great work, The Canterbury Tales, was a brilliant and entertaining piece of poetry. It was also a story of the

religious pilgrimage of an odd group of travelling companions. Many spiritual women of the monasteries and convents were well educated and expressed their union with Christ in wonderful poetry and prose so that others might experience the passion of that union as well. Women like Mechtild of Magdeburg and Catharine of Sienna wrote powerfully of their faith and their understanding of living that faith. The female mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries used prose and poetry to express their understanding of a very personal union with Christ. They understood the spiritual dimension of life and faith in a very different way than the church had previously recognized, and moved readers to reinterpret their relationship with Christ as well. Their work and lives influenced church leaders, whether enraging them or encouraging them to change for the better their ways of thinking and acting.

Soon after the middle of the twelfth century, an important change in artistic style began to make itself felt. Artists regained the ability to use lines to describe three-dimensional shapes. Figures, and the stories told in them, took on greater depth and presence. Around the same time an important change in the style of religious women also took place. Women began to seek ways in which they could have some greater authority over their own lives and live out their faith in communities that would offer them some safety and protection. They sought out places of strength and solidarity, and offered leadership, both spiritual and physical, to one another. Women in the church and in religious communities began to take on greater depth and presence.

In the same way as artists' creations are manifestations of life and their experience of culture and tradition, so diakonia's changing roles and lives are manifestations of the pressures, needs, cultures and attitudes of the times. Rather than creating something out of nothing, diakonia emerges out of the community with skills and passion to serve the needs of that community, and to make real the vision of life that community has. It seeks to respond to the perceived needs of

the time and to enable change to happen by creating newness out of existing conditions and by analyzing the current situation and working with others to affect the outcome in a positive way.

By the sixth century, the office of deacon had disappeared in the hierarchy of a male dominated religion, but the function of diakonia continued to be exercised. Priests, bishops, and the Pope regulated the activities of the church and delegated authority and power to bestow sacraments on those deemed worthy, and so excluded women from ecclesiastical offices.

> In every instance the inherited traditions of the early centuries of Christianity were evident: Pious women active in the first decades of the new orders were excluded or restricted when institutionalization replaced enthusiasm.[1]

The disappearance of the diaconate coincided with the formation and expansion of the monastic movement, possibly one of the factors contributing to the end of the deaconess order itself. While women were no longer allowed to function in official capacities, the church recognized that it had to provide some way in which religious women could engage themselves. In this way it was possible to continue to use the skills and faith of women for the glory of the church, as well as preventing them from either leaving the faith altogether or demanding leadership positions. A "cult of the virgin" called women to take vows of celibacy and "marry" themselves to Christ. The provision of cloistered monasteries or convents for women gave them an alternative to marriage and children, and the possibility of education and communion with other religious women. Employment for women who were not attached to men was almost non-existent except as servants to the wealthy. As it was, convents were largely open to women of wealthy families able to provide a dowry for them to enter.

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[1]Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present, Volume I (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988) p.198

The monastic life offered women an opportunity to live in contemplative orders, apart from others. Women in monasteries devoted themselves to prayer, meditation and communion with God, as well as contributing to the household duties. They also contributed to the life of the church with their art. There are still examples of elaborate stitching, beadwork and lace in chapels throughout Europe. In addition to hangings depicting scenes from the life of Christ and stories of faith and lace cloths for the altars, nuns created ornate vestments for the clergy. Women's monasteries were often close to and connected with men's monasteries and may have also had household responsibilities to them.

Women in these communities were able to hold positions of leadership and authority in their own establishments, and also had influence on the leaders of the larger church. Abbesses were often present at ecclesiastical gatherings and brought an informed and deeply spiritual perspective to the church's deliberations. Many of the writings of the Church Fathers refer to the advice and wisdom of women on weighty ecclesiastical matters. These women signed church documents and wrote opinions and recommendations on the affairs of the church. Those in holy orders were thought to have a special character that devoted itself entirely to matters of the Spirit and understood the worldly as profane.

> The church was the keeper of the means of grace, especially the sacraments, and these graces were distributed by the ordained clergy. Those in holy orders, whatever their personal behaviour, had a special character because they were ordained to give the sacraments. In addition, because the temporal or worldly was understood as profane, those in holy orders were not supposed to be concerned with secular affairs, or at least the latter could never be their proper business.[8]

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[8]Elsie Anne McKee, Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today, p.35

While part of religious vows stated that the inhabitants of the convents would have no contact with the outside world, this was impossible for the heads of the institutions. Such cloistered women had contact with the lords who originally owned the land and received payments for its use, and with those who brought food and other necessary goods to them.

In the twelfth century, groups of women formed to pursue religious life outside the confines of the Roman Catholic Church structure and the structures of the convents. This provided an avenue for women to be active in religious life without the structure laid on by the religious orders. In such groups, women maintained the freedom to return to the secular world and marry if they wished, and managed what resources they had on their own. One such group in Holland was known as the Beguines. Similar groups evolved in England, Germany and France. The Beguines provide a good example of how diakonia lived in the world still, for they sought ways in which to be faithful that stretched the institutional church's boundaries and challenged the Church's expectations and their exclusive authority.

The Beguines, and groups like them, formed communities that taught, prayed, fed the hungry, and served the call of Christ in the world. They brought a different kind of vision of the work of women to the Church and pushed the edges of understanding of what women were capable of and what Jesus called all people to do. They showed that their spiritual devotion to Christ and their call to faith was equal to that of their male counterparts. They dedicated their lives to being part of the world and working for others, and declared that they could be pious without being "regularized".

The communities they formed were not exclusive, and did not require a lifelong commitment or vows of permanent chastity or obedience. They did not require a dowry to enter, so were open to more than just members of wealthy families. Women brought what resources they could to the community and either worked or begged for money and food to support themselves and one another. Most importantly, they were not ordered by the Roman Catholic Church. The success of the Beguine movement which was religious but non-ecclesiastical was, "like that of female monasticism, derived from a desire for a religious life combined with economic and social factors."[9]

The economic and social factors that pressured women to live under the discipline of powerful church structures were being rethought and challenged by the growing numbers of those unwilling to see life as merely a physical existence. More and more, women in particular recognized that their spiritual life need not be dictated entirely by the institutional church.

The large numbers of women living outside the authority of the church caused great distress in the hierarchy, but renewed enthusiasm and energy for religious life among other women. The response to this movement on the part of the church was first to try and bring official order and retain control of the communities. They attempted to bring the Beguines under the wing of Franciscans, and while some did join the Franciscans, other groups were disbanded by the church and threatened with further discipline if they defied authority. The Council of Vienne in 1311 charged that the Beguines were guilty of spreading heresy and demanded their disbanding. The women and their supporters were not so easily dismissed, however, and they continued to survive into the sixteenth century.[10]

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[9]Shulamith Shahar. The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages p.43

[10]Latourette. The History of Christianity p.449

The Beguine movement was a diaconal ministry in that it offered service to the community at large as well as support to sisters and brothers in the movement itself. Like the artistic changes of the Late Middle Ages, diakonia took on different forms than it had in the early church. In some ways it was Romanesque in format, taking on larger, rounder shape; expanding its lines and providing impetus for other groups to provide service as well. Like the building up of the cities and towns, diakonia built up its own structures, maintaining continuity with the diaconal tradition of the past. It sought to be recognized as a bold venture for women and for service to the whole community. The movement offered inspiration and hope to others who benefitted from its work.

The growing dissatisfaction with the Roman Catholic Church led inevitably to reformations lead by Luther and Calvin and others. It gained great momentum partly because of the new roles for women and men that developed and the increasing desire on the part of many to have greater freedom in their religious lives. The movement offered women and other lay persons the opportunity to speak with confidence about their religious views and to have some autonomy from Rome. Once the order of the church became the responsibility of the people, religious life blossomed in new ways. There were supporters of women in positions of liturgical leadership, but even in the new order, men were the leaders. It was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that women were once again able to participate openly in the governance of the churches.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

> A new age is coming. It will be upon us swiftly and we must bestir our imaginations to prepare for it. We are like the dwellers in the war-swept areas of the old world whose homes are wrecked by shell fire. Our intellectual houses are falling about our ears. We do not yet know whether we must rebuild them or desert them. We are hurriedly wondering what to save from the wreckage. We are half unconsciously taking stock of our valuables; making new appraisals of what is most precious. It is a time of reexamination of all things, a time of changes, profound and universal. The disorganization of normal life by the great war has compelled a new openness of mind and roused new demands for better life.[1]

This was Von Ogden Vogt's 1921 assessment of the twentieth century. It was a view of the world that held up the tension of the past being torn apart and the future being uncertain. It may hold equally true for the last part of the century as changes are constantly surprising the people of the earth. This century has seen more rapid change in its technology, industry and politics than any other age, and by many accounts, has failed to achieve the promise of prosperity that was envisioned. The "disorganization of normal life" that has been experienced in the twentieth century is not due entirely to any one war, but to the convergence of strands of technology, philosophy, science, theology and the extraordinary actions of human beings upon our environment.

The industrial revolution promised that people would no longer have to use their hands and

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[1]Von Ogden Vogt, Art and Religion, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921) p.9

backs to create only a few goods. Mechanization meant that machines would do the heavy and difficult work — farming alone would be revolutionized — and fewer manual labourers would be needed. Factories could employ people to work on assembly lines doing rote work, so persons with little education or creativity would be suitable. With lower labour costs, many more goods could be created faster and cheaper. More could be produced, with less human action and interaction, and everyone could have the staples and luxuries they needed with less cost.

Philosophers and scientists researched the origins of life and theorized that all planetary life evolved over centuries due to a complex process of genetic mutation. The idea that human beings had evolved from apes over millions of years, and that humanity would continue to evolve in different ways depending on climate, food supply, intelligence, health care abilities, and disease became not just theory but part of intellectual reality. This scientific explanation of the origins of life debunked religious myths of Creation and a Creator/s. Through long and heated public and private debates, issues of faith versus science were discussed, including issues of who has the authority to make public such theories. There has never been any consensus reached between the deeply held beliefs of various religious groups and the heady excitement of scientific discovery.

After two world wars, Europe and the western world were working to rebuild their infrastructure and plan for the future. The aftermath of the wars brought a demand for a better life. Industries such as science and technology and medicine, which had focussed much of their energy on wartime production and response, began to do research and development on grand scales. Researchers made many new discoveries including vaccines for many human diseases, improved hybrids of plants and animals for food production, and material of increased durability such as plastics for storage and furniture. The technological community developed faster and bigger

means of transportation and communication: trains, airplanes, cars, telephones, computers, satellites. The quickening pace of life in cities also gave rise to the "fast food" industry. Now meals-to-go could also be mass produced and sold cheaply and quickly in restaurants built for that purpose, or in frozen dinners from a grocery store. People were encouraged to eat meals in front of their television screens, where they could be passively entertained or informed.

The scientific community discovered vaccines for diseases such as smallpox, insulin as a treatment for diabetes, DNA as the basis of all organic life. Scientists explored the effects of human activities on the human body and the environment. They also looked beyond the earth itself to the stars, and sought out ways to further their knowledge of the universe. Researchers and technologists built spaceships to view the planet from above the outer atmosphere of the earth and land people on the moon. This ability that people now had to see the planet Earth from above increased our universe exponentially. The world was no longer the entire focal point of understanding of human life — all of a sudden every person with access to a television set or a newspaper could see that the planet Earth was not alone in the universe, and that it was not surrounded by a visible heaven. The stars were no longer just pretty lights and constellations, but either potential threats of invading forces or potential sources of contact with other species. Many of the myths and beliefs about the nature of life and the earth of the previous generations were being challenged in the midst of human discovery. As scientific or technological explanations poured into people's lives and consciousness, many began to lose the ability to believe that there is a spiritual dimension to the world.

Another major influence on the modern world's understanding of itself and the people in it was the work of Sigmund Freud and others in the field of psychoanalysis. Freud theorized that all individuals are influenced in their thinking and their behaviour by previous life experiences and

a collective consciousness of the history of one's people. The subconscious life can affect a person's conscious life in ways of which they might be totally unaware. Once the influences are identified, he believed, individuals can work with them to control and overcome the hazards and barriers that they present to fulfilment. Freud's work encouraged others to explore the internal workings of the human mind: its needs, compulsions, desires and foibles.

All these changes and advancements provided improved health care and access to information and cultures. They also provided enormous wealth for some people and countries. But for most, such changes did little to improve simple living. The principal benefactors of new discoveries were people of Europe and North America. In what came to be known as the Third World (or developing) nations, there was a large pool of poor, uneducated labour, with plenty of natural resources to be exploited by industrial leaders of the so-called First World. Marketing of products in the mass media could now encourage everyone to use products such as coffee, tea and tropical fruits, only available from poorer nations.

The social gospel movement of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly in Canada, the United States and Great Britain, brought a renewed consciousness of the link between faith and action, and called to account the politicians and leaders who failed to understand the effect of their actions on the majority of people. It challenged church people to participate more fully in their community, to recognize their social responsibility, and to hear the Gospel's call to justice as a call to make the world better for everyone. They challenged community leaders to understand corporate responsibility as a political ideal. It was an ideological movement of the educated elite that took on meaning as it was adopted by the greater population and used to support social change in areas from labour reform to social welfare laws.

Some of the leaders of the social gospel movement also became leaders in the socialist political movement. In Canada, J.S. Woodsworth quoted Karl Barth's statement that a sermon should always be preached with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. The movement addressed issues of universal health care, unemployment insurance and crop insurance, among others. The movement addressed the injustice of the huge disparity between the very rich and the very poor. In that same time, women continued to lobby for their right to be politically active in the public sphere, to vote in democratic elections, to gain education and employment opportunities, and to take their place as clergy in the churches.

The women's movement finally met with some measure of success in the twentieth century as basic concessions to equality in the workplace and the political arenas were won. The issues raised in the feminist movement regarded not only women in general, but also people of colour, children, the poor and the marginalized. Barriers against those who were not white, male, and privelged were being challenged.

After the Second World War, churches were full and growing as the "baby boom" cause growing populations and increaased industrialization filled the cities. Family life became the focus of church and community, and community involvement generally centred around the local church. It provided a meeting place for young people and after school and holiday activities for children. It also instructed people in the faith and lead them in worship. It was an important place for reflection on moral and ethical issues, and often found itself involved in the political issues of the community.

As the century progressed and further advancements of power and influence were made by

politics and economics, churches began to lose their prominence in society. Questions were once again raised about the authority of the church to become involved in secular affairs. With development of education systems, sports and community groups and entertainment opportunities, churches found themselves in competition with other demands on peoples' time. Religious groups found their numbers dwindling, both in the pews and in the pulpits. By the 1980s governments in Canada were no longer interested in the moral and ethical pronouncements of religious groups. The division between church and state grew wider.

Political changes continue to be rapid given the need and greed of leaders, both political and economic, to gather more wealth. National borders have shifted and shifted again as capitalism has expanded to become the god of business. While military wars are less often fought on such grand scales as previously in our history, the takeovers of land and wealth now happen on computers and on paper. The invention of the nuclear bomb and its development and use by rich industrial countries holds the threat of annihilation over the heads of the people of the earth, making all of us realize the fragility of life.

Today the world suffers from a loss of moral authority, as the God of tradition and the gods of capitalism clash. There is a renewed need for spirituality and connectedness. On one level we understand ourselves as connected in a way we never have before, through our consciousness of a "global village". At the same time, we are more separate than ever through our lack of direct experience with other cultures and countries. It may be that there is an even greater need for social, political and spiritual education than at any time in our history, partly because of the masses of people who live on the planet, and partly because of the rapidly changing worldviews of its population.

The century began with an event that would be a powerful influence on modern art and the world. In 1895 the first moving picture was shown on a screen in Paris, France. That medium alone has shaped more than any other the consciousness of the population of the world, and brought about a transition from book culture to visual culture. The later development of the television entrenched that transition. "Gabriel Marcel spoke of the birth of a new type of human being, the *homo spectans*."[2] With the coming of films, and later of television, humans were able to be observers of the global community. While visual culture has brought people an increased understanding of life in other parts of the world, it has also served to objectify life so that it can be detached from one's emotions and reality. By showing people up close the horrors of war, telling whimsical stories through animation and music, living out fantasies of what life might or could be (whether violent or beautiful), moving pictures captured the imaginations and changed the world of reality for every generation since. Children's films provide moral instruction and adult films reinforce the values of the business world. News footage informs us in much more powerful and immediate ways of the horrors in the world around us. When the first images of the war in Vietnam started appearing, a huge movement for peace began protesting the violence of the American invasion. The movement triggered the activity of more and more people who may have otherwise not questioned the authority of governments to declare their opposition to war. The availability of such a broad diversity of images and experience (vicarious though it may be), has allowed people to blur the distinctions between fantasy and reality, to the extent that some have become unable to see the difference.

By the latter part of the twentieth century, computer technology has given people greater access than ever before to information and philosophy and other worldviews. Larger numbers of people now have access, through the world wide web, to people and places around the globe. The

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[2]Antonie Wessels, Secularized Europe, Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 6 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996) p.21

technology is still available primarily to moneyed nations and people but has allowed these privileged participants to take part in "virtual reality".

It has also taken away some of the impetus to create. Even with time saving inventions in homes and workplaces promoted as ways for people to save time and energy, the savings have not necessarily improved individual creativity. Gardner's Art Through the Ages laments the increased precision and need for accuracy in modern society as it dampens imagination:

> The aim of the designer of computers is to eliminate ambiguity from its operations and to eliminate human error in the process. But art and life are rich in ambiguity, and to eliminate it would impoverish and trivialize them.[3]

Ambiguity is an unpopular word in a world where facts and figures hold power over markets and governments. The business model is linear in function, needing precision and control in order to make profits. The response of the artistic community has been to create imprecision, to create works that are not necessarily true representations of reality, but representations of an imaginary reality. Pablo Picasso was one of the leaders in the movement toward art that saw with the mind's eye rather than with the physical one. His statue called Bull's Head is a "striking example of how an artist saw something new and exciting in two very ordinary objects."[4] The piece is created out of a bicycle seat and handlebars, but calls one's imagination to see instead of the ordinary, the extraordinary.

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[3] Gardner's Art Through the Ages, Fifth Edition, revised by Horst de la Croix and Richard G. Tansey (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. 1970) p.690

[4] H.W. Janson, A Basic History of Art, Second Edition, Revised by Anthony F. Janson, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1980) p.10

> Art, in the modern view, consists in the free manipulation of its elements in arrangements that need have no reference to anything outside themselves — that is, they need not represent anything. The arrangement is complete and self-contained; one cannot find its message by demanding that it point to something recognizable beyond itself. The modern artist, like the scientist, "experiments" with his medium, investigates its possibilities, and discovers, or invents, new forms.[5]

Until the twentieth century, art forms such as painting, sculpture and architecture enjoyed some sense of stability and linear growth. Particularly painting and sculpture relied on realism or naturalism, even when depicting a scene from myth or fantasy. In this century, a wide variety of forms have been born including cubism, futurism, surrealism, expressionism, abstract expressionism, and pop. These reflect a need to see beyond the simply obvious and "real" to force the imagination into a different view of reality. Out of the world's experience of automation and uniformity, the art world has called people to see individuality and imagination. Out of the concrete reality ordered by the business and political worlds, artists call the public to see an abstract reality. Just as ink blots are viewed differently by every person who looks at them through the eyes of their own experience, different kinds of art can trigger the dynamic and creative imaginations of the viewer.

Forces of change and discovery have propelled the world's people into vastly different spheres of knowledge and experience than previous generations would have believed possible. But change and discovery have also created confusion about who and what humankind is and where we are going. Giacometti's City Square is a good example of an artist reflecting the confusion of modern society. It depicts a group of people, each alone in a crowd.

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[5]Gardner's Art Through the Ages, p.691

> This problematic quality of modern life is the result of constantly shifting grounds of our beliefs: an axiom of our time could well be "where nothing is certain, everything is a question", the fundamental question being: What is "real"?[6]

Modern art does not seek to answer that question. Instead it proposes that little is real in the world of imagination and creativity, and that perhaps reality is not necessarily what we perceive it to be. It encourages people to look at reality from different angles and to continue to ask the question, 'what is real?' in new and different ways.

The Roman Catholic Church, once the only organization for Western Christians, is now only one of many denominations of Christians the world over. While it is still the largest of Christian institutions in Asia and Latin American countries, the Roman Catholic Church has lost its dominance. More and more, the people of the regions are taking over the administration of the faith and its responsibilities. Diakonia and women of faith continue to challenge the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the limitations of the roles of women and lay folk, but there are few institutional roles for them to play. In convents and monasteries, however, nuns continue a tradition of study and prayer, as well as offering service, spiritual direction and education to the communities in which they live. The clergy are still entirely male, and both priests and nuns take vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience.

Diakonia in Protestant denominations has undergone massive expansion. From the establishment of the deaconess community at Kaiserwerth in the 1830s to the present, organizations for the office and function of diakonia have formed and grown strong. The passion that has fuelled diakonia's growth in this century has been the same passion shared by sisters and brothers in the

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[6]Ibid. p.690

early church and through the centuries. It is a passion for the ministry and teachings of Jesus and his call for all people to work for justice. It is a commitment to imagining what life could be like if God's justice worked for all people. It has brought that imagining into being. Like Picasso's Bull's Head, members of diakonia take ordinary abilities, people and situations, and present a different vision.

The forces that prevented diakonia from flourishing institutionally through the centuries have been the same in this century, if magnified somewhat. Church hierarchy's control of the liturgical and administrative activities of congregations, the offices of ministry, and those who are ordained to clergy, has resulted in the devaluation of diakonia. Higher priority has been given to acquiring the trappings of religious practice — the cathedrals, music and artwork — than has been given to ministry with women, children, the poor and the sick.

In each denomination from which it has come, diakonia has taken a slightly different form. In the early part of the century the social gospel movement brought issues of justice to the political scene, and the social settlement movement brought acts of justice into the communities. The women who worked in the social settlement movement founded houses in which they would live together to support one another and their communities. They provided services to those who otherwise had little or no access to support. They taught English to immigrants, provided education for children, offered health care to the poor of the inner cities, aided the working classes in finding employment, shared resources of food and clothing with those in need, gave support to those in trouble with the law — in short, they enabled and encouraged the living conditions of many.

Like the Beguines of the Middle Ages, they sought alternatives to the proscribed roles for women of faith in society. Many of the women who worked in the social settlement movement were women who had been able to gain education. While they were well educated, they were unable to find useful and fulfilling employment in the either the church or in society — the expectation being that women should be happiest and most fulfilled caring for a husband and children. They had a passion for learning and for the communities in which they lived and they held a strong Christian faith which led them to make those communities better for all their inhabitants. They raised money for their efforts through family and friends, and through whatever employment they could find.

The church, while it may have applauded the efforts of such women, did not necessarily support the movement as an institution. These women were not ordered in any way, they may or may not have been attached to a worshipping congregation, and they did not take their direction from the church hierarchy. They acted out of their faith in the world, living out a call to diakonia through the only avenues open to them, and fashioning for themselves the ways and means to do so.

> There are a number of reasons for the development of confusion in the church's diakonia, literally, the church's ministry or service to the world. ...In recent decades... there has come a renewed appreciation of the corporate nature of the church as the Body of Christ, and with this renewal a fresh sense of what it means for the church as Church to act in the world. The church is greater than the sum of its members.[1]

Diakonia in the twentieth century is offered to the church in a wide variety of ways, and has expanded the understanding of lay people and clergy about their own call to service in the world. Many of those called to diakonia have chosen to work outside the institutional church in

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[1] Elsie Anne McKee, Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today, p. x

service ministries defined and supported by communities. Non-governmental organizations and community groups responding to the needs of the poor and dispossessed have been led by persons who have a vision of a different reality — a vision of the spiritual as well as the physical needs of a community. The functions of diakonia are many, but include service, education and pastoral care. These are lived out in as many ways as there are individuals in its practice.

In the United Church of Canada, diaconal ministers work with ordained and lay ministers to educate and nurture the community of faith. In the institutional church, they work in congregational and administrative settings, offering leadership development, program resources, counsel to the Courts, and so on. In local congregations, diaconal ministers may serve in small communities where they are responsible for leading Sunday worship (including presiding at sacraments), organizing and implementing Christian education programs, working with committees in the church, and representing the congregation in the larger community, offering programs in skills and leadership development, and providing pastoral care to those in need. Or they may serve with one or more colleagues in ministry, often with an emphasis on Christian education and leadership development. In church outreach ministries, diaconal ministers are often involved in pastoral care with particular groups, such as in hospices, drop-in centres, community ministries, and in hospitals and prisons. Outside of the institutional church, persons who live out a ministry of diakonia may work in public office, sexual assault centres, counselling centres, mission refugee centres, development organizations and other organizations that educate and advocate for justice at home and in other countries.

Clergy roles are changing in the midst of late twentieth century society. As fewer lay people inhabit the pews, there are fewer who are willing to take on positions of leadership in the administration of the church and the institution itself tends to entrench its power in the ordained

functions of the hierarchy. More and more, congregations and the administrative bodies of Christian denominations are taking their structural authority from the model of business, even as the people of congregations are seeking out spiritual direction and authority in a world that offers contradicting values and ethics. The corporate structure is dedicated to perpetuating itself as an institution and unlikely to recognize the call of God to be active in the world.

As roles for all the members of congregations and communities change, diakonia offers a variety of resources to people, including leadership development and spiritual direction. Members of the diaconate develop skills in group work, conflict resolution and management, social and systemic analysis. These skills are not pursued for purely intellectual reasons, but in order to strengthen the whole people of God and build community and solidarity. Particularly in the United and Anglican churches in Canada, through institutions like the Centre for Christian Studies, liberation and feminist theologies have been integrated into diakonia's perspective on the world of faith and the role of churches in the world. There is a strong association with and passion for working with the marginalized of the world who offer a different perspective on the world and challenge the wealthy of the world to act out their ideals and beliefs.

Jill Pinnock, in The Deacon's Ministry speaks of service to the world as "exemplifying, extending and personifying the Church's proclamation of the Gospel in word and deed." She goes on to say that:

> We live in a society in which people are increasingly seen either as having a product to market, or as consumer: against this background deacons...stand out. They are witnesses to a very different world order in which Christ himself is among us as "one who serves" and where ambition is turned on its head.[8]

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[8]Jill Pinnock, "The History of the Diaconate" in The Deacon's Ministry, ed. Christine Hall (Herefordshire: Fowler Wright Books, 1992) p.9

Those involved in service in the church strive not for status, but for the nurture of their own spirits and those of others around them. In this sense, ambition is turned on its head. The powers of the world are challenged to share their resources rather than either holding them altogether or giving them away as charity. It is a service that looks to both the spirit and the body of a community, recognizing — as the early followers of Jesus recognized — that one cannot survive without the other.

More important than the actual function of diakonia is the philosophy or idealism of its members. Such ideologies affect the way members of the diaconate approach any task and the lenses through which they look at the world around them. Diaconal folk focus not on themselves as individuals but on themselves as members of a much broader community. The community towards which diakonia strives has no members who are more important than the others, and takes turns offering each other leadership. The community is no longer one with specific geographical boundaries, but one with ideological and theological links that call individuals to seek and to offer support to one another.

Diakonia chooses to use what resources are available to continue a tradition of education, service and pastoral care with the people of God, and through the church to society in general. These functions have traditionally been seen as women's tasks, and often as the roles of lay volunteers. Outside the institutional churches, diakonia is becoming less gender specific, as more men commit themselves to ministries of diakonia and offer their faith and skills to communities.

The end of the twentieth century is "a time of reexamination of all things, a time of changes, profound and universal."[9] This is true especially as we look to life in the twenty-first century. As

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[9]Von Ogden Vogt, Art and Religion, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921) p.9

political power shifts to economic power, as the people of poor nations demand their rights and find allies in the common people of rich countries, as churches re-examine their messages to the world and their need to hold on to wealth and power, changes may well be profound and universal. The strength that diakonia brings to the church is very similar to that which the artistic community brings to the world: the ability to envision a new reality out of the old, to take an abstract view of reality and to explore alternative perspectives. To live a passion for bringing that new reality into existence.

Conclusion

"Eyes for Art"[1]

One of the discoveries of twentieth century science has been that different parts of the brain control different abilities, thoughts, perceptions and emotions. The left side of the brain controls the ability to organize and to think in linear, logical, orderly ways. The right side of the brain controls the ability to imagine and to think in circular or creative ways. Both ways of thinking are essential for life in the world. Right brain/left brain theory is a way to understand the variety of different perspectives amongst the general population, for every individual will tend to favour one side of their brain function over the other. In this aspect as in many other areas, it is important to strive for balance. The way that people or groups perceive the world and interpret those perceptions will affect the way they understand themselves and therefore how they will interact with their environment. Some eyes see the world as entirely sensate, made up of details and order, designed to be owned and kept. Some see the world as simply the physical manifestation of a greater cosmic power or consciousness. Eyes for art "see the form, and then its power as a symbol for some part of life or for the whole."[2] Eyes for art attempt to bridge the gap between these two approaches, encouraging compassion for all parts of the whole and openness to new ideas and perceptions of reality.

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[1]Roger Lipsey, An Art of Our Own: The Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1988) p.1

[2]Ibid. p.17

The skills that humans have developed to feed, shelter and protect ourselves arose out of our need to survive into the next generations. The practice of art — "and there is not just *one* art, but arts — is a more complex historical and anthropological phenomenon."[3] The practice of art emerges out of the imaginative life of a people — out of the need to make a connection with the eternal. The art of diakonia is also a complex historical and anthropological phenomenon, yet is as simple as education, service and pastoral care. The art of diakonia, as service to the world, sees the world itself as precious and holy. The world is to be cared for and held in trust for the people of the world, for it is created and loved by God. Diakonia is an expression of humankind's need for a link with the eternal, a need to understand ourselves as part of a continuum to which we all contribute and by which we all benefit. Diakonia as a form of art strives to give human reality a sense of that link and to challenge Christians to understand and respond to the needs of their neighbours.

Elsie Anne McKee, in her study of diakonia in the classic reform tradition and today, reflects on the relationship between religious faith and social responsibility. She says that it is a complex question for Christians in a world that is changing its structure and values at a rapid rate. In the midst of all that change, she reflects that "poverty and need, whether next door in the inner city or in Africa, are always with us. We realize that we are responsible for each other."[4] The arts also reflect this understanding of responsibility to and for the world.

To be truly responsible for and to one another, we must trade our notions of power and control for a paradigm of partnership. The practice of power in the world of business and politics does

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[3]Felix Marti-Ibanez. The Adventure of Art p.3

[4]Elsie Anne McKee. Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989) p.2

not necessarily allow for sharing. It recognizes individual and finite power to be held by some over many. This is a concept that diakonia, in its many forms and functions, has tried to address. Power over one another, as Jesus also taught his disciples, is not the way of a good and loving God. Power from within energizes and mobilizes individuals to care for one another. The power that communities have when they work together is shared by and benefits all.

Common to diakonia in each of the three time periods explored in this paper are passion and a willingness to risk the discipline of the church and rejection by the world. Passion for growth, learning, the nurture of people, justice and empowerment of communities, provides hope in despair, and a willingness to risk the ire of those who fear the loss of their personal power and authority. Persons practicing the art of diakonia look to models of Jesus and the prophets of many ages who knew the risks they were taking in challenging the status quo and were willing to take them. While few in the European and North American context risk violent death at the hands of those in power, all who challenge authority are susceptible to backlash from those currently holding power.

This is common to the history of art and artists as well. Artists must be willing to face the possibility of ridicule and rejection in order to achieve any growth or recognition of their art. If they displease their benefactors or view reality in another way than popular culture, they may find themselves isolated. Yet the rewards of living the spiritual side of their being compel artists to continue their work. This is also the danger and reward for the deacon or deaconess or diaconal minister as artist: to be in the world as listeners and healers and as servants; to open ourselves to possibilities for hope and growth and learning.

Antonie Wessels observed that "there is little sense in only complaining about the developments in a culture. Once a particular discovery or invention is made, the challenge that confronts humankind is the same: how to use it well."[5] This is some of the richness that diakonia has brought to the church. Given the speed with which today's world is changing and discovering new avenues of exploration, it is vital that people of faith lend their wisdom and strength to the use of new discoveries. We need to ask the questions, will the changes in one part of the world benefit those in another? Or will the needs of the wealthy few exploit the resources of the poor?

> The nature of diaconal ministry has always been: a teaching ministry; an enabling style of leadership; a response to particular needs in the church; nurturing of the community of believers; and participation in liturgical leadership through preaching, blessing, and serving the communal meal.[6]

Diaconal folk around the world struggle with ways in which to live out this calling in their home communities and in adopted communities. They meet with opposition in some places, and with support in other places. Diaconal ministry offers a paradigm of partnership to the church as we move into the next century. The progress may be slow, even as Henry Wheeler reflected on the advancement of the principles of diaconal ministry early in this century:

> The deaconess will make a still greater advance when our cynical world shall comprehend that it is not for the gratification of passing vanity, or foolish pleasure, or matrimonial ends, that she extends her hand of generous courtesy toward man, but that he may be aided by the strength she gives in weakness, encouraged by the smiles she bestows in sympathy, and enlightened by the wisdom she has gained by inspiration.[7]

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[5] Antonie Wessels, Secularized Europe, Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 6 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1996) p.29

[6] The History of Diaconal Ministry, The United Church of Canada Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education, 1987

[7] Wheeler, Deaconesses Ancient and Modern, p.166

The practice of diakonia has changed somewhat from this vision of Wheeler's. Deaconesses are freer at the end of this century to challenge and confront than they were before. Yet it is still true that it is not for the sake of gaining power, influence or prestige that deacons or deaconesses lives out their calling, but for the sake of abundant life for the world. Out of the energy and hope of the early centuries of the church, the re-energizing of the faithful in the Late Middle Ages and into the Reformation, and the search for a renewed sense of spirituality and connectedness with the earth of the twentieth century, diakonia re-emerges with a new passion for justice and commitment to work in and with the churches. Diakonia and the arts have offered the world education, service and pastoral care. The physical arts educate participants in ways of creative thinking and of seeing beyond what the eye of flesh can take in. They offer the service of reflecting both reality and possibilities in physical form, and they care for the spirit of humanity by offering beauty and hope. While art is profoundly individual, it is also innately social:

> Whether combined with practical utility or not... art is first of all a solitary phenomenon, an unselfish human activity.... It is also an altruistic social phenomenon, as well as a proclamation of tremendous individualism. For if language is only allusion, art is execution.[8]

Diakonia, through centuries of Christian history, has also been something of a solitary phenomenon. It has been an individual's response to messages of faith received through scripture, community activity, personal experience, prayer and meditation. It has combined the need for individual fulfilment with a deep desire to share life with others. As a social phenomenon it seeks peace and wholeness, the bringing about of God's *shalom*. It educates participants to think creatively and solve problems and struggles effectively. It offers service to those in physical and spiritual need, and pastoral care in times of crisis and celebration. Theology and ecclesiastical structure offer shape and order to the world of faith, while diakonia offers skills and gifts to

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[8] Felix Marti-Ibanez, The Adventure of Art, p.3

bring that order and shape into being.

If theology is only allusion, diakonia is execution. Art invites people to participate in a spiritual pilgrimage — to imagine spirit within objects and to understand their own souls. Diakonia likewise invites people to participate in a spiritual pilgrimage — to imagine God's *shalom* and act in partnership with others to achieve justice and wholeness. The art of diakonia is in its bringing about transformation and the partnership of ideology with action, reflecting both the reality of community life and a vision for a better world.

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APPENDIX

THE QUILT

Accompanying this written thesis is a symbol of the art of diakonia.

Quilts have traditionally been both practical in their function and beautiful in their design. They keep people warm and comforted in the cold, use leftover scraps of fabric from no longer usable items, and shape those pieces into a new design. They allow the creator to present beautiful, imaginative patterns.

The ministry of service, education and pastoral care is also both practical and beautiful in its practice. Diakonia gathers many individual gifts and invites the community to work together to create new patterns that meet the needs of every member. It seeks health and wholeness for individuals and communities and offers skills in leadership, education, service, and pastoral care.

This quilt is a bargello design, with the colours arranged to form a spiral. The spiral is itself an important symbol of diaconal ministry — representing a model of the way in which learning takes place. It is an ancient symbol of life, which represents the movement of the seasons and the cycle of nature. The learning spiral, based on the Kolb theory of learning, is a model of the process of learning by which the learner: begins with concrete experience; reflects on the elements involved, and the images, words, feelings that it evokes; examines connections with existing theory, theology and history; and suggests ways to identify present learnings and areas for further

learning. At any place in the spiral, there may be points of departure, discoveries that lead to other reflections on learning.

Every community is made up of many different colours and patterns, shades and hues of experience and imagination. This quilted project symbolizes the shapes and colours of our lives that create a design for life and invites all people to seek both warmth and beauty.

This quilt contains pieces of fabric offered by members of the artist/author's larger community. The people who offered fabric to this project live in every province of Canada. They are members of churches, family members, friends and supporters. Many are members of Sturgeon Creek United Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Some are members of the Transitional Central Council and staff of the Centre for Christian Studies in Winnipeg. Some are family members in Ontario, Québec and New Brunswick. Each piece of fabric represents some important piece of the giver's life. The scraps come from articles of clothing, other women's quilt-making or sewing projects or were purchased because the colour or pattern was symbolic for the giver.

To tell all the stories of the people who contributed to this quilt would take far too long. Suffice it to say that each of the stories is significant, because it is a story of love and faithfulness and support. This in itself is what makes any community rich and strong.