

The Chichester Workshop for Liturgical Art

THEOLOGICAL VISION

This theological vision of the Chichester Workshop for Liturgical Art underpins all of the Workshop's making, training and teaching. The Chichester Workshop intends that its artists and teachers will share in this vision.

The unity of earthly and heavenly worship

Humankind is created to love, worship, and be at one with God the Holy Trinity. Since humans are a union of flesh and spirit, liturgical art in its various forms is an essential aspect of this worship, a material expression of spiritual adoration. Because worship on earth is participation in heavenly worship, healthy liturgical art reflects and harmonises with heavenly worship.

The mystery at the heart of this unified worship is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity become flesh. God's self-revelation as Christ within the created order—in the person of a man of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem—is a complete and inexhaustible revelation. The liturgical arts are justified and empowered by this vision of 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1.15).

The glory of heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3.20) is mediated through the sacraments, the *mysteria*. Among the sacraments, it is in the Eucharist above all that Christ becomes tangible. The liturgical arts serve to manifest the invisible realities of sacramental life where, in particular, earthly life is invested with heavenly grace.

The style, or form, of liturgical art

The event of God's Incarnation in Jesus Christ determines the form of liturgical art, as does the Incarnation's fulfilment in the deification of human persons and in the wider transfiguration of all material creation. Each of these existential truths—the divinity of Christ, the enlightenment of the saints, and the radiant grace of the cosmos (as a bush 'burning')—is to be signified in both the content and style or form of liturgical art.

Indeed, the form of liturgical art is as important as its subject matter. The *way* something is presented impacts on people's souls as much as *what* is presented. This is the case for all forms of liturgical arts: music, ritual, architecture, church lighting and furnishings, and visual iconography. The beauty and gravitas of its forms can give people a glimpse of divine beauty and therefore inspire repentance and compunction; the way it depicts the material world can help people to see the world transfigured and illuminated; and its otherworldliness can inspire awe, desire for God, prayer and thankfulness, all signs of growing union with God.

A paradoxical and revelatory art

The paradoxical, surprising quality of the Incarnation further informs the sacred aesthetic. The little baby who enters into grime and squalour and poverty is the King of Glory. The one

who is born into obscurity and indigence, the one who is nailed to the tree, is the beautiful one. This beauty, as then reflected in liturgical art, unsettles conventional norms.

Since it is utterly rooted in these mysteries, liturgical art is not 'art' in the commonly understood sense. It is revelation. It is not ornament, but epiphany. It is not illustration, or decoration. It is manifestation.

The effects of beautiful worship

Worship, while being its own end, also has profound effects when beautiful.

Mission: Divine beauty is a fragrance that attracts people, stimulating nostalgia for the lost homeland of life with God. The newly awakened person then wants to find the source of this beauty and seeks guidance from people on how to find the Lord.

Personalism: When a person enters a church resplendent with images of saints, angels and Christ, they are offered the immediate sense that life with Christ is above all to do with relationship, not with ideas, systems, authority, legalism or rules.

Healing: Psychological and social ills are ultimately caused by departure from God and the inevitable fragmentation. Exposure to divine beauty helps to reunite a fragmented person and community.

Orientation: 'Without vision the people perish' (Prov. 29:18). The actions and aspirations of individuals and societies spring from their vision of what they consider to be the perfect life. A person's experience of beautiful worship, one that envelopes all five senses in love for God, can powerfully reorient their vision of life towards the love of God. This in turn has a great impact on their future life.

Challenges for practitioners and representatives

This theological vision places certain demands upon practitioners within, and representatives of, the Chichester Workshop.

Committing to service to Christ and His Church

The Church artist is a servant of Christ and of His Church rather than someone aiming to promote their own private vision of life. This in turn means that the creation of liturgical art demands not only consummate skill from the artist but also theological knowledge, thorough acquaintance with liturgical art tradition, participation in the liturgical life of the Church, and a personal life of prayer and obedience to Christ.

Relating diverse media to a single symphony

Liturgical art encompasses all aspects of worship: singing and hymnography, architecture, vestments, stonework and woodwork, furnishings, ritual, and iconography in its various

expressions, such as murals, mosaic and panel painting. Word, image and ritual need to work together in a single symphony of love for God. Practitioners in each of these mediums therefore need to understand the roles that their works will play in relationship with works in other media. Both makers and their works are not soloists but members of an orchestra.

Discerning continuity and variation

Because liturgical art is incarnational it reflects something of the culture in which it lives. Authentic liturgy possesses both continuity with successful elements in tradition and variation in accordance with this reflection of contemporary culture. In authentic liturgy, continuity does not consist in mindless copying, nor does variation consist of novelty for its own sake. The challenge is to embody the timeless in time.

The continuity of authentic liturgy is provided for insofar as liturgical artists are able in their practice to draw discerningly upon previous epochs that have successfully embodied the timeless in time. The Chichester Workshop makes liturgical art that is resourced in particular by the first twelve to fifteen centuries of Christian art. The early Roman, Byzantine, Carolingian, Anglo-Saxon and Romanesque traditions provide core inspiration. A spirit of open yet critical discernment is applied elsewhere. Importantly, there are a number of contemporary liturgical artists of great inspiration.

The liturgical artist best progresses by uniting the wisdom of the past with the skill and living experience of the artistic worshipping community in the present.
