To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Beverly Jean Brasell entitled "Toward a Christian Perspective on Theatre." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Speech and Theatre.

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TOWARD A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

"Toward a Christian Perspective on Theatre" investigates the relationship between theatre and Christianity in the contemporary world in an effort to determine the ramifications of a Christian perspective on theatre. Because Christianity views divine revelation as the final judge of truth, this study pursues a Biblical perspective.

Chapter I probes the tension that has developed between theatre and Christianity and the subsequent misunderstandings of the essential nature and character of each. Chapter II develops a description of Christian drama by applying a definition of drama to both contemporary and Christian philosophy. Chapter III explores the scriptural rationale for the art of acting and investigates several major problems within the medium--the image of the profession, the illusion vs. reality dilemma, and the influence upon the individual. Chapter IV, entitled "Future Horizons: Drama as Worship and Witness," suggests a dilemma and then seeks to solve it. The need for Christianity to speak into the twentieth century culture and the discrepancies between the Christian and the secular approaches to drama and acting might be reconciled through a theatre based on scriptural principles and staffed by Christians.

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CHAPTER I

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEATRE AND CHRISTIANITY

> A survey of existing journals of the arts shows an almost complete absence of any consciousness of the philosophy of art and ways of working in the arts that grow naturally out of belief in a significant Creation and the living Christ.[1]

This statement by the Society for Christians in the Arts suggests skepticism as to whether or not there is a Christian consciousness in the arts; theatre is no exception. Having been alternately condemned and condoned through the centuries by organized religion, the theatre has found little sympathetic base within the framework of Christendom. Having been ostracized and labeled as "pagan," the theatre seems to have pulled further and further apart from Christianity, finding no pattern of co-existence.

A brief analysis of the historical association of the "church" and the theatre exposes a vacillating attitude on the part of the church. For reasons ranging from the righteous to the ridiculous, the church has rejected theatre, alleging that it: (1) came from "pagan" origins, (2) was a "graven image," (3) was worldly and fleshly, (4) confused reality and illusion, (5) distorted Biblical truth, (6) provided an immoral environment, (7) promoted idleness, (8) corrupted by portraying sin, (9) sheltered dangerous people, (10) caused plagues, and (11) caused

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[1] Genesis, the Journal of the Society of Christians in the Arts (Greenwich, Conn.: The Society of Christians in the Arts, n.d.), p. 2.

violent storms and catastrophes.[2] On the other hand, the church has praised the theatre for such contributions as: (1) instruction in morals, (2) education in church dogma, (3) assistance in worship, (4) enlightenment in literature, (5) relaxation through humor, and (6) diversion for young people.[3] Historically, then, there have been two basic views toward the relationship between the Christian faith and the theatrical arts: (1) suspicion that led to puritanical denunciation, and (2) exploitation for religious instruction and education.

The extremism of these historical attitudes prompts the twentieth century Christian in the dramatic arts to examine the question: Are the theatre and Christianity in the contemporary world mutually exclusive, or are they potentially significant partners in the process of creation? This paper will explore their relationship in an effort to determine the ramifications of a Christian perspective on theatre.

Personal research has revealed considerable literature on Christian aesthetics--a general view of the Christian in the arts, but very little appears to have been written on a Christian perspective on theatre, per se. The application of these general principles of Christian aesthetics to the particular field of theatre should lead to the development of some guidelines for the Christian in the theatrical discipline. According to Harry Blamires in The Christian Mind (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), p. 4, there is a need for such principles and guidelines, because there is no "immediate living dialogue" in any area of our

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[2]Dale D. Rott, "Drama," Christ and the Modern Mind (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), pp. 37-38.

[3]Ibid., p. 38.

culture for the Christian:

> There is no Christian mind; there is no shared field of discourse in which we can move at ease as thinking Christians by trodden ways and past established landmarks.

Providing the groundwork for such a "discourse" or "landmark" in theatre, this study will discuss the theatre from a Biblical perspective. Truth for Christianity is supernaturally grounded, i.e., reality goes beyond this world and that reality affects this life: "Secularism asserts the opinionated self as the only judge of truth. Christianity imposes the given divine revelation as the final touchstone of truth."[4] An evaluation of theatre for the Christian, therefore, must be based on the revelation of God to man, the Bible, rather than on ethics or other man-made guidelines.

There are very few direct Biblical references to drama. In Ezekiel 4:1-3, Ezekiel is admonished to act out a drama as a warning to Jerusalem:

> Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and portray upon it the city, even Jerusalem; And lay seige against it, and build a fort against it, and cast a mount against it, set battering rams against it round about.
>
> Moreover, take unto thee an iron pan, and set it for a wall of iron between thee and the city; and set thy face against it, and it shall be beseiged, and thou shalt lay seige against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel. (King James Version)

Another example of the use of drama in the Old Testament is found in Zechariah, when God has Zechariah portray several types of shepherds to

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[4]Harry Blamires, The Christian Mind (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), p. 101.

illustrate certain truths to Israel. One of the roles he plays is that of an evil shepherd:

> Then the Lord told me to go again and get a job as a shepherd; this time I was to act the part of a worthless, wicked shepherd. And he said to me, "This illustrates how I will give this nation a shepherd who will not care for the dying ones, nor look after the young, nor heal the broken bones, nor feed the healthy ones, nor carry the lame that cannot walk; instead, he will eat the fat ones, even tearing off their feet. Woe to this worthless shepherd who doesn't care for the flock. (Zechariah 11:16-17, The Living Bible)

Old Testament scripture appears to support the instructional use of drama, but the New Testament advocates that:

> God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners [which included the use of drama] spoke in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. (Hebrews 1:1-2, King James Version)

This apparent contradiction and the fact that there are no direct references to drama in the New Testament could challenge the validity of the theatre as an art form for the Christian.

But the theatre, like all art forms, reveals man's innate ability to be a "maker"--to create. Being created in the image of a creator, man is creative, for "Creativeness in the world," says Nicolas Berdyaev, "is, as it were, the eighth day of creation."[5] As mimetic or representational art, theatre is a valid artistic medium for the Christian, as he must live within the framework of what actually exists, of what God has created. But for the fact that God made them possible, there would be no economics, government, recreation, education, or art:

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[5]Elizabeth O'Connor, Eighth Day of Creation: Gifts and Creativity (Waco: Word Books, 1971), p. 1.

> He created the possibility. So these structures are the horizons of man's activity. We cannot do anything but within the created order--to be outside this order is to be outside of reality. To this reality belong imagination, fantasy, the discovery of things unheard of and undreamt of--for God gave man these things, and imagination is not outside Creation's structures.[6]

The Christian, then, as a dramatic artist, confronts tremendous tension, because he must function in two worlds rather than one. If he chooses to work only in the theatrical realm, he is generally considered by the Christian community to have submitted to the "lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life" (I John 2:16). But if he selects to operate within the confines of the evangelical community, he may have to sacrifice his artistic integrity since dramatic standards are usually low.[7] This personal pressure must be relieved for true freedom and creativity to exist for the Christian dramatic artist, but any genuine endeavor to unite these spheres will require an understanding of the nature of both Christianity and art.

First, Christianity needs to be delimited for the purposes of this inquiry. Based on propositional truth, Christianity encompasses the existence of God, his personal-infinite nature, and the revelation of that nature to man through the Incarnate Word and the Inscripturated Word--Jesus Christ.

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[6]H. R. Rookmaaker, Modern Art and the Death of a Culture (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 225.

[7]Frank Gaebelein, "Toward a Biblical View of Aesthetics," Christianity Today, 30 August 1968, p. 4.

Such Christianity, especially as manifested in Protestant evangelicalism, has been alienated from the theatre. Indicative of this alienation are the attitudes that have emerged within the "church" over the past hundred years: cultural passivity, romantic idealism, and compartmentalization. Protestantism over this period of history has been charged with cultural insensitivity. Having prompted the exodus of many artists from the church, this insensitivity has been partially responsible for the dissatisfaction and detachment of many nineteenth and twentieth century dramatic artists.[8]

Closely akin to this cultural disposition is what Amos Wilder calls the "Christian romantic or idealist tradition," which he traces both in English and American religious culture through the Victorian Age to the "Southern" poets of the present era. The nineteenth century melodramatic tradition in theatre reflects this romantic-idealist attitude and suggests another source of estrangement between Christianity and theatre. Much of the contemporary religious drama seems to be a carry-over from this melodramatic tradition; for these plays are for the most part nondescript bits of moralizing like The Challenge of the Cross and Christ in the Concrete City which make strong evangelistic appeals. A lack of understanding of the space-time fall of man, his loss of innocence and the redemption of Christ has produced "mock innocence" or sentimentality in drama; sin has affected the whole of creation,

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[8]Amos N. Wilder, "Christianity and the Arts," The Christian Scholar, XL (1957), 261.

so that solutions are not simple and happy endings not always perfect or possible.[9]

The artists of the romantic-idealist tradition were able to fuse religion and art, because both had become romantic to the point of sentimentality. When religion and art become activities of an idealistic mentality, they lose their base in reality. "Shrine religion," claims Wilder, "becomes aestheticism. Pedestal art takes on a pseudo-sanctity. Beauty becomes a special precinct, rather than the transfiguration of the actual world itself."[10] Christianity must be separated from such sentimental theatre before any real integration can begin; the Christian faith and the theatrical arts must be viewed in their true context and allowed to function within that context.

A third rationale for such tension is the compartmentalization of life. The theatre has been dealt with by the evangelical Christian community as secular. Church-related vocations seem to be the higher calling, while artistic pursuits have been considered inferior. If such talents are accepted, they are usually prostituted; the dramatist is recruited as a dramatic evangelist, rather than allowed to use the full scope of personal expression in his art work. As a result, the theatre is barren of significant Christian contribution; the Christian dramatist seldom identifies himself with the professional theatre--one of the most significant cultural avenues.

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[9]Bonnie M. Greene, "Discerning Artistic Spirits," Christianity Today, 16 March 1973, p. 16.

[10]Wilder, pp. 266-268.

To change these negative attitudes and to prevent the relegation of theatre to the periphery of life, evangelicals must realize that the whole man belongs to God:

> The Lordship of Christ over the whole of life means that there are no platonic areas in Christianity, no dichotomy or hierarchy between the body and the soul and redemption is for the whole man.[11]

The theatre and the Christian artist need to be confederates, not to decorate the faith, but to exhibit the lifestyle that relates all the earthly issues to the eternal, that sees everything in the context of the Lordship of Christ; for as H.F.R. Catherwood stated in The Christian Citizen (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), p. 12, "It is not true Christianity but false pietism which divides one from the other."

If Christianity is a way of life, a practical outworking in the life of the truth of what actually exists, how does the Christian view the theatre? As a moral, yet thinking being, he must consider the correspondence between Christianity and aesthetics, since the aesthetic experience is the heart, the essence of the creative process. In his article, "The Artist in Today's World," in Educational Horizons, XLI (Spring 1963), 82, Dr. Paul L. Soper defines the aesthetic experience as "mental action that is felt as the quality of a situation being contemplated." He further states that "in the best artist and in the best art, the aesthetic and the moral principle are one and inseparable." Susan Sontag's essay, "On Style," in Against Interpretation and Other

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[11]Francis A. Schaeffer, Art and the Bible (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 7.

Essays (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964), p. 25, makes the identical claim:

> Art performs this "moral" task because the qualities which are intrinsic to the aesthetic experience (disinterestedness, contemplativeness, attentiveness, the awakening of the feelings) and the aesthetic object (grace, intelligence, expressiveness, energy, sensuousness) are also fundamental constituents of a moral response to life.

These qualities of the aesthetic experience (the mental action) and the aesthetic object (the situation being contemplated) are all commended in the scriptures.

Observe first the qualities of the experience itself. Disinterestedness is detachment from personal gratification--a selfless objectivity. The apostle Paul admonished the Philippians with "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:4), and the Corinthians with the thought that love "seeketh not her own" (I Corinthians 13:5). Involvement in aesthetic appreciation involves a refocusing of attention from oneself to the object being considered.

Contemplativeness or steady regard receives poignant commentary by Paul in Philippians:

> Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

At the center of the inward life lies the throttle of man's character, for "what a man thinks, he is."

The quality of attentiveness requires intense concentration and self-discipline--qualities that have been made available to the

believer: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (II Timothy 1:7). Neither the aesthetic experience nor the Christian life produces instant satisfaction or easy fulfillment; persistence is a prerequisite.

As the final innate quality in the aesthetic experience, the awakening of feeling is recognized by scripture as a valid and important aspect of man's total being. Proverbs 4:23 states, "Keep they heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Feelings themselves are not wrong; but for the Christian, they must be conditioned by the precepts of scripture.

The object of the aesthetic experience, according to Sontag, involves the qualities of grace, intelligence, expressiveness, energy, and sensuousness. As the ingredients of the aesthetic experience correspond to the attitudes of the Christian toward God, so are the attributes of the aesthetic object recognizable in the character of God, who is the object of Christian contemplation and worship.

Grace is the quality of attractiveness or beauty; scripture identifies beauty with God's character and his creation: "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us" (Psalms 90:17).

Intelligence or reasoning ability is a manifestation of the rational quality of God and his creation. God acknowledges this when he says, "Come now, and let us reason together" (Isaiah 1:18).

Expressiveness is possessed by God's works, for "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge"

(Psalms 19:1). When "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), the epitome of God's articulate nature was revealed to man.

Energy or power is evident in the person of God, who is the ultimate source of all such energy: "Great is our Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite" (Psalms 147:5).

Sensuousness is revealed by God's tremendous concern for the aesthetic details of the tabernacle; he even prescribed the precise ingredients for the incense (Exodus 30:34-38).

All the characteristics of the aesthetic object are paralleled by qualities in God's character. If the Christian's life is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21), which means that God's character is accurately revealed, then the aesthetic process can be potentially pleasing to God and is not contradictory to scripture:

> There is nothing that may not be done aesthetically--that is, beautifully in its own way or kind. For a Christian, doing things aesthetically amounts to doing things for the glory of God.[12]

The tension that has developed between organized theatre and organized religion has been seen to be the product of a misunderstanding of the essential character and nature of each; the theatre provides an outlet for man's creativity, while Christianity can give that creativity substance and meaning.

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[12]Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "Christianity and Aesthetics: Conflict or Correlation?" Christianity Today, 9 May 1969, p. 9.

CHAPTER II

A DESCRIPTION OF CHRISTIAN DRAMA

The art of drama, of the play script itself, requires discussion in a Christian perspective on theatre, for this is the first building block in the process of theatrical art. The ideas, the ideals, and the imagination of the playwright form the essence of the theatrical vision; his perception of life is expressed through the dramatic creation. A man's view of the world, his philosophy, is reflected in this creation. Consideration of the definition of drama and the application of this definition to both contemporary and Christian philosophy provides a basis for determining the Christian's response to drama.

The concept of drama as the presentation of a world view can be supported from the classic tradition down through the avant-garde movements. In The Poetics, Aristotle spoke of drama as the representation or imitation of "men in action." Shakespeare's famous exposition on the purpose of drama in Hamlet extends the scope of drama to include the mirroring of a cultural philosophy as well as an individual one:

> . . . the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first, and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature--to show Virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. (III, ii, 22-27)

Leonardo de Vinci's words echo these classical interpretation of drama: "Every artist has two subjects: Man and the hopes of his soul."[1]

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[1]John Gassner, "Bernard Shaw and the Making of the Modern Mind," Dramatic Soundings (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 642.

Men of the twentieth century offer concurring definitions. Alfred North Whitehead notes that "it is to literature that we must look, particularly in more concrete forms, namely in poetry and drama, if we hope to discover the inward thoughts of a generation."[2] John Gassner agrees that drama reveals the "form and pressure" of the time:

> The great theatrical periods of the past always nourished themselves on the ideas, aspirations, and struggles of their age, and at the same time, evolved or adhered to a central dramatic vision that is nothing less than a fundamental view of life itself.[3]

At the forefront of contemporary theatrical thought, Theodore Shank describes the aim of the dramatic artist as follows:

> . . . the aim of dramatic artists is to create from any and all materials which serve their purpose virtual action comprising a semblance or illusion of life which is presented as an immediate audible or visible presence and embodies their collaborative conception of emotive life.[4]

In addition to these professional opinions, current Christian positions offer concordant views. "For the subject of the theatre is man," states Robert Speaight.[5] Donald Drew, college lecturer in English in Kent, England, says, "Great literature is aimed at helping us to greater

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[2]Edward J. Dirks, "The Editor's Preface," The Christian Scholar, 40 (1957), 259.

[3]John Gassner, "The Dramatic Vision," Dramatic Soundings (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 109.

[4]Theodore Shank, The Art of Dramatic Art (New York: Delta, 1969), p. 55.

[5]Robert Speaight, The Christian Theatre (New York: Hawthorn, 1960), p. 140.

awareness of human nature."[6] Entering the realm of value, Denis DeRougemont points out that "the aim (conscious or not) of all true art is to make objects which signify; therefore, it is to make one attentive to the meaning of the world and of life."[7] Because twentieth century life is growing in its complexity, Edward Dirks makes the following claim:

> At their best they [the arts] are a mirror of man, recording in their changes man's changing ideas of himself; expressing that which gives human actions meaning and which enables him to live under the burden of a world view that increases continually in complexity and magnitude.[8]

Drama, then, is the portrayal of human action that consciously or unconsciously presents a view of man, of the world, and of man's relationship to that world.

The major twentieth century outlook on man, found in contemporary drama, has a background of humanism, a philosophy of despair, and a theatre of nihilism. The current view of man has its roots in the humanism of the fifteenth century. The French philosopher Descartes propounded that man was the measure of all things; truth was demonstrable only through man's measurements: "The world of the spirit was beyond such measurement, a matter of faith and intuition, not truth."[9] This dichotomy between grace and nature formed the cornerstone of humanism,

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[6]Donald Drew, "A Christian Philosophy of Literature," L'abri Fellowship Tape (Bloomsburg, Pa.: Chalet Cassettes, Inc., n.d.).

[7]Denis De Rougemont, "Religion and the Mission of the Artist," Spiritual Problems in Contemporary Literature, ed. Stanley Romaine Hopper (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 179.

[8]Dirks, p. 259.

[9]"The Rediscovery of Human Nature," Time, 2 April 1973, p. 78.

and reason and religion became adversaries rather than allies.[10] The result of such a split was expressed by Rabelais in the inscription on the gate to his abbey: "Do what you like."[11] And with the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century the break between grace and nature was finalized: "If the legacy of the Renaissance is humanism, the contribution of the Enlightenment is paganism."[12]

The ultimate impact of such a philosophy is depicted in this statement by Claude Levi-Strauss, twentieth century European intellectual and anthropologist:

> I don't believe in God, but I don't believe in man either. Humanism has failed. It didn't prevent the monstrous acts of our generation. It has lent itself to excusing and justifying all kinds of horrors. It has misunderstood man. It has tried to cut him off from all other manifestations of nature.[13]

For the humanist or rationalist, all knowledge must be verifiable through the senses and right or wrong becomes relative--a matter of personal judgement.

Flannery O'Connor noted that we live in "an age that has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily."[14]

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[10]Gary Hardaway, "The End of the Renaissance Road," Christianity Today, 11 May 1973, pp. 4-5.

[11]Ibid., p. 5.

[12]Os Guinness, The Dust of Death (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 6.

[13]Robert Dunavon, "The Art of the Future," America, 16 December 1967, pp. 740-741.

[14]Flannery O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer," Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969), p. 159.

In Beyond the Outsider: the Philosophy of the Future, Colin Wilson says that the basic problem of the twentieth century is:

> . . . that the basic human relation to existence seems to be static. The image that can be found in so many modern novels --of the hero staring at a cobweb in the corner of the ceiling, and feeling no desire to do anything--is a symbol of a certain aspect of modern consciousness. We examine life; it is poker-faced, apparently meaningless.[15]

If man is alone in the universe, if life is futile and absurd, there is no meaningfulness to life. If man's life has no meaning, then he is little more than a machine, and as B. F. Skinner writes in Beyond Freedom and Dignity, "To man as man, we readily say, 'Good riddance.'"[16] Donald Drew sums up the logical extension of such attitudes: "Man is The Naked Ape, Beyond Freedom and Dignity, and there is little uniqueness or importance to distinguish him from anything else in the universe, natural or mechanical."[17] One of the best scholarly descriptions of this philosophy is recorded by John Gassner:

> With the dissolution of character in our century we come to the true age of decadence. It is not obscenity, morbidity, or undue fascination with death and decay that undermines the drama--these are but concomitant characteristics--but the disappearance of man himself, in the fullness of life, that constitutes decadence in the theatre. Depersonalization has been the gravest threat to our theatre whatever its source . . .[18]

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[15]Colin Wilson, Beyond the Outsider: the Philosophy of the Future (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 27.

[16]Hardaway, p. 4.

[17]Donald Drew, Images of Man (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), p. 59.

[18]John Gassner, "The Playwright and the Contemporary World," Dramatic Soundings (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1968), p. 627.

The dramatic arts reflect this widespread feeling of depersonalization and despair. Take, for example, the Theatre of the Absurd and the Kitchen Sink Drama. The Theatre of the Absurd acknowledges the meaninglessness of the world, but advocates the dignity of man in confronting the chaos--an absurd, but nevertheless necessary reaction:

> Today . . . the need to confront man with the reality of his situation is greater than ever. For the dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its senselessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusion--and to laugh at it. This is the cause to which . . . the dramatists of the Absurd are dedicated.[19]

An essay in Time, July 8, 1966, sums up the modern theatre in its title--"The Modern Theatre or The World as a Metaphor of Dread." In surveying the European dramatists--Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Pinter, and Osborne--the article concludes: "None are alike; yet all raise a hemlock toast to the twentieth century." The problem they are dealing with is man's oldest and newest--existence:

> These playwrights begin with one major premise--the absence of God. Their despair and their task are to fashion a post-Christian ethos, to find a meaning for life without supernatural sanctions. Man, as they see him, is a creature trapped between two voids, prenatal and posthumous, on a shrinking spit of sand he calls time.[20]

The major contemporary world view sees man as a depersonalized, mechanistic being living in a meaningless world; man has no worth. Drama from the Christian perspective would be blatantly opposed to such a world view.

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[19]Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York: Overlook Press, 1961), p. 377.

[20]"The Modern Theatre Or, the World as a Metaphor of Dread," Time, 8 July 1966, p. 34.

Dr. Ralph G. Allen, Chairman of the Speech and Theatre Department, The University of Tennessee, in his Theatre History lectures advances three possible types of universes depicted in drama: (1) a benevolent universe, (2) an indifferent universe, and (3) a malevolent universe. A biblical perspective must suggest a fourth possible universe--a fallen one. The doctrines of creation, sin, and redemption are necessary to understand a fallen universe. God created the heavens and the earth and "saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was good" (Genesis 1:31). The physical universe had God's stamp of approval. When man rebelled against God, a space-time fall resulted, and man was separated spiritually from God, socially from other men, and psychologically from himself. Creation also suffered, but unlike man, cannot be redeemed until the return of Christ:

> For all creation is waiting patiently and hopefully for that future day when God will resurrect his children. For on that day thorns and thistles, sin, death, and decay--the things that overcame the world against its will at God's command--will all disappear, and the world around us will share in the glorious freedom from sin which God's children enjoy. For we know that even the things of nature, like animals and plants, suffer in sickness and death as they await this great event. (Romans 8:19-22, The Living Bible)

So the universe was meant to be benevolent, but because of the fall has been marred. But the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and his space-time crucifixion and resurrection have provided the present redemption of men and the future redemption of creation. The major theme of a Christian world view, is, therefore, an optimistic one. Man, made in the image of God, has worth; he is fallen and flawed, but can be redeemed through Jesus Christ. Life is meaningful and purposeful. The minor theme of the Christian world view--the abnormality and fallenness of man and the

world, and the defeated, sinful side of the Christian life-- must not be omitted, for without this component, Christian ideology would be romantic, not realistic.[21]

Drama written by Christians will reflect such a view of the world, just as drama by a humanist, an existentialist, a naturalist, or a communist will reflect that individual's outlook on life. Flannery O'Connor recognized this fact in her essay, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," The Living Novel (New York: Macmillan, 1957), p. 163:

> When we talk about the writer's country we are liable to forget that no matter what particular country it is, it is inside as well as outside him. Art requires a delicate adjustment of the outer and inner worlds in such a way that, without changing their nature, they can be seen through each other.

Continuing her trend of thought in Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 153, Flannery O'Connor points to the blending of the natural and supernatural realms as the key to good fiction: "The fiction writer presents mystery through manners, grace through nature, but when he finishes there always has to be left over that sense of Mystery which cannot be accounted for by any human formula."

If drama is a natural reflection of a concept of the cosmos, then the term "Christian drama" is a misnomer. Consider the testimony of several artists and professors of art. W. H. Auden contends that:

> There can no more be a "Christian" art than there can be a Christian science or a Christian diet. There can only be a Christian spirit in which an artist, a scientist, works or

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[21]Francis Schaeffer, Art and the Bible (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 58.

> does not work. A painting of the Crucifixion is not necessarily more Christian in spirit than a still life, and may very well be less.[22]

H. R. Rookmaaker, Professor of the History of Art at the Free University of Amsterdam, agrees with Auden:

> . . . what is Christian in art does not lie in the theme, but in the spirit of it, in its wisdom and the understanding of of reality it reflects. Just as being a Christian does not mean going around singing hallelujah all day, but showing the renewal of one's life by Christ through true creativity . . . .[23]

Donald Drew pursues the same premise in the art of film:

> I would go so far as carefully to say there is no such thing as a Christian film. There is a Christian world view and a Christian mentality, and there are Christians who are able to choose to create a film embodying these. Yet too frequently a "Christian film" is primarily an excuse for evangelism, not an expression of film as an art.[24]

Christians should be producing drama as the natural outworking of their creative ability and conception of existence.

As creative expression of the reality of surrounding life, drama should be experimental, not pragmatic; i.e., the primary aim of drama is to please, not to instruct. Paul L. Soper in "The Artist in Today's World," in Educational Horizons, XLI (Spring 1963), 85, notes the degradation of instructional drama:

> . . . practical interests, while inherent in every play, for instance, are fused with and used for aesthetic experience,

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[22]W. H. Auden, "Postscript: Christianity and Art," The New Orpheus: Essays Toward a Christian Poetic, ed. Nathan A. Scott (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p. 76.

[23]Rookmaaker, p. 228.

[24]Drew, Images of Man, p. 112.

> rather than the reverse . . . . In times past and today, people in power and well-meaning do-gooders have sought to enlist the service of art in the promotion of their ideas and their goals. And uniformly, when such influence has succeeded --when art has become only the means to some extrinsic end-- it has been degraded.

Moral instruction, religious education, and evangelistic outreach can be destructive to the proper sense of drama; the validity of art does not lie in its commentary. Archibald MacLeish's immortal phrase in "Ars Poetica" points up this principle. "A poem should not mean but be." Rookmaaker agrees when he says, "Art needs no justification."[25]

Drama with a Christian vision grows out of the whole life, from encounters with people and the life around us, as well as encounters with God. Referring to Dante's Divine Comedy, Chad Walsh declares, "The greatest Christian poetry has not been commissioned, but has simply come about."[26] Let Dorothy Sayers, noted English novelist, have the final word on this subject:

> Let her [the Church] by all means encourage artists to express their own Christian experience and communicate it to others. That is the true artist saying: "Look! recognize your experience in my own." But "edifying art" may only too often be the pseudo-artist corruptly saying: "This is what you are supposed to believe and feel and do and I propose to work you into a state of mind in which you will believe and feel and do as you are told." This pseudo-art does not really communicate power to us; it merely exerts power over us.[27]

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[25]Rookmaaker, p. 229.

[26]Chad Walsh, "The Wary Witness of the Poets," Christianity Today, 25 October 1974, p. 20.

[27]Dorothy Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," The New Orpheus: Essays Toward a Christian Poetic, ed. Nathan A. Scott (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p. 18.

The natural and supernatural realms are bridged in drama as the dramatist expresses the truth of what is "in him."

Dramatists in the Christian community should have the freedom to be dramatists without being mentors. But this freedom needs monitoring; abuse must be abated. Jacques Maritain, noted Princeton professor, claims that art and morality are autonomous, for "Artistic value relates to the work, moral value to the man."[28] Granted, there is a strong correlation between the aesthetic experience and Christian values, and dramatic art is not beyond moral judgement. Because we live in a moral universe with absolutes, the Christian cannot only experience, but has the foundation for judging or criticizing that experience:

> The work of art, then, does not have total autonomy, but embodies meanings and values having relevance to life and the world at large, and the critic who is also a Christian will affirm that his faith provides a proper perspective by which to express these meanings and values.[29]

Our literary and spiritual judgements cannot be separated, for life is a unity; the whole man, including his art, is subject to the touchstone of scripture. There are no specific biblical rules for drama, but the principles of creation, sin, redemption, and the Lordship of Christ provide a basis for evaluating the world view of all drama. Several guidelines emerge from this basis: (1) What does the play say about man? (2) What does the play say about the universe? (3) What does the play say about man's relationship to that universe? Having a basis

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[28]Jacques Maritain, The Responsibility of the Artist (New York: Gordian Press, 1972), p. 29.

[29]"How Autonomous Is Art?" The Christian Century, 19 May 1965, p. 636.

for evaluation does not mean, however, that we have the freedom to tell writers what to write. We can judge their work, but we cannot dictate their content. T. S. Eliot was alert to this principle of freedom, when he said, "And the last thing I would wish for would be the existence of two literatures, one for Christian consumption and the other for the pagan world."[30] Freedom for artists of every life-style and philosophy is necessary for humanity and creativity to exist.

Yet it is possible to use Christian thought without writing Christian drama. For example, Samuel Beckett and Tennessee Williams draw greatly on Christian symbolism and ideas. Beckett's Waiting for Godot employs Christian symbols to establish his nihilistic philosophy; and Williams' The Night of the Iguana exhibits Christ as an archetype, not as a real person.[31]

Christians have much to learn from atheistic drama and should be interested in such dramas, because they are creations of men--men who are human beings created in the image of God. To limit our dramatic experiences only to those that reflect our own thinking or to require the world to limit its dramatic experiences to those that fulfill our religious requirements is a deadly option. The Christian stands for freedom and humanity, as his vital union with Jesus Christ, and the resulting life-style and world view find expression in his drama

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[30]T. S. Eliot, "Religion and Literature," The New Orpheus: Essays Toward a Christian Poetic, ed. Nathan A. Scott (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p. 233.

[31]Nancy M. Tischler, "The Shrinking World of Christian Drama," Christianity Today, 13 October 1967, pp. 19-20.

CHAPTER III

A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO ACTING

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more" (V, v, 24-26). Shakespeare's words from Macbeth highlight the ephemeral quality of the acting profession. According to Oscar Beckett in The Theatre: An Introduction (San Francisco: Rinehart Press, 1964), pp. 420 and 438, this unique art expression

> . . . most nearly personifies the stage for the general public, for he [the actor] is the only one an audience sees. It is the actor who lends his body and voice to the character and makes it live and breathe . . . the actor is the artist most necessary for the existence of a theatre.

How does the Christian relate to this evanescent, yet essential, ingredient of the theatre--the art of acting? Based on this question, Chapter III will explore the scriptural rationale for the art of acting and investigate several major problems within the medium--the image of the profession, the illusion vs. reality dilemma, and the influence upon the individual.

Talents are recognized in the Bible as significant personal expressions that have their ultimate source in the Creator of the universe. In speaking of the artistry and craftsmanship of Bezabel, God says:

> And I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver,

> and in bronze, and in cutting of stones for settings, and in the carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship. (Exodus 31:3-5, New American Standard Version)

References throughout the scriptures point to God as the ultimate source of all gifts and abilities. Take, for example, this passage from I Chronicles 29:11-12.

> Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in the earth is thine. Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.

Craftsmanship is important to acting, but it does not represent the total gamut of the actor's art. The famous English actress, Ellen Terry, suggests certain qualities which she believed essential to an actor's success:

> Imagination! Imagination! I put it first years ago, when I was asked what qualities I thought necessary for success upon the stage. And I am still of the same opinion. Imagination, industry, and intelligence--"the three I's"--are all indispensable to the actress, but of these three the greatest is, without any doubt, imagination.[1]

Imagination or creativity is the actor's most significant attribute; industry and intelligence (craftsmanship and skill) are needed, but imagination (creativity) is his primary tool. As pointed out in Chapter I, it is not a waste of time to indulge in creative pursuits, because man was created with the capacity for such enterprises. In Hidden Art

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[1]Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds. Actors on Acting (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957), p. 334.

(Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), p. 24, Edith Schaeffer emphasizes that man can:

> pursue artistic or scientific pursuits in creativity, because this is what man was made to do. He was made in the image of a Creator and given the capacity to create.

Twenty-five percent of the scriptures is poetry. God is interested in poetry, in creativity; such a Creator, says G. K. Chesterton, "may be younger than we are."[2] The actor's trademark, creativity, is the reflection of the creative nature of God. In his autobiography, Surprised by Joy (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955), p. 167, C. S. Lewis expounds the close allegiance of Christianity and creativity:

> . . . I do not think the resemblance between the Christian and the merely imaginative experience is accidental. I think that all things, in their way, reflect heavenly truth, the imagination not least. "Reflect" is the important word. This lower life of the imagination is not a beginning of, nor a step toward, the higher life of the spirit, merely an image.

Dorothy Sayers claims that "this idea of Art as creation is . . . the one important contribution that Christianity has made to Aesthetics."[3]

It follows that Christians, the people who claim to know and follow God, should be the most creative people by way of their relationship to the Creator, the one who created out of nothing--the one who is the source of imagination. H. F. R. Catherwood in The Christian Citizen (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), p. 21, summarizes the significance of the creative act for the Christian:

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[2]Gladys Hunt, Ms. Means Myself (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), p. 58.

[3]Dorothy Sayers, "Toward a Christian Aesthetic," The New Orpheus: Essays Toward a Christian Poetic, ed. Nathan A. Scott (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), p. 13.

> Not only are we told to administer God's creation, but since God has made us in His own image, He has given us some part of His creative ability. It is this spark of creativity and this authority over nature which marks man out and which enables him to carry out his commission. There is nothing so deeply satisfying in human life as creative achievement, nothing which so makes us feel that we are fulfilling our basic function in life.

The first problem for the Christian actor involves the current image of the profession. The job market increases the competitiveness of the acting profession and causes success rather than creativity to be the major goal of theatrical enterprises. In his book Acting Professionally (Irvine: National Press Books, 1972), Robert Cohen describes in detail the world one enters as a professional actor, noting especially the scarcity of parts and the lack of artistic integrity. Professional actors are literally a "dime a dozen," for "there are frighteningly few jobs of any kind available in the American theatre." Of the 24,000 members of the Screen Actor's Guild in Hollywood, only 4,000 made as much as $3500 in 1969. Moreover, says Cohen, "in 1969 only one out of three working professional, unionized Hollywood actors made as much as $200 a month, an income on which it is hard to live! Two out of three made less, or nothing" (p. 4). New York professional actors have it even worse, for their median income is below $2000 a year with the unemployment average between 75 and 85 percent. At times the rate goes above 85 percent.

Because such a market increases competitiveness, priorities become confused. One producer was known for sending his cast and crew a telegram on the first day of shooting saying, "forget art, make money." Cohen claims that "most producers live by this message and a high amount of purely commercial claptrap is marketed both in Hollywood and New York,

and even by regional theatres" (p. 6). Originality and creativity are eyed with skepticism, for they open the doors to financial disaster. Variety's review of The Love Machine reflects this skepticism: "The secret of a film like this, rarely spoken outside of inner sanctums, is that if it were better written, better directed, and better acted, it would probably fail" (p. 6). The artist is caught in the throes of a gigantic "money machine," which measures his value to the industry in dollars and cents, rather than in creativity. Cohen concludes:

> There are artists in Hollywood and on the other hand, there is vice, graft, exploitation, indolence, and greed throughout every phase of the theatre. In general, you are going to have to tread carefully between art and money, and you will have to hang on to your integrity with an iron grip. (p. 7)

Francis Schaeffer in The Church at the End of the 20th Century (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 127, analyzes such a success-oriented culture:

> What does God say to our generation? Exactly the same thing that he said to Israel two thousand years ago when he said through Ezekiel: "I am broken with their whorish heart, which hath departed from me and with their eyes which go whoring after their idols." I believe that this is how God looks at much of the modern church, and on our Western Culture. I believe this is how he looks on much of our cinema, much of our drama, much within our art museums.

For the Christian, neither success, money, nor creativity form the ultimate objective of the art of acting. Success is not measured by monetary standards or hierarchal advancements. Success is measured by the fulfillment of life's objective--to know God, to love God, to glorify God, "Whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). Every action and every attitude must be judged against the standard of this overall objective. Success,

then, becomes a vertical measurement between the individual and God, rather than a horizontal one between man and man. An individual's relationship with God does not eliminate his competitive spirit or his disappointments, but it does help him to cope with these issues. In The Eighth Day of Creation: Gifts and Creativity (Waco: Word Books, 1971), p. 40, Elizabeth O'Connor voices the cause of comparison and contrast, the root of the problem of competition in the theatre:

> If we keep our attention focused on the other person, we only increase our pain and anxiety. Envy is a symptom of lack of appreciation of our own uniqueness and self-worth. Each of us has something to give that no one else has to give.

The cause of the anguish of play try-outs and rejection lies, then, in the individual's concept of himself and his importance. Biblical understanding of the special place of each of God's creations provides the Christian with a basis for realizing and accepting his place in creation and the uniqueness of his individual contribution (Psalms 139: 13-16, Luke 12:6-7).

C. S. Lewis in his book The Weight of Glory (Grand Rapids: Eerdman, 1965), p. 9, says that human ambition must fade away when the redeemed soul

> . . . learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval, she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex forever will also drown her pride deeper than Prospero's book. Perfect humility dispenses with modesty.

Christian actors need a firm handle on their position in Christ (Ephesians 1) in order to cope with the forces of the contemporary

theatre that are contrary to their life-style in Christ; spiritual values take precedence over earthly ones in the artistic gauge of the Christian. Concludes Elizabeth O'Connor:

> If we are to be creators, we must begin to think in terms of a whole new work ethic. The reward will not be in higher wages, another rung on the ladder, the acclaim of our peers, but in creative forces which flow within us and accomplish in our lives the gracious work of transformation.

The world of the theatre is a world of illusion; it is based on reality, but it is not reality. The discrepancy between appearance and reality has caused several problems for the actor and the audience. In the theatre, the cognitive faculties of the audience are conditioned to ignore the question of actuality. The aesthetic condition does not demand that something exists, but allows one to imagine that it does exist. Historical drama, for instance, may be based on real events and people, but motivations and dialogue are usually the inventions of the playwright. Coleridge called this power of objective observation, a "willing suspension of disbelief." We acknowledge that the events of a play are not real, but we believe them for the moment. This acceptance, however, is conditional, for our concept of reality clearly influences our perception of the dramatic event.[4]

Because they have a basis for distinguishing reality from illusion, Christian audiences should not confuse the character in the play and the person playing the role. C. S. Lewis exemplifies such an attitude in his

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[4]Stephen Baker, Visual Persuasion (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), chapter 6.

essay, "Behind the Scenes," in God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 247-248:

> All sorts of things are, in fact, doing just what the actor does when he comes through the wings. Photons or waves (or whatever it is) come towards us from the sun through space. They are in a scientific sense, light. But as they enter the air they become "light" in a different sense: what ordinary people call sunlight or day, the bubble of blue or grey or greenish luminosity in which we walk about and see. Day is thus a kind of stage set . . . the actor may come on stage to play a drivelling part in a bad play. But there is always the transformation.

This transformation from "behind the scenes" to "on stage" is viewed by Lewis as "a ready-made symbol of something universal" (p. 247). In the same manner that a Christian takes on the character of Christ, the actor takes on the visage of his character; spiritual growth is a transformation resembling the acting process: "But we all, with veiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (II Corinthians 3:18).

The actor as well as the audience needs to be aware of the relationship between the subject and the object, between appearance and reality; for without such awareness the artist is threatened by fantasy and illusion and unable to make clear distinctions. Such confusion for the actor could result in psychological instability. The Christian, however, has a strong base for dealing with illusion. Francis Schaeffer states why:

> Being a Christian and knowing that God has made the external world, there is no confusion for me between that which is imaginary and that which is real. The Christian is free; free to fly, because he is not confused between his fantasy and

> the reality which God has made. So we are not inwardly confused. We are free to say, "This is imagination."[5]

Because the Christian knows the difference between imaginative creations and the real world, he "is the one whose imagination should fly beyond the stars."[6]

Another problem the actor must confront is the presence of evil in drama: How much does an actor's identification with a role influence him and his audience? Does the portrayal of evil ever result in participation in the evil? An understanding of the power and influence of drama and the scriptural guideposts for handling such power should provide assistance in determining the Christian's response to the problem of evil in dramatic experience.

A description of evil is necessary to develop this portion of the study. C. S. Lewis in his A Preface to Paradise Lost (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 65, gives an incisive definition of evil:

> God created all things without exception good, and because they are good, "No Nature (i.e., no positive reality) is bad and the word Bad denotes merely privation of good. What we call bad things are good things perverted. This perversion arises when a conscious creature becomes more interested in itself than in God, and wishes to exist "on its own." This is the sin of Pride . . . . From this doctrine of good and evil it follows that good can exist without evil, as in Milton's Heaven and Paradise, but not evil without good.

Another prominent author who accepts this view of evil is Flannery O'Connor:

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[5]Francis Schaeffer, He Is There and He Is Not Silent (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), pp. 85-86.

[6]Francis Schaeffer, Art and the Bible (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 61.

> The artist penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality. This in no way hinders his perception of evil, but rather sharpens it, for only when the natural world is seen as good does evil become intelligible as a destructive force and a necessary result of our freedom.[7]

Evil, then, is a deprivation, the result of not choosing the good, of not choosing to follow God. The Christian must turn his back on evil, but he dare not close his eyes to the evil around him, for as Rookmaaker notes, "Being a Christian means being clean in an unclean world. It is hopeless to try to be beyond contact with evil. Not only is it within us, it is all around us."[8] This is true of the artistic realm as well as the rest of life; the scriptural principles and norms that direct our life-style and behaviour must also direct our artistic ventures, for "art belongs to human life, is part of it, and obeys the same rules."[9]

As far back as the classical tradition, we find men like Plato asserting that men become like what they imitate. Plato went so far as to condemn certain art forms as evil in themselves and to banish them from his Republic. Yet I Corinthians 10:23 proclaims, "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify." Acting is an art form that is not necessarily good or evil, but might be either.

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[7]Flannery O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer," Mystery and Manners (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969), p. 157.

[8]H. R. Rookmaaker, Modern Art and the Death of a Culture (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), p. 227.

[9]Ibid., p. 236.

The effect of theatrical art is difficult to determine. Varying with each participant, the degree of theatrical appeal and the import of the dramatic message are dependent on the values, attitudes, and opinions of each individual. A person's background and sensitivity predispose him to certain influences.[10] T. S. Eliot was acutely aware of this influence:

> The author of a work of imagination is trying to affect us wholly, as human beings, whether he knows it or not; and we are affected by it, as human beings, whether we intend to be or not. I suppose that everything we eat has some other effect upon us than merely the pleasure of taste and mastication; it affects us during the process of assimilation and digestion.

Although the primary purpose of art is not to persuade, the empathy or "feeling into" of the dramatic experience does exert moral influence, as Paul Soper points out:

> Literary art, in particular, since its content consists largely in human character and conduct, has moral influence. At the theatre, for instance, we are irresistibly moved toward the moral (or immoral) position of a character with whom we sympathize or whom we admire. In general, there will be a high correlation between our admiration or sympathy and our previously held standards of behaviour.

The Bible states that it is what proceedeth out of the mouth (the heart) that defiles the man, not what goes in (Mark 7:20-23, Matt. 15:19-20). If our hearts are pure, then our response to the influence of the drama can only have positive or good effects. Purify the source and the results will take care of themselves.[11] A strong devotional

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[10]Baker, chapter 6.

[11]Geddes MacGregor, "Christian Discrimination in the Realm of Aesthetic Judgement," The Christian Scholar, 40 (1957), 270.

life enables the Christian to withstand evil, to confront it, to move forward to greater triumph in the power and victory of Jesus Christ. John Milton in Areopagitica and Other Prose Writings (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927), pp. 19-21, draws much the same conclusion:

> "To the pure, all things are pure"; not only meats and drink, but all kinds of knowledge, whether of good or evil; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defiled . . . . He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run far, not without dust and heat.

As the Christian actor maintains close communion with Christ, he will have the power to determine the particular plays and parts he can or cannot perform, for "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

This chapter on acting and the Christian faith dare not close without acknowledging the values of the art form. Acting can be a potentially selfless experience and can deepen our understanding of man. John Barrymore believed that a characterization became truly believable at the point of total personal negation:

> A man isn't an actor until he commands a technique which enables him to get an impression across into the heart of an audience without reference or relation to his own individuality. The better the actor, the more completely he is able to eliminate the personal equation.[12]

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[12]Cole and Chinoy, p. 515.

The acting process in which one totally gives himself to the part he is playing in order to share that character and thus a part of himself with his audience resembles the attitude reflected in Christ's mission on earth:

> Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men . . . . (Philippians 2:5-7, New American Standard Version)

In addition to increasing one's ability to come out of self, acting can deepen our appreciation of and insight into the human personality. As an extension of our beings and intensification of our lives, acting allows us to become many different people and yet remain ourselves. In his lecture, "A Christian Philosophy of Literature," L'Abri Fellowship Tape (Bloomsburg, Pa.: Chalet Cassettes, Inc., n.d.), Donald Drew praises the value of such experience:

> How reassuring to know that our chaos of feeling can be crystalized into order . . . . And we come across an expression of self better than self can express . . . . It is only through the novel and the drama, moreover, that one can realize how complicated human beings are.

Acting for the Christian is a viable, valuable form of expression. Because of God's revelation, the Christian actor has a life goal that reorients his entire frame of reference, has the ability to distinguish between illusion and reality, and has a basis for confronting evil in the drama.

CHAPTER IV

FUTURE HORIZONS: DRAMA AS WORSHIP AND WITNESS

> I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.
> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2, New American Standard Version)

In light of these verses, worship is a way of life, a total surrender of mind and body to Christ, not just a religious exercise on a Sunday morning or Wednesday evening. The Christian's participation in drama can be a part of his "spiritual service of worship"; as he brings the truth of God's Word to bear on every area of his participation in drama, from the evaluation of the drama to the personal relationships with cast and crew, the Christian is worshipping God, pleasing God, because he is being transformed into the image of His Son, the only one who can please Him. A distinction should be made, however, between the Creator and the Creation, for to worship art is dangerous. R. G. Collingwood in Speculum Mentis (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), notes that:

> . . . worship is, naturally, at bottom an exercise of the aesthetic consciousness. All acts of worship, whether they take the form of singing, dancing, speech, or the like, are first and foremost aesthetic acts.
> . . . But worship is no more mere art than holiness is mere beauty.

Making art or making drama (acting, directing, producing) is not worship in itself, but to bring these under the Lordship of Christ is worship.

Harold M. Best, director of the Conservatory of Music, Wheaton College, agrees with this concept of worship:

> Redemption is so radical that it calls for a new totality, hence a total worship. The essential call to worship comes at conversion. In its fuller sense, worship should be the whole life-style of persons in whom Christ lives. They go to church not for part-time worship but as full-time worshipers corporately and habitually. To them everything done by faith, by which alone the just can live, is an act of worship.[1]

Participation in the theatrical arts can also be a witness, as well as worship, for witness is the process of redemption applied to one's approach to drama and acting. This continuing process of redemption is observed best in the life. H. F. R. Catherwood in The Christian Citizen (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), p. 135, says:

> But the great strength of the Christian position is that Christians themselves are given by God the power to live it out in practice and in the end it is what we do rather than what we say that will make the deep and lasting impact.

Worship and witness through a life-style that applies God's truth to the reality of existence needs to be exercised by Christians in drama, because the true Christian faith is fast becoming a minority philosophy. Donald Drew says, "We are approaching the situation of the first Christians where the entire thought forms and life-styles that surround the Christian are opposed to him."[2] A Time article entitled "On Being a Contemporary Christian," 12 April 1968, p. 43, recognizes this current trend:

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[1]Harold M. Best, "There is More to Redemption Than Meets the Ear," Christianity Today, 26 July 1974, p. 15.

[2]Donald J. Drew, Images of Man (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), p. 115.

> It is conceivable that Christianity is heading toward an era in which its status will be akin to that of the despised minority who proclaimed faith in the one God against idolatry of the Roman Empire. To be sure, the Christian burden in the future will be different from that of the past: less to proclaim Jesus by word than to follow him in deed and loving service.
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> It may prove a perilous course, but the opportunity is great: the courage and zeal of that first despised minority changed the history of the world.

Because there is no real Christian "leaven" in society, Christianity's cultural position is growing weaker and weaker. Christians have to rent a large auditorium or coliseum to hold an evangelistic rally in order to make their presence known; thus it appears that they are retreating from, rather than permeating, the culture. In an age where every kind of religious movement is speaking from its corner soapbox, the most significant evangelism is one that saturates culture with Christian energy and thought. Plays produced, directed, and acted by Christians should be on Broadway; it might take several decades to realize such a vision, but the vision and the energy to pursue it needs to be cultivated among evangelicals. Geddes MacGregor in "Christian Discrimination in the Realm of Aesthetic Judgement," The Christian Scholar, 40(1957), 274, speaks of this type of influence, stating that our Christian journals and other mediums of expression should be vying with each other for aesthetic excellence: "Their cartoons would make the New Yorker look old hat to every Christian who had got as far as the confirmation class." Concurring with this viewpoint, Gary Hardaway in "The End of the Renaissance Road," Christianity Today, 11 May 1973, p. 6., says:

> . . . some of us Christian warriors need to step into the arena of cultural life and tackle the difficult job of

> presenting the truth to modern man through secular media . . . . Their ideas must compete with ours in the market places of our time. We face two alternatives: invade these secular domains or lose them by default.

Therefore, the Christian in drama cannot live a compartmentalized life; he must be involved through the natural outworking of his gifts. Elizabeth O'Connor says:

> . . . our gifts carry us out into the world and make us participants in life . . . . We cannot be ourselves unless we are true to our gifts. When we talk about vocation, whether we are artists or engineers, we are talking about gifts.[3]

T. S. Eliot speaks of the need to integrate the theatre and the Christian faith, in Religious Drama: Medieval and Modern (New York: House of Books, Ltd., 1954), pp. 15-16:

> . . . there would be something wrong about the aim of developing and maintaining a religious drama as something having nothing to do with the ordinary stage. . . . we need to strive towards a kind of integration of both kinds of drama, just as we need to strive towards a reintegration of life. And we can work for this as spectators and auditors, as critics in the widest sense, as well as when we are authors or producers or actors.

Christians are exhorted in scripture to be "in the world," but not "of the world." Christ expressed this attitude in his priestly prayer in John 17:15-18. Christians need to confront the world of drama as Christ coped with the world in his time: "not isolated, but in contact; not compromising, but concerned; not belligerent, but compassionate; not conquering, but transforming; not compartmentalized but integrated."[4]

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[3]Elizabeth O'Connor, Eighth Day of Creation: Gifts and Creativity (Waco: Word Books, 1971), p. 14.

[4]Karl E. Keefer, "Christian Living in a Non-Christian World," Christianity Today, 6 December 1968, p. 14.

The Christian's participation in dramatic art can be both worship and witness, integrated into his Christian experience and expressing a significant cultural statement. This particular approach to the theatre by the Christian is highly desirable and necessary, but it is not the only way. Another approach that might be valuable would be the construction of a professional theatre company based on scriptural principles and staffed by Christians. The rationale for such a company is discussed by Theodore Shank in The Art of Dramatic Art (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969) pp. 158, 162, 165:

> All dramatic artists who work during the same period are likely to have similar experiences which shape the artistic conceptions they formulate. Insofar as their attitudes are similar, they will feel a rapport for each other's work and be able to collaborate creatively . . . . The similar conceptions of the human condition and the resulting artistic rapport between a group of artists may be furthered by their sharing a particularly profound emotive experience . . . . Although the mutual experience and influence of the artists is important in order to achieve a community of feeling which can result in a unified work of dramatic art, and a permanent company is one of the best ways of bringing this about, the artists must also have extensive experience outside of the company. If a company isolated itself from the contemporary world, it would likely fail to develop an understanding of the significant and pervasive feelings of the time.

The collaboration of Christian dramatic artists would allow for great unity and creativity, for they would have mutual apprehensions, attitudes, and aspirations. Donald Drew's comments on Christian collaboration in film applies to theatre also:

> . . . above all, films made by Christians will require not only totally Christian personnel but total dedication under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The director and the producer, the actors and all involved may feel it right to ask God to do a new thing in cinematic thought and action, something no one has yet realized or even imagined.

Such a theatre company could operate on the principles presented by Francis Schaeffer in his booklet, 2 contents, 2 realities (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974). If we are able to meet the needs of the contemporary theatre and the pressure we face as Christians within that theatre, we must understand these basic building blocks:

1. First content: Such a theatre must be based on sound doctrine, on the system of truth that views the universe as fallen and man as a moral, redeemable being.

2. Second content: Such a theatre must view the body, intellect, emotions, and spirit as redeemable; there can be no dichotomy in God's economy.

3. First reality: Each member of the company should love God and be in a vital relationship with Him.

4. Second reality: The relationships between the individual members and between the company and the Christian community and between the company and the contemporary theatre must reflect the beauty of human relationships.

Toward the end of his discussion, Schaeffer points out the cultural significance of such an enterprise:

> Every big company, if it is going to build a huge plant, first makes a pilot plant is order to show that their plan will work. Every church, every mission, every Christian school, every Christian group, regardless of what sphere it is in, should be a pilot plant that the world can look at and see there a beauty of human relationships which stands in exact contrast to the awful ugliness of what modern men paint in their art, what they make with their sculpture, what they show in their cinema and how they treat each other. Men should see in the church a bold alternative to the way modern men treat people as animals and machines. There should be something so different that they will listen, something so different it will communicate the gospel to them.

The reality of Christian worship through the drama "cannot be restored by injections of saccharine," declares Amos Wilder. Paul Claudel asks, "If the salt hath lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? With sugar?"[5] As the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13), Christians, in accord with the truth, should influence the dramatic trends of our time, should be marching into the dramatic arena, not cowering beneath its powerful roar.

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[5]Amos Wilder, "Christianity and the Arts," The Christian Scholar, 40 (1957), 268.

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APPENDIX

PROPOSED GOALS FOR A CHRISTIAN THEATRE

1. To show forth by demonstration in its individual and corporate life and work, the existence of God, the redemption of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. To give Christians who are talented in the Fine Arts an opportunity to exercise their various gifts in worship and witness of God.

3. To create an awareness in this culture that it is God who is the source of creativity, the first Creator, the finest artist and the original lover of beauty.

4. To lay the first groundwork of evangelism with a people who are otherwise out of touch with the rational, propositional truth of Biblical Christianity.

5. To demonstrate that it is ultimately by faith and not by "Madison Avenue" that we live.

6. To redefine the word Christian in our community and to our generation.

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