

EMBODIED TRUTH: THE INHERENT COST AND VALUE OF IMPLICIT  
COMMUNICATION IN ART

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## INTRODUCTION

Images have been used to describe thoughts and interact with the world since its origin. Disciplines like art, music, architecture, film, and literature have developed over time as the building blocks of culture and humanity. Authors have embodied morals in characters. Songwriters have embodied emotion in composition and lyrics. Filmmakers have embodied the struggles of life in motion picture. Architects have embodied atmosphere in buildings. There is no doubt that art is a useful, and arguably *essential* tool for understanding and navigating life. In a world that began from a single act of creativity, it is reasonable to suggest that creativity is a part of its DNA. How then, does one go about discovering the deep spiritual significance of art in a world created by an invisible God?

Psalm 33:6 says, “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.”<sup>1</sup> The very material world that we live in is infused with God’s act of creativity, and as the pinnacle of His creation, man carries in him the gene of divine creativity. Psalm 24:1-2 says, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.”<sup>2</sup> What belongs to a creator more than His creation? The breath of the Father is inside of man, carrying with it the aroma of creativity, imagination, and art.

According to the work of modern writers like Dorothy Sayers, George MacDonald, and J.R.R. Tolkien, who have theorized about the imagination and its function, creative expression undoubtedly plays a key role in Christian belief. From Genesis to Revelation, creativity is modeled and utilized extensively throughout the biblical narrative as the instrument of

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 33:6, ESV.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 24:1-2, ESV.

communication between Creator and creation. Scholars and theologians agree that the creative quality of the universe speaks to the existence and nature of a divinely creative source. The Christian Church often utilizes the arts as a derivative work of praise through music, painting, and architecture, reflecting creativity back to the One to whom it belongs. However, this thesis is not exclusively about the value of explicit communication of religious truths through art. It is about the value of *implicit* communication of religious truths in art.

Sayers, Tolkien, and MacDonald suggest that the imagination is a divine faculty in human nature that both aligns with that of the Creator and guides creation toward the Creator from within. The imagination transcends explicit methods of communicating truth, showing further that *all* of creation points to God. With the gap between believers and non-believers growing wider every day, and with the rise of entertainment and arts culture, it is imperative for Christians to understand the relationship between art and faith. The beauty of creativity is its ability to function as a *foundation* of truth, not simply a reiteration of it. When viewed as man's teacher as well as his tool, art transcends the divide between explicit and implicit expressions. Not only is the imagination the faculty that drives human experience, it also unifies humanity in its ability to implicitly communicate eternal, religious truth. Creation involves a number of elements, from imagination, to creativity, to art. The process in which one engages with the creative imagination leads to discovery, where one can cultivate his sense of self and form spiritual maturity. This thesis proposes that this process is best embodied in art that communicates truth implicitly.

## **HOW THE IMAGINATION WORKS IN ART**

In order to understand the value of art in communicating truth, it is first necessary to define three key terms: the imagination, creativity, and art. For the purpose of this essay, the “imagination” will be defined as the *faculty* of the mind that prompts “creativity,” the *action* of transforming imaginative energy into “art,” the product or *result*. The imaginative *faculty* is an inherent mental power, a capability. In his essay, “On Fairy Stories,” J.R.R. Tolkien says, “The human mind is capable of forming mental images of things not actually present... called Imagination.”<sup>3</sup> The faculty itself simply exists; it does not need to be acquired through skill, though it may be practiced and sharpened through creativity. Similarly, babies generally do not need to be taught that they have a voice. It is an inherent faculty that they are born with. However, they *can* be taught how to use their voice in a productive way, forming words and sentences to ultimately communicate intelligently with other people. The imagination is similar to the voice in this case, in that it is a part of the human makeup. The active practice of the voice is comparable to creativity. “‘Creativity’ is not a passive state, but an active application of the faculty of the imagination.”<sup>4</sup> Finally, the words or sentences that result from this active application of the voice are similar to our definition of art. It is the object or product that serves as a palpable representation of the active faculty.

The work of the creative mind cannot begin without the imagination. The very existence of an ability to conceive an image, or a statement, or an action suggests that this faculty is an integral part of human beings, just as the existence of the human voice suggests that the speech faculty is an integral part of human biology. Since it is inherent, the faculty is also considered logical, and therefore interacts with the world logically. In her book, *Apologetics and the*

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<sup>3</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” in *Tolkien On Fairy-stories: Expanded edition, with commentary and notes*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2014), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Holly Ordway, interviewed by Nao Lewandowski, April 27, 2018.

*Christian Imagination*, Holly Ordway says, “Imagination is related to reason, and *necessarily* so: not related in the way that two sides of a coin are related to each other, but related in the way that a building’s foundation is related to the structure that is built upon it. Reason is dependent on imagination.”<sup>5</sup> The imagination is not the action, nor is it the resulting image. It is the faculty of the mind that makes possible the ability to create, connect, or conceive thought.

The imagination is the faculty that correlates between sense and understanding. Since it is a metaphysical element of human existence, the imagination exists at the crossroads between physical human experiences like sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch, and abstract human experiences like thought and emotion. In his book, *The Religious Function of Imagination*, Richard Kroner says, “Neither the senses alone nor understanding alone can build up a scientific system of nature; imagination must submit the material of sense perception to the notions of our understanding.”<sup>6</sup> This exchange of sensory data and mental understanding occurs in the imagination. The faculty is particularly valuable in artistic expression because of its integrated approach to both our senses and our understanding. It provides the mind with the capability to express ideas in terms of sensory material (used in art). An author or a poet, for example, can describe a scene with sensory language and communicate a mood, an atmosphere, or an emotion with those terms. J.T. Sellars references James M. Garrett in his book, *Reasoning Beyond Reason*: “The imagination is a faculty that mediates between sensation and thought, as depending on sensation for its supply of images, and in turn supplying these images as input to thought.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Holly Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: An Integrated Approach to Defending the Faith* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2017), 17.

<sup>6</sup> Kroner, *The Religious Function of Imagination*, 6.

<sup>7</sup> J.T. Sellars, *Reasoning Beyond Reason: Imagination as a Theological Source in the Work of C.S. Lewis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 193.

Objects that are perceived by our senses interact with our thoughts like the strings interact with a puppet, animating them with meaning and life.

The imagination houses creative energy that comes from both physical and mental material. Anything from objects, to thoughts, to emotions are the materials that make up the images made through the imagination. In her book, *Imagination and Time*, Mary Warnock says, “There is, then, a strong philosophical tradition which gives to the imagination the task of allowing us access not only to the natural, external world as a whole, but also to the minds and thoughts and feelings of other people.”<sup>8</sup> In a shared world, human beings are able to understand the material, emotions, and experiences not only of themselves, but of others who are a part of the world as well. “They are observers, but not observers made of wholly different stuff. Their existence is in space and time, alongside all material objects, and alongside other humans.”<sup>9</sup> As the faculty that allows us to conceive thought, the imagination is also responsible for allowing us to perceive and understand thoughts that exist around us, in others. Therefore, the faculty of the imagination is the foundation on which human spirituality and connection rests.

As the faculty of the mind that allows one to produce mental images that were not present before, the imagination can lead to new ideas, new understandings, invention, innovation, even something as simple as forming thoughts into sentences. Kroner suggests, “Imagination displays its peculiar power not by such imitative images but by creating new images or new connections of images; it is not reproductive but *productive*.”<sup>10</sup> This productive process begins with the imagination and serves as a tool for spiritual formation and maturity, which will be discussed later in more detail. In his essay, “The Fantastic Imagination,” George MacDonald says, “The

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Warnock, *Imagination and Time* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Kroner, *The Religious Function of Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1941), 5.

natural world has its laws, and no man must interfere with them in the way of presentment any more than in the way of use; but they themselves may suggest laws of other kinds, and man may, if he pleases, invent a little world of his own, with its own laws.”<sup>11</sup> The imagination is capable of perceiving the element of newness, and with that perception, it ignites creative invention and rearrangement of forms. “When such forms are new embodiments of old truths, we call them products of the Imagination; when they are mere inventions, however lovely, I should call them the work of the Fancy: in either case, Law has been diligently at work.”<sup>12</sup> Law is made up of sensory and mental data, which can be transformed by the faculty of the imagination into new images. Natural law is not abandoned when new images are formed, but used as a reference for perception. MacDonald suggests, “Law is the soil in which alone beauty will grow,”<sup>13</sup> and thus begins the act of embodiment.

Our second term, creativity, is the imagination put to action. While the imagination “forms meaningful images out of sensory and intellectual data, creativity is the human faculty that allows a person to embody the imagined images into art.”<sup>14</sup> In *The Mind of the Maker*, Dorothy Sayers says, “The ‘creation’ is not a product of the matter, and is not simply a rearrangement of the matter.”<sup>15</sup> Unlike matter and combinations of matter, the act of creativity is limitless.<sup>16</sup> A chef does not equate his ability to cook with the amount of ingredients that he has to work with. His materials have no impact on the actual action that he performs. The number of possible flavor combinations does not even have an impact on the act of cooking. Unlike the

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<sup>11</sup> George MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination,” in *A Dish of Orts* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2017), 190-91.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Holly Ordway, interviewed by Nao Lewandowski, April 27, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1987), 29.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

imagination, which houses the material, or the art, which is the product of the material, the action itself is inexhaustible.

The materials that the imagination forms into images for creativity to embody are drawn from waking life. Therefore, the embodiment process is fluid, dynamic, and in a constant state of motion. Sayers says, “The artist does not see life as a problem to be solved, but as a medium for creation. He is asked to settle the common man’s affairs for him; but he is well aware that creation settles nothing. The thing that is settled is finished and dead, and his concern is not with death but with life.”<sup>17</sup> The action of creativity does not occur at one specific point in time, and therefore concerns itself with neither the beginning nor the end of the process. It *is* the process. A runner does not train for the starting line or the finish line of a race. He or she is concerned with “running.” The starting line and finish line are merely materials used to measure the process of running. He or she is concerned with the space between the beginning and the end. It is the process of completing a race that holds the reward. Similarly, creativity is merely measured by the imaginative data and the resulting art. The action of creativity is in between the two.

On a spiritual level, creativity serves as creation’s response to its attraction to the divine Creator. In the act of creativity, one is attempting to express, understand, and communicate the experience in which he has been placed. With creativity, we try to reckon with the time we have been born into, or the family we have, or the place we live. Most of these circumstances are beyond our control, and can be considered a fact of divine circumstance. The ultimate circumstance that man finds himself in is that of a world created by God. Sayers points out, “Looking at man, he sees in him something essentially divine, but when we turn back to see what he says about the original upon which the ‘image’ of God was modeled, we find only the single

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 188.

assertion, ‘God created.’ The characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire and the ability to make things.”<sup>18</sup> The image of God in which man was made is at play in every act of creativity. Man’s desire to make things is his cry of belonging to the One that created him. He is using the material data from the imagination to actively understand himself.

Finally, the act of creativity is embodied in a product or result – art. Creativity can either stir idly in the mind as a concept, or take incarnational shape in art. While all people function out of the imaginative faculty and creativity, not all people partake in a great deal of artistic disciplines like painting, composing music, writing, design, filmmaking, architecture, or culinary arts. One could conduct a marketing plan at work, or solve an algebra problem, both of which are not necessarily “works of art,” but still engage the creative imagination. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the definition of art can be refined even more, as a product or result of the creative imagination that is primarily enjoyed for its beauty or emotional evocation. MacDonald says, “Beauty is the only stuff in which Truth can be clothed; and you may, if you will, call Imagination the tailor that cuts her garments to fit her...”<sup>19</sup> Beauty is best captured in art, and art serves to demonstrate truth. The goal of art is not to recreate what is for the sake of modification. The goal of art is to unveil, illuminate, and endorse what exists in a new or different way.

Impressionist painters like Claude Monet do not attempt to re-define the natural laws of the physical world. Instead, they suggest a new way of viewing the physical world, with loose structure and a focus on color and movement. In his painting, *The Artist’s Garden in Argenteuil*,<sup>20</sup> Monet uses short, staccato brush strokes to create a soft scene that draws the eye to the movement of wind and light, things otherwise difficult to portray in realistic styles of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>19</sup> MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination,” 191.

<sup>20</sup> Claude Monet, *The Artist’s Garden in Argenteuil*, 1873, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., oil on canvas.

painting. The viewer's focus is not on the structure of the rose bushes, but in their colors and their placement in the foreground. The people in the photo are loosely painted in the background, keeping the eye from perceiving clearly defined facial features and evoking curiosity about their conversation instead. The unspoken elements of the scene are brought into focus by Monet's technique. In this way, the painting does not reconfigure the physical world, but illuminates elements of it in an extraordinary way. Art makes use of both the ordinary and extraordinary so that the audience can understand one in terms of the other. By understanding the ordinary physical attributes of Monet's figures, one can better understand the extraordinary elements that are also at play, like communication and perspective. Then, by understanding the extraordinary elements like the removal of structure, one can better understand the ordinary significance of structure that exists in the material world.



Similar unveiling qualities can be found in the surrealism movement. A piece of artwork like Salvador Dali's *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*<sup>21</sup> attempts to arrest the viewer's understanding of gravity and time, all to depict the approaching digital age. The clocks in the painting seem to be falling in a different direction than the other objects, igniting the viewer's sense of gravity and evoking an intellectual and emotional response. Dali arrests his audience's sense of gravity, but also depends on it. If the viewer had completely abandoned his sense of gravity upon viewing the painting, its significance would cease to exist. It is only because the viewer knows how gravity works that Dali's redefinition of it holds any meaning.

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<sup>21</sup> Salvador Dali, *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*, 1952-1954, Salvador Dali Museum, St. Petersburg, FL, oil on canvas.

The extraordinary composition of the piece allowed its original viewers to wonder and speculate about the mystery of the upcoming technological era. Even now, viewers can partake in Dali's masterpiece and question the current state of the technological world. The artist is not suggesting a modification of the physical world, but by redefining its laws, he draws attention to the associations and ideas that are attached to them.



As seen in these examples, art also has the ability to inspire the faculty of the imagination, bringing the cycle back around. It is both the *product* of the creative imagination in the artist, as well as an *initiation* of it in the spectator. MacDonald says, “The best thing you can do for your fellow, next to rousing his conscience, is not to give him things to think about, but to wake things up that are in him; or say, to make him think things for himself. The best Nature

does for us is to work in us such moods in which thoughts of high import arise.”<sup>22</sup> Creating art contributes more data and material for the imagination to work with. It is like the circle of life, in which plants fuels the animal kingdom, and eventually the animals’ deaths fertilize more plants for the cycle to repeat. The faculty makes the work possible, and the work reciprocally serves the faculty. The relationship between the imagination and art is a beautiful reflection of man’s relationship with God. As the source of everything, God makes life possible, and life reciprocally serves God in the way that it functions creatively.

The conception of art is the point at which the faculty extends beyond the individual, by way of the action, and enters into relationship with others. Similarly, the words and sentences that a child learns by practicing the use of their voice are the points of connection between that child and other people. By presenting art, individuals momentarily share beliefs with one another, unveil commonalities or disagreements, and challenge each other to conceive new thoughts. The meetings of the Inklings, for example, show that art initiates conversation and community. In her book on Inklings studies, *The Company They Keep*, Diana Glyer says, “These cooperative relationships thrive because of the ways in which opposites attract and then enhance one another.”<sup>23</sup> The group of writers used their art as a foundation for working out their ideas on literature, faith, and life itself. Their imagined worlds were inhabited by the others’ imaginations, extracting meaning from them. Occasionally, the meaning extracted was unbeknownst to the artist, igniting new ideas. Without the product of their creativity, these men would not have developed their worldviews in the way that they did. Their art set the stage for their discovery of truth.

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<sup>22</sup> MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination,” 194.

<sup>23</sup> Diana Glyer, *The Company They Keep: C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien as Writers in Community* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2008), 32.

There is an undeniable tie between truth and art that is mutually dependent. Tolkien suggests, “If men were ever in a state in which they did not want to know or could not perceive truth (facts or evidence), then Fantasy would languish until they were cured.”<sup>24</sup> By engaging with the images presented in art and perceived through the imagination, one is taking part in those images, and is therefore shaped by them in one way or another. His perception of truth is either challenged or confirmed by his experience in the imagined world. Art therefore, depends on man’s inherent desire to create images in order to understand the world in which he lives. It also depends on his natural ability to communicate experiences effectively with other human beings. In his book, *C.S. Lewis and the Art of Writing*, Corey Latta says, “Reading brings us out of our limited life experiences and allows us the experiences of another.”<sup>25</sup> Literature is one artistic media that assists man in his understanding of his fellow man and his Maker. He could also gain similar insight from film, music, painting, or architecture. The public nature of art (as opposed to a private experience contained in the mind) suggests that it is deeply intertwined with relationships. Its purpose, to publicly represent the creative process in which it was produced, inevitably connects that process with the human experience.

If art is a response to what is true about man and the world, then creativity must be aware of and value existing reality. As Kroner suggests, “The theoretical function of imagination consists in connecting the field of sensation with the intellectual sphere.”<sup>26</sup> Without knowledge of what is in existence, one cannot separate or properly utilize what is creative from what is not. Tolkien describes the balance as “a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it. So upon logic was

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<sup>24</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” 65.

<sup>25</sup> Corey Latta, *C.S. Lewis and the Art of Writing: What the Essayist, Poet, Novelist, Literary Critic, Apologist, memoirist, Theologian Teaches Us about the Life and Craft of Writing* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 76.

<sup>26</sup> Kroner, *The Religious Function of Imagination*, 7.

founded the nonsense that displays itself in the tales and rhymes of Lewis Carroll. If men really could not distinguish between frogs and men, fairy-stories about frog-kings would not have arisen.”<sup>27</sup> Creativity requests fullness of sight, where everything is seen for what it is in the world and beyond. However, creativity also requires that the fullness of sight submit to the faculty and function of the imagination in order to be discovered more fully. The primary view of frogs may be that they are slimy, gross, and a bit marginalized in the animal kingdom. Likewise, the primary view of kings may be that they are pompous, powerful, and detached from society. By combining these two primary realities in a fullness of sight, the imagination can initiate a secondary reality; one that suggests that perhaps the combination of these two factual things can illuminate some deeper truth or broadened understanding of the things themselves; perhaps a king is more marginalized than our fullness of sight will allow us to believe. Sellars says, “In order to find out what the faculty of imagination does, one must look to the idea of cognition in general. There, one will find that reason is working on what is already delivered - one will find reason is always intertwined with imagination.”<sup>28</sup> Without reality, imagination would have no canvas on which to paint. And even so, the canvas does not hold any significance without the curiosity that flourishes in the space between what is seen and what is not. It is the *relationship* between reality and imagination that facilitates the act of creativity.

In the process of creating, one begins with what is familiar as a passage to explore what is unfamiliar. Kroner says, “Imagination is the architect of our future world, the intrinsic motor of our private and public life.”<sup>29</sup> The scope of reality is animated by the use of the imagination in creative acts. The elements of reality function as the root system underneath the work, absorbing

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<sup>27</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” 65.

<sup>28</sup> Sellars, *Reasoning Beyond Reason*, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Kroner, *The Religious Function of Imagination*, 8.

the nutrients that the imagination offers, and finally blossoming into art. In his description of Faërie, Tolkien writes, “*Faërie* contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.”<sup>30</sup> The co-mingling of these elements is the very picture of reality co-mingling with the imagination in order to expand human understanding. G.K. Chesterton made this same discovery in his conversion to Christianity. It was the work of the imagination that captured his sense of reality and slung it into a larger scope of truth. In *Orthodoxy*, he explains, “Fairyland is nothing but the sunny country of common sense. It is not earth that judges heaven, but heaven that judges earth; so for me at least it was not earth that criticised elfland, but elfland that criticised the earth.”<sup>31</sup> When only faced with what is real, man is not challenged to be anything more than what he already is. In order to make any kind of discovery or growth, one must be open to imaginative teaching.

However, Tolkien and Chesterton both allude to an even deeper truth at play. In her book, *Tolkien and Chesterton as Theologians*, Alison Milbank says, “Faërie, as Tolkien understands it in his extended essay on fairy-stories, is the site where we encounter other beings and the world itself not just as ‘enchanted’ but as ‘other.’”<sup>32</sup> Milbank suggests that the enchantment Tolkien refers to has a layered meaning – first, to clarify that the fantastic is not merely a manipulation of the primary world, and second, to suggest that the ways in which it functions, ordinarily and extraordinarily, are necessarily different, but related. Fantasy must be different than reality in order to accomplish its goal of evoking new laws and thought. However, it must have one foot

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<sup>30</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” 32.

<sup>31</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2015), 51.

<sup>32</sup> Alison Milbank, *Tolkien and Chesterton as Theologians: The Fantasy of the Real* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 12.

grounded in reality so that those who partake in it can maintain a frame of reference. These elements must be different in order to illuminate the relationship between them, but nevertheless, they are related so that they can guide one's understanding through their other-ness. "As with 'The Ethics of Elfland', enchantment is a mode of relationality as well: Neither Tolkien nor Chesterton has the nominalist individualism that would see each thing as totally separately named from every other. Instead, the created nature of the world renders it both related to God as its origin yet separated from its Creator by its contingency."<sup>33</sup> On one hand, creating an imagined world is related to God in that it has been created, a mirrored act of divinity. On the other hand, it is separated from God's world in its actual content and, on occasion, its laws. However, these points of connection and differentiation allow for exploring what is unfamiliar without losing sense of what is already known to be true.

Imagination is not an abandonment of what is real, but an endorsement of it; a baptism of reason into the waters of creativity, unveiling a new sense of sight that is not limited by the material world, but also embraces the magnificent and supernatural. In his essay, "On Stories," C.S. Lewis notes, "The story does what no theorem can quite do. It may not be 'like real life' in the superficial sense: but it sets before us an image of what reality may well be like at some more central region."<sup>34</sup> According to George MacDonald in his essay, "The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture," this region is where man connects with God, "and it will help much towards our understanding of the imagination and its functions in man if we first succeed in regarding aright the imagination of God, in which the imagination of man lives and moves and has its being."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> C.S. Lewis, "On Stories" in *Of Other Worlds* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1994), 15.

<sup>35</sup> George MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture" in *A Dish of Orts* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2017), 4.

Reality is not limited to what can be perceived through the five senses. Interacting with the imagination illuminates the entire scope of man's physical and spiritual existence.

Understanding the nature of the imagination, creativity, and art allows one to discover the vast number of ways that religious truth can be displayed in art. Creative study acknowledges the facts of the universe and faculty of the human imagination separately, but with reciprocal impact on one another. This is where the bridge between the imagination and the faith is built. The goal of creative study is not to use art to simply restate fact. If that were the case, creativity could only occur in a way that displays truth in an explicit manner. Instead, art is also used to *interpret* fact. Just as God makes Himself known in creation, creativity is the way to receive Christian truth. By taking part in an active pursuit of God's image as creators, we can begin aligning our personal purpose with our creational purpose of recognizing and bringing Him glory.

When discussing art and fact, Aristotle differentiates between the function of the poet and the historian in *Poetics*. He says, "The poet and the historian differ not by writing in verse or in prose... The true difference is that one relates what has happened, the other what may happen. Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history in particular."<sup>36</sup> It is important to approach creative study from the bird's-eye view so that it does not get confused with the study of fact and history. This is where the terms are often not clearly defined in some Christian communities, causing tension and sacrificing opportunity to learn from art that may communicate religious truth implicitly. Sellars states, "The imagination has a role in the process of cognition. And if all cognition is a process of participation - the knower and the known become united, the spirit passes between them and all

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<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997), 17.

things - then every known event has at its core this oneness.”<sup>37</sup> The goal of creative study is to discover this oneness, and the only way to discover it, that which is at the core of the imagination, is to take the faculty as a pure, valuable piece of humanity, independent from the art that it produces, which is vulnerable to worldly influence and interference.

Sayers, MacDonald, and Tolkien outline the eternal value of the imagination *as a faculty*, distinct from the value of art, to religious tradition. While art can certainly function as a religious tradition, its inherent value also serves as a foundation for wisdom and understanding life. This inherent quality is unlimited in presentation or religious affiliation. MacDonald says, “A wise imagination which is the presence of the spirit of God, is the best guide that man or woman can have; for it is not the things we see the most clearly that influence us the most powerfully.”<sup>38</sup> If the imagination is not engaged in art, its message falls on deaf ears. It is the things that we see imaginatively that make lasting impact on our understanding. An image is fleeting, but the meaning that it conveys is lasting. The image is separate from its significance. These “meanings” that are realized through a “wise imagination” must be understood independently, apart from the explicit or implicit nature of artistic presentation. If they are not, art will not serve the needs of an interpersonal world. The values that are taught through art remain separate from the way that the art is presented. This distinction allows one to study the function of the imagination with accuracy.

Art depends on the integrated nature of the universe to communicate truth; integration of the material, the philosophical, and the psychological. All of these elements exist in harmony, and therefore all work together in art to depict what is true. Kroner suggests, “Our image of the whole is closely connected with our emotional reaction toward reality. This reaction is probably

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<sup>37</sup> Sellars, *Reasoning Beyond Reason*, 51.

<sup>38</sup> MacDonald, “The Imagination: Its Function and its Culture,” 20.

the primary cause of the special direction and activity of our imagination.”<sup>39</sup> If man were not in a constant state of receiving and responding to reality, there would be no need for him to create. Since it is clear that man *does* need to create, it can be suggested that reality has not yet been revealed to him in its fullness. The role of the imagination in art is to respond and ignite the engine of creativity. Without the prompting of the faculty, art does not even begin.

One could argue that the imagination merely informs art of illogical nonsense for the sake of vain, fruitless entertainment. However, it should not be assumed that art is void of intellect or logical truth. On the contrary, art is informed by intellect. MacDonald says, “There were no imagination without intellect, however much it may appear that intellect can exist without imagination. What we mean to insist upon is, that in finding out the works of God, the Intellect must labour, workman-like, under the direction of the architect, Imagination.”<sup>40</sup> Whether it aligns with the intellect or draws attention to misalignment, art is a reflection of reality because it exists in context with what is real. The imagination uses what it knows of the senses and understanding to reconfigure reality into a way that it can be grasped. This process, while abstract, does not categorize the imagination and its works into the unreal. Instead, it reshapes the universe into a form that can be grasped not only by our hands, eyes, and ears, but also in our minds and our hearts.

If this is the case, the next step is then to determine the different ways in which the imagination can inform art of the truth. In terms of the Christian worldview, art can communicate truth in two primary ways: explicitly and implicitly. Art that explicitly communicates truth depicts qualities of God the Father, Jesus Christ, or the stories of Scripture. Typically, these works re-tell the doctrine of Christianity through artistic mediums as they are

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<sup>39</sup> Kroner, *The Religious Function of Imagination*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> MacDonald, “The Imagination: Its Function and its Culture,” 9.

found in Scripture. For example, contemporary Christian musician, Chris Tomlin pulls lyrical material directly from Scripture to depict religious truth. In his song, “How Great is Our God,” he sings,

The splendor of a King clothed in majesty.  
Let all the Earth rejoice, all the Earth rejoice.  
He wraps himself in Light and darkness tries to hide,  
and trembles at His voice, trembles at His voice.”<sup>41</sup>

Tomlin’s lyrics can be directly traced back to Psalm 33:8, Psalm 89:16, Psalm 104:2, and Nahum 1:5. He is not incorrect in his understanding of religious truth, nor is he wrong for depicting qualities of God in an explicit form. It is simply one of two ways to communicate religious truth in art.

The second way in which the imagination can inform art of religious truth is implicitly. In this case, an artist’s presentation is not bound to the characters and stories found in Scripture. These works imply truth through the use of imaginative tools like perspective, setting, or characters that are not found directly in the Bible. Metalcore band, Silent Planet uses poetic, interpretive language to depict the truth of Christianity. In their song, “First Father” they say,

I feared this world would never change, but you steady your resolve anyway  
Let’s set the pen against the sword  
How orphans long for peace before they learn to love the war  
Perhaps it’s our language, perhaps we are incomplete  
Words like shadows to what we see:  
Faint flickerings across the cavern in our minds  
Candles in the dark, defiant to the night  
You pull me through time, through the edgeless night  
I learned to love as you learned to die.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Chris Tomlin, “How Great is Our God,” by Chris Tomlin, Ed Cash, and Jesse Reeves, *Arriving*, recorded 2004 by Capitol Christian Music Group, MP3.

<sup>42</sup> Silent Planet, “First Father,” by Alex Camarena, Igor Efimov, Thomas Freckleton, Spencer Keene, Garrett Russell, and Adam Mitchell Stark, *Everything Was Sound*, recorded 2015 by Solid State Records, MP3.

Rather than pulling lyrical content directly from Scripture to communicate the truth of God and the world, Silent Planet implicitly communicates theological and philosophical truth. The band references Plato's cave in their verse, along with the timeless nature of God and the condition of man and Christ. Silent Planet's lyricism requires far more interpretation than Tomlin's, but the process of interpreting is precisely why its implicit form is so valuable.

It is important to know the difference between explicit and implicit forms of communication in art so that one can interpret it accurately and effectively. Explicit forms of religious art are particularly useful in worship and the outpouring of religious gratitude. Implicit forms of art are often useful in reflection or discovery of one's understanding of truth and his place in the universe. The engagement of the faculty brings meaning to the result, regardless of its presentation. Therefore, the imagination is at work in both explicit and implicit forms of art, making both forms useful in communicating religious truth. However, presentation does impact the way that meaning is perceived in the audience. Moving forward, this essay primarily addresses the implicit ways in which truth is presented in art.

## **THE VALUE OF IMPLICIT COMMUNICATION OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH IN ART**

Since the inherent value of the imagination has been discussed, it is now appropriate to explore the value of implicit communication of religious truth in art. Again, while explicit communication of religious truth is not *damaging* to the faith, implicit communication reveals supplementary benefits that are not found in strictly explicit expression. On occasion, communicating implicitly through art provides a great deal of religious insight that would otherwise be inaccessible to both the artist and the audience. In some circumstance, like that of a

skeptic, certain truths could not be grasped or would not be received if they were embodied in Scriptural characters or stories. Where the power of the naturalistic mind stops, imagination continues. It is the imaginative context that often fuels the discovery of human nature, error, or success in the real world. Characters such as Frodo in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Edmund in Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, or Scout in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* all display internal conflict of the human condition – imaginative examples of living in a fallen world, wrestling with pride, power, and temptation. To the Christian, these qualities may be identified as a battle of the spirit. To a skeptic, they are simply realities of life. It is the imaginative space that allows these two views to collide into a single truth. While these characters are often wrestling with the conditions of an imagined fantasy world, it is the symbolism and imagery that exceed the material world that also shed light on the constructs and limits of the material world.

Communicating religious truth implicitly through art means that one is not only working from what he already knows or believes about God, outlined for him in his religious doctrine, but also allowing the imagination to guide him to new lands, understandings, and relationships. Instead of telling the story of Jesus Christ in an allegorical fashion in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lewis strips the story of its explicit presentation and makes it meaningful to any reader, regardless of religious tradition. One does not need to identify as a Christian in order to relate to the themes in Lewis's story. However, those themes do lead the reader to a deeper understanding of religious truths. MacDonald suggests, "The mind of the teacher must meditate between the work of art and the mind of the pupil, bringing them together in the vital contact of intelligence...And ever he must seek to show excellence rather than to talk about it, giving the

thing itself, that it may grow into the mind, and not a eulogy of his own upon the thing.”<sup>43</sup> By allowing his imagination to be the conductor of his work, and allowing the reader’s imagination to interpret it, the artist submits to the eternal value of creativity and its ability to function on behalf of God the Father with no dependence on man’s direction.

One of the primary functions of art is making sense of man’s natural draw toward objective moral truth. A work of art can unite people on the grounds of recognizable beauty, and unveil objective qualities about humanity that leads to introspective thought and contemplation about universal truth. According to William A. Dyrness in his book, *Visual Faith*, “Beauty shares in the purposeful movement of a person, a movement in which he or she constantly pulls events and objects into valuing pursuits. It reflects the fact that the Old Testament portrays human life as dynamic, in which each step reflects the delights and moral seriousness of the whole.”<sup>44</sup> Realizing the correlation between one’s life and Christian truth leads to a holistic discovery of being. Upon these discoveries, man can make sense of his emotions, his actions, his character, and his faith. Ordway suggests, “When people lack imaginative engagement with the Faith...their belief (or potential belief) is not so much destroyed as starved.”<sup>45</sup> The creative DNA that was breathed into mankind from the beginning of its existence requires nourishment. Art does not only offer one’s faith the reason that it needs to stand on, it also offers a healthy dose of imaginative nourishment to make use of that reason.

Art that implicitly communicates religious truth offers one the opportunity to make use of reason in more than a strictly religious context. This exposes corners of culture that may have gone untilled. To see the difference between explicit and implicit communication, one could

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<sup>43</sup> MacDonald, “The Imagination: Its Function and its Culture,” 25-26.

<sup>44</sup> William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 83.

<sup>45</sup> Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 14.

begin by observing the artwork of Rembrandt. Rembrandt's work is quite effective in its explicit depiction of religious themes. His painting, *Judas Repentant, Returning the Thirty Silver Pieces*<sup>46</sup> artistically displays the history found in Matthew 27:3, which reads, "Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders."<sup>47</sup> The artist paints realistic figures of Judas and the high priests, demonstrating body language reflective of regret and desperation in Judas, and even refusal and disgust in the high priests. In addition to a realistic reenactment of the scene, Rembrandt also infuses the audience's imagination with the emotional and spiritual significance of the event with his use of color, light, and composition. The deep contrast between light and shadow suggests the painting is set at dusk, which implies a dramatic sense of urgency. As the day runs out of minutes, Judas runs out of time for repentance. In the painting, his face is void of color, highlighting his utter despair. His final desperate attempt for reconciliation is seen in his clenched hands and tattered clothes. Rembrandt uses artistic elements to depict the weight of Judas's betrayal. His explicit communication of religious truth carries purpose by providing a deeper insight into Scripture, bringing life to stories that relate directly to doctrine.

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<sup>46</sup> Rembrandt, *Judas Returning the Thirty Silver Pieces*, 1629, Mulgrave Castle, Lythe, North Yorkshire, oil on oak panel.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew 27:3, ESV.



In comparison, one could observe the work of Vincent Van Gogh and discover an entirely different batch of religious insights communicated in an implicit manner. Perhaps his most famous painting, *Starry Night*,<sup>48</sup> was not initially crafted to depict religious truth, and yet it carries a great deal of religious significance. In a letter to his brother, Van Gogh suggested that the inspiration for the piece came from a desperate need for religion.<sup>49</sup> The artist was captivated by the stars as a point of contact between the mortal and the divine. He therefore painted the stars in a way that reflected his awe of them, utilizing artistic elements like perspective, space, depth, and color gradient. While at the time, Van Gogh was not particularly religious; the art that he created led him to wonder and reverence of the afterlife, which resulted in an artistic expression of religious truth.

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<sup>48</sup> Vincent Van Gogh, *Starry Night*, 1889, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, oil on canvas.

<sup>49</sup> Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, *Van Gogh: The Life* (New York: Random House, 2011), 651.



One could also observe the work of modern painter, Jackson Pollock and extract a great deal of spiritual significance. Pollock would often title his paintings with plain numbers in order to keep the viewer's focus on the art itself and avoid fostering pre-conceived meanings in their mind. His abstract drip paintings are often considered chaotic and void of meaning. However, regardless of the artist's intention, Pollock's work evokes religious thought by challenging the very concept of sight. In her article, "God's Back: Jackson Pollock and the Beatific Vision," Lexi Eikelboom says, "In standing in front of one of Pollock's drip paintings, the viewer finds his or her eyes moving compulsively across the canvas, following lines that have no end. The eyes can never come to a place of rest but are instead invited into an eternal motion."<sup>50</sup> Pollock's non-traditional approach to painting resulted in art that does not necessarily show a picture, but

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<sup>50</sup> Lexi Eikelboom, "God's Back: Jackson Pollock and the Beatific Vision," *Transpositions: Theology, Imagination and the Arts*, accessed April 25, 2018, <http://www.transpositions.co.uk/gods-back-jackson-pollock-and-the-beatific-vision/>

induces mental energy. Eikelboom suggests, “Due to the way in which we typically encounter objects in day-to-day life, we sometimes make the mistake of thinking that this means that we will see God as one sees other objects and that the only reason we cannot do so now is either due to a veil of sin, the hiddenness of God, or an incapacity of our corporeal visual apparatus.”<sup>51</sup> One could argue that Pollock’s *Number 1*<sup>52</sup> is a meaningless mix of color and confusion, but perhaps the object to be seen is not tangible, but evanescent and empirical. “The divine can only be known in and through the rhythm, through those motions in which one encounters the divine. Pollock’s paintings are not paintings of God or of the divine as such. But they are paintings that disrupt our assumptions about how vision functions.”<sup>53</sup> In that way, Pollock’s work inspires faith and discovery in a way that explicitly religious art does not.



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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Jackson Pollock, *Number 1*, 1949, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA, enamel on canvas.

<sup>53</sup> Eikelboom, “God’s Back: Jackson Pollock and the Beatific Vision.”

Implicit communication of religious truth allows the mind to reach beyond only receiving truth and allows it *discover* truth in a creative context. The mental prompting to create or connect images brings life and significance to the images it creates. In his essay, “Bluespels and Flalanspheres,” Lewis says, “Reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning.”<sup>54</sup> The truth that is discovered through art only has meaning because it was developed from the imagination. MacDonald confirms that “‘He hath set the world in man’s heart,’ not in his understanding. And the heart must open the door to the understanding.”<sup>55</sup> Without meaning, truth may be passed over or rendered unhelpful to the understanding. However, by developing that truth from imaginative energy, and thereby infusing it with meaning, its implicit communication opens doors for the understanding to intersect with truth. Chesterton also says,

I deal here with what ethic and philosophy come from being fed on fairy tales. If I were describing them in detail I could note many noble and healthy principles that arise from them... But I am not concerned with any of the separate statutes of elfland, but with the whole spirit of its law, which I learnt before I could speak, and shall retain when I cannot write. I am concerned with a certain way of looking at life, which was created in me by fairy tales, but has since been meekly ratified by the mere facts.<sup>56</sup>

The worldview of Christianity is often imprinted on Christians and expected to sink in. However, it is best realized when it is implanted and grows from within. This process occurs most effectively when the imagination is the start of the process and truth unfolds implicitly.

This method of communication allows the imagination to do its work on our senses and understanding as it was designed to. Ordway says, “The senses bring the data; the reason makes the identification; the imagination mediates between the two.”<sup>57</sup> The interaction of our sense experience corresponds with our broadening understanding and allows for a deeper knowledge of

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<sup>54</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Bluespels and Flalanspheres: A Semantic Nightmare,” in *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 265.

<sup>55</sup> MacDonald, “The Imagination: Its Function and its Culture,” 9.

<sup>56</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 51-52.

<sup>57</sup> Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 17.

a limitless God. In his review of *The Lord of the Rings*, C.S. Lewis states, “By putting bread, gold, horse, apple, or the very roads into a myth, we do not retreat from reality, we rediscover it. As long as the story lingers in our mind, the real things are more themselves...By dipping them in myth we see them more clearly.”<sup>58</sup> When speaking with someone of a different language, it often helpful to have a translator. This is not explicitly the person we are trying to communicate with, but the translator implicitly connects us to our interlocutor. Though our line of contact is not direct, he or she does not draw us away from the one whom we are trying to communicate with; he or she helps us understand them. Similarly, fairy-tales and implicit art do not draw us away from reality; they help us understand it.

It is this very concept that led C.S. Lewis to his own conversion to Christianity. His role in the Inklings, a creative collaboration of writers, was the foothold to his understanding of Christian belief. Since the group was first and foremost a writing group, creativity, rather than religious motive, gave the Inklings ground to explore their differences in a manner of respect, which also created teaching moments that, on occasion, drastically changed one’s view of truth. In her book, *Bandersnatch*, Diana Glycer explores the creative relationships of the Inklings. She notes that Lewis readily admitted that Tolkien and [Owen] Barfield were the “immediate human causes” of his conversion,<sup>59</sup> sparked by his love of myth and creativity. His friends discussed literature with him, and therefore implanted the seeds of truth found in literature in the soil of his mind that would later blossom into true belief. His conversion to Christianity was not an

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<sup>58</sup> C.S. Lewis, “The dethronement of power: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (being the Second Part of *The Lord of the Rings*)(London: Allen and Unwin, 1954) and J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (being the Third Part of *The Lord of the Rings*)(London: Allen and Unwin, 1955),” in *Image and Imagination*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 108.

<sup>59</sup> Diana Glycer, *Bandersnatch: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Creative Collaboration of the Inklings* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2016), 17.

occasion initiated by his interest in the faith, but by his interest in literature. Their art, rather than their personal beliefs about doctrine or faith, was the material to shape into discovery - a process that is far less condemning and far more cooperative. Ordway also notes, "When Lewis realized that he could connect his imaginative response to the story, to the factual reality of the Christian claim about the Crucifixion and Resurrection, the final barrier to belief fell. He could become a Christian as a whole person, with both his imagination and his reason fully engaged."<sup>60</sup> Once the author's imagination led him to truth about himself, he could begin to see other facets of life, such as his faith, through the same lens. Stories like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Out of the Silent Planet* provided these writers with a world or two in which they could explore the truth as people; worlds that did not infringe upon their views with hostility, but provided creative suggestion that often put two people on the same side of belief.

The Inklings are a prime example of how the act of creating connects one mind to another and through relationship, expands one's knowledge of eternal truth. MacDonald says, "No man is capable of seeing for himself the whole of any truth: he needs it echoed back to him from every soul in the universe; and still its centre is hid in the Father of Lights."<sup>61</sup> The nature of art is relational. As stated earlier, it is the point at which creativity extends a hand beyond the internal faculties and enters into relationship - between man and fellow man, artist and audience, Creator and created, of imagination and reason. Art voices the different facets of truth that human beings interact with individually, and reflects that truth as a collective, magnificent whole. While one man may discover the truth of God's love, another may discover the truth of His justice, and together their discoveries assemble a more holistic picture of Him than either had before. Embracing the implicitly communicative art assures that no piece of imaginative discovery is

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<sup>60</sup> Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 8-9.

<sup>61</sup> MacDonald, "The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture," 16.

denied the opportunity of being discovered.

With that said, art that implicitly communicates religious truth embodies the process of discovery necessary to cultivate understanding. Imaginative learning, the connection of sense and understanding, is a participatory act. In order to learn, one must go through the discovery process. For example, Tolkien suggests that the writer of fantasy is successful when his audience participates with genuine belief. He says, “He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed.”<sup>62</sup> One begins with a sense of understanding, and through the prompting of the imagination, he is able to flex and strengthen that understanding over the course of a process. Tolkien’s description of fairy-stories serves as a helpful example in understanding the process of discovery through art. The fantasy writer does not depend on one final image to convey his truth. He depends on his reader’s journey of discovery to fully engage with the world he has created, its laws, and the truth that can be extracted from it. Depicting the end result of the discovery process is often a stagnant, conceptual form of imagining. When creativity is set in motion, one is able to begin the process of discovery, which actively builds on his knowledge and understanding. Only then can we grasp the deep truths about humanity and creation. This process is, by nature, implicit.

It is worth noting that even in explicitly religious works of art, there is an implicit quality that takes place in order to bring meaning to those images. This is not to suggest that explicitly religious art is void of opportunity to discover truth. Instead, it is to acknowledge that the discovery process itself is implicit, separate from its explicit presentation, and therefore in many

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<sup>62</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-stories,” 52.

cases, implicitly presented truth embodies the discovery process more effectively. The presentation of art must bear the markings of the process that brought it about.<sup>63</sup> While explicit forms of art are valuable in worship, implicit art can accomplish the same thing through the striving toward it.

The process of discovery and its role in cognitive thought is better understood upon theoretical examination of creativity. In her book, *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*, Margaret A. Boden says, “Exploration is the start of non-combinational creativity...*Exploration* - where the terrain explored is *the mind itself*...The artist or scientist may explore a certain style of thinking so as to uncover its potential and identify its limits.”<sup>64</sup> Uncovering truth occurs deep within the realm of thought. Communicating truth implicitly acknowledges the space necessary for discovery. The product of discovery, in this case, refers to one’s understanding of the self and religious truth. For example, in reference to *The Lord of the Rings*, Milbank writes, “The world Tolkien invents is, of course, fictional, but it is famously realistic in its density and completeness of realization. To invent a world at all, as fantasy writers continue to do, is to commit to metaphysics.”<sup>65</sup> In both the writing process and the reading process, Tolkien’s work, like many others’, encourages the blooming of realization, the unveiling of truth, and the construction of self.

By allowing the imagination to work implicitly on us in the pursuit of truth-discovery, we strengthen our understanding of the kingdom and correct our perception of our position in it. Again, *The Lord of the Rings* is an excellent example of artistic work that implicitly communicates Christian truths that expand the reader’s knowledge of the kingdom of God

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<sup>63</sup> Corey Latta, interview by Nao Lewandowski, Memphis, April 20, 2018.

<sup>64</sup> Margaret A. Boden, *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 58-59.

<sup>65</sup> Milbank, *Tolkien and Chesterton as Theologians*, 18.

through discovery. In his review of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Lewis suggests, “What shows we are reading myth, not allegory, is that there are no pointers to a specifically theological, or political, or psychological application. A myth points, for each reader, to the realm he lives in most.”<sup>66</sup> Tolkien uses characters, plot, and settings that are not explicitly religious in nature, but still reflect deeply religious themes. In doing so, he allows the reader an opportunity to venture through an imaginative world to fortify his own. Sayers says, “The fact is, that all language about everything is analogical; we think in a series of metaphors. We can explain nothing in terms of itself, but only in terms of other things.”<sup>67</sup> Since all thoughts result from exploring the relationship between things, the magnificent and magnanimous nature of Tolkien’s “Faërie land,” Middle Earth, gives readers a grand landscape to explore the magnificence and magnanimity of universal truths of God and Christianity.

Implicitly communicative art allows one to discover the thoughts, minds, and beings of other humans, and the mind of a God that exists within *and beyond* the Gospel story. As the redeemed, we are tempted to view religious truth only within the boundaries of its usefulness to us; in Christ’s incarnation, death, and resurrection. Jesus Christ entered the human story, and therefore it is often easier to understand God based on the events that happened between his birth and his death and resurrection. Even Sayers suggests, “To complain that man measures God by his own experience is a waste of time; man measures everything by his own experience; he has no other yardstick.”<sup>68</sup> However, the limitations are broken by the use of imagination, specifically in the process of understanding one’s relationship with a God that exists before and after the life

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<sup>66</sup> C.S. Lewis, “The gods return to earth: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*” (being the First Part of *The Lord of the Rings*)(London: Allen and Unwin, 1954) in *Image and Imagination*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 102.

<sup>67</sup> Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 23.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

of Jesus. Once the limitations are broken, our understanding of religious truth has the luxury of both our human experience *and* the fantastical experiences that we have when engaging with art. MacDonald says, “In the interpretation of individual life, the same principles hold; and nowhere can the imagination be more healthily and rewardingly occupied than in endeavouring to construct the life of an individual out of the fragments which are all that we can reach us of the history of even the noblest of our race.”<sup>69</sup> Building an individual life, whether it consists of a career, an education, a family, a faith, a community, or a combination of these elements, is valuable primarily because of the process that it requires of us, fueled by imaginative exploration. Often, we gain our greatest perspectives on life from imaginative engagement with our own experiences and the experiences of others.

T.S. Eliot’s poem, “The Waste Land,” for example, encourages his readers to explore life in Europe after World War I through prose and composition. It reads,

-- Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden  
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.”<sup>70</sup>

Eliot offers his readers an emotional glimpse into the trauma of a very specific point in history. The process necessary to understand the meaning of such a work is where growth occurs; the reader develops empathy, cultural awareness, and a greater understanding of himself as a human being. “The Waste Land” is still considered a masterpiece in poetry, long after the historical event it recounts. Transcending the barriers of time and space, it uses language and creativity to tie together the experiences of various people in different contexts of war: literal, spiritual, or

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<sup>69</sup> MacDonald, “The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture,” 13.

<sup>70</sup> T.S. Eliot, “The Waste Land,” in *The Waste Land and Other Writings* (New York: Random House, 2001), lines 37-41.

mental. The poet connects readers in emotion and experience through vivid detail and imagery. One can feel the death that Eliot describes in whatever capacity he can interpret despair. The same emotions are triggered, and people are linked. By engaging with art in this way, one's sense of his personal relationship with God is discovered in a fuller light and magnified into an understanding of *humanity's* relationship with God.

Poetry, like other forms of art, ignites the awareness of meaning that exists beneath the surface of worldly constructs in language. Ordway states, "Words never mean just one thing and one thing only, but carry with them ideas, associations, and connections that provide the raw material that a gifted poet can use to convey more meaning than the word, by itself, can hold."<sup>71</sup> The story of "The Waste Land" evokes a breadth of emotions because of Eliot's use of words as an artistic medium. In the final lines, he writes,

These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.  
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
Shantih shantih shantih."<sup>72</sup>

Words like "fragments" and "ruins" have, as Ordway suggests, ideas and associations that not only describe what the reader feels in the context of what he is reading, but also in the context of what he knows to be true of the world. "Fragments" could carry the idea and association of a broken window, to which the reader now equates to a post-war society. The linking qualities between a broken window and a post-war world set a foundation of connection and understanding between the poet and the reader. Eliot's final repetition of the word translated to "peace" encourages a sort of meditation on the word and its associations. The reader is

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<sup>71</sup> Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination*, 36-37.

<sup>72</sup> Eliot, "The Waste Land," lines, 431-34.

confronted with a deeper discovery of the word and therefore he can better understand the truth of it as it relates to himself.

Communicating religious truth is not momentary; it is as alive and as moving as God, its source, and therefore must be embodied rather than accomplished. It is the difference between a model car and an actual car. One is accurate in its depiction, but lacks the embodiment of driving. In writing *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis addresses the assumption that he “drew up a list of basic Christian truths and hammered out ‘allegories’ to embody them.”<sup>73</sup> The result of such a process would be limited to the writer’s image of those truths. Instead, he says, “Everything began with images; a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent lion. At first there wasn’t even anything Christian about them; that element pushed itself in of its own accord.”<sup>74</sup> By allowing his art to implicitly communicate Christian truths through discovery, Lewis not only captured his personal relationship with God, but also shed light on a grander picture of God’s nature.

Writers, painters, and musicians present their audience with a tangible depiction of some kind of journey. The beauty of implicitly communicated truth is that it allows the spectator to also take part in a journey. For example, a film like Harold Cronk’s *God’s Not Dead* tells the story of a college student who wrestles to prove the existence of God to his professor in a classroom. While the story certainly depicts a young Christian’s association with apologetics and evangelism, the audience is not required to engage imaginatively with the God the young man defends. The filmmakers rely on the audience’s prior knowledge of the Christian God to engage with the topic, whether they believe in Him or not. Movies like this are not necessarily working

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<sup>73</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to be Said,” in *Of Other Worlds* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1994), 36.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

against the goals of the Christian Church, but they do depend on the viewer's receptiveness from the start.

In contrast, films like J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series engage the viewer in what seems like an entirely new story. By doing this, filmmakers and writers do not require their audience to have a pre-established understanding of the worldview they intend to depict. The viewer can discover the qualities of God, faith, and morality through their imagination, which is a journey in itself. The truth is planted into their mind rather than impressed upon it. In John Granger's book, *Unlocking Harry Potter*, Rowling says, "I did not conceive it as a moral tale, the morality sprang naturally out of the story, a subtle but important difference. I think any book that sets out to teach or preach is likely to be hard going at times."<sup>75</sup> Arguably, the story's implicit communication method is a primary reason that the series is world-renowned. The films do not explicitly outline the historical life or qualities of Christ like *God's Not Dead*, but they *do* prove that belief in Him is philosophically reasonable and inspire a journey in the audience.

The process is paramount in the development of self-understanding, and where the material world is limited, the imaginative is not. Sayers says, "The components of the material world are fixed; those of the world of imagination increase by a continuous and irreversible process, without any destruction or rearrangement of what went before. This represents the nearest approach we experience to 'creation out of nothing.'"<sup>76</sup> The world and its truths were created out of imagination. The Creator did not choose to act instantaneously, but in a process evident as far back as Genesis. That same truth is also unveiled to human beings through a corresponding process of creativity.

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<sup>75</sup> John Granger, *Unlocking Harry Potter: Five Keys for the Serious Reader* (Wayne, PA: Zossima Press, 2007), 162.

<sup>76</sup> Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 29.

Upon completion of the creative process, one finds spiritual formation. The fullness of art and being are found in the same place – around the bend of maturity. Here, the work of the imagination is no longer trivial or aimless. It aligns with the order of creation and the mind can take hold of both. Latta says, “After Lewis’s conversion to Christianity, imagination’s plain sense, the human faculty for making images, began to carry spiritual significance. The imaginative mind, like the good book, found purpose in life’s ultimate purpose, to draw the soul further out of itself.”<sup>77</sup> Like Lewis, artists mature as a result of the creative process, and thence their art aligns inherently with truth.

Along with spiritual maturity comes the confidence in one’s faith to withstand challenges. The fear of leading one’s faith astray by participating in art that does not explicitly communicate Christian truth is abolished when the imaginative process is manifested and understood fully. By understanding the inherent value of the imagination, one is able to create art without a pre-determined image to depict, and therefore can learn from the process of discovery. The maturity that is developed from this process enables one’s eyes to recognize truth in art (or a perversion of truth), regardless of its presentation. Sayers writes, “If the structure is truly knit, it will stand any strain, and prove its truth by its toughness. Pious worshipers, whether of mortal or immortal artists, do their deities little honor by treating their incarnations as something too sacred for rough handling.”<sup>78</sup> What one finds in artistic discovery either confirms or challenges what he believes, and therefore forges a path to a more refined knowledge of truth.

In describing his experience with fairy tales, Chesterton says, “The strongest emotion was that life was as precious as it was puzzling. It was an ecstasy because it was an adventure; it was an adventure because it was an opportunity. The goodness of the fairy tale was not affected by

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<sup>77</sup> Latta, *C.S. Lewis and the Art of Writing*, 59.

<sup>78</sup> Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 92.

the fact that there might be more dragons than princesses; it was good to be in a fairy tale.”<sup>79</sup> The seasoned imaginer is not at risk for derailing his faith at the sight of darkness, evil, or despair that can often be found in art. Should he encounter such darkness, he will also encounter an internal unsettling that will shepherd his heart back to what is true and what is good. The very fact that he is participating in a creative act grounds his faith in truth and at the very least, paves the way for spiritual maturity, regardless of his starting point.

Filmmaker Scott Derrickson, for example, chooses to work in the horror genre for the very purpose of creating opportunities for spiritual maturity. In making *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, Derrickson says, “I didn’t want to make a morally instructive movie, and I didn’t want to make a movie that was bent on providing religious answers for the audience, because I am so resistant to that kind of propaganda myself. But I felt that this was the opportunity to help provoke the audience into asking the right spiritual questions.”<sup>80</sup> Art has the ability to challenge one’s beliefs in the same way it can support them. Regardless, the imagination continues to lead the mind toward what is true. The artistic way that Derrickson depicts the horrors of demonic possession in his film encourages the audience to consider what is true about God. His choice of actors, angles, scenes, and script all play into the imaginative process that, when developed to completion, fosters discovery and spiritual maturity.

The beauty of maturing through imagination is that one finds opportunity for growth in everything. MacDonald says, “For the world around him is an outward figuration of the condition of his mind; an inexhaustible storehouse of forms whence he may choose exponents... The meanings are in those forms already, else they could be no garment of

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<sup>79</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 57.

<sup>80</sup> Scott Derrickson, interviewed by Jeffrey Overstreet, *Through a Screen Darkly: Looking Closer at Beauty, Truth, and Evil in the Movies* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 282.

unveiling. God has made the world that it should thus serve his creature, developing in the service that imagination whose necessity it meets.”<sup>81</sup> If one allows the forms around him to communicate truth implicitly in art, their discovery renders them permanent factors of building and refining belief. As Lewis suggests, “We are imperfect in our delivery – Let the pictures tell you their own moral.”<sup>82</sup> Inanimate objects, like a book, or a painting, or a song, function in creation by serving as vessels that carry morals, meaning, and even messages that the physical thing itself cannot portray. Their existence becomes transcendent and heaven inevitably floods in.

Spiritual maturity also includes the ability to interact with others who do not share similar beliefs. Embracing art that implicitly communicates religious truth allows both the believer and the non-believer *one* space to explore what is unfamiliar in the context of *two* belief systems. When each man is equal in their humanity and their inherent creativity, they can give each other permission to find unity with another whose beliefs may at present time, differ. In his book, *The Work of the Imagination*, Paul Harris conducted a psychological study of children and their ability to solve problems. He says, “Although analogy might seem far-fetched at first, there are several interesting parallels between children’s attitude toward the imaginary situation that they create during make-believe play and the analytic orientation.”<sup>83</sup> From his study, Harris found that children are often able to analyze and solve problems more effectively when they are presented with an imaginative framework. “When engaged in a make-believe play, children routinely set aside certain obvious facts...Clearly, involvement in pretend play calls for the

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<sup>81</sup> MacDonald, “The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture,” 5.

<sup>82</sup> C.S. Lewis, “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” in *Of Other Worlds*, (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1994), 33.

<sup>83</sup> Paul L. Harris, *The Work of the Imagination* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 102.

suspension, however transient, of the empirical orientation...”<sup>84</sup> Children are able to look past the empirical circumstances in front of them and envision a solution to a problem through creative imagery. Similarly, when one can suspend his current empirical circumstances for the sake of solving a problem (in this case, the problem of disbelief), he is more effective in his response. More than telling the gospel story, it is important to share one’s faith in a meaningful way that relates to whom he is sharing it with. This requires patience, acceptance, and spiritual maturity.

The process of discovery initiated by implicitly communicative art keeps the believer humble in his pursuit of spiritual maturity. Throughout the spiritual life, it is tempting to search for explicit answers and forget that the value of growth will never expire. Sayers says, “The danger of speaking about life exclusively in terms of problem and solution is that we are thus tempted to overlook the limitations of this detective game and the very existence of the initial arbitrary rule that makes the playing of it possible.”<sup>85</sup> Spiritual formation is useful to both the believer and non-believer. Implicitly communicative art reinforces the constant process of sanctification by unveiling the goodness found in discovering. It is through sanctification that Christians are able to know more about God and become better image-bearers, and it is through the implicit understanding of art that an imaginer can know more about himself and the journey that God has placed him on.

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 210.

In review, this thesis first establishes definitions of key terms like imagination, creativity and art. Imagination is the faculty of the mind that allows one to create images. Creativity is the faculty that allows one to actively embody those images. And art is the resulting embodiment of those images. The imagination pulls material from sensory and mental data, and transforms them into creative energy so that one can depict truth in a work of art. The imagination depends on existing reality to relate to what is created, ultimately expanding one's understanding of the unfamiliar. According to Tolkien, "Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make."<sup>86</sup> As with all art, fantasy does not depend on human reason to *depict* truth, but to discover and *understand* it. MacDonald states, "A man may well himself discover truth in what he wrote; for he was dealing all the time with things that came from thoughts beyond his own."<sup>87</sup> By using both the imagination and reason, human understanding is stretched to new worlds while still remaining true to what is real. Once one understands how the imagination works with truth, he can begin to recognize the different ways in which the imagination can inform his art of the truth.

Art can communicate religious truth in one of two ways: explicitly or implicitly. Explicitly religious art depicts religious truth or doctrine in a forthright manner, whereas implicit communication of religious truth takes a variety of shapes and is often adorned or interpreted through artistic devices. Both methods of communicating truth are useful in the Christian life. According to Sayers, "The son works simultaneously in heaven and on earth; this needs to be unceasingly reaffirmed, artistically as well as theologically. He is in perpetual communion, both

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<sup>86</sup> Tolkien, "On Fairy-stories," 65.

<sup>87</sup> MacDonald, "The Fantastic Imagination," 194.

with the Father-Idea and with all matter. Not just with some particular sort of etherealized and refined matter – with things enskied and sainted-but with *all* matter.”<sup>88</sup> With that said, it is reasonable to suggest that truth can be communicated effectively both explicitly and implicitly in art. There is no superiority when it comes to which method is most effective in truth telling, as both are comprised of the same matter. This essay simply focuses on the inherent value of implicit communication in art as a vessel for deeper truth discovery, and ultimately serving as a springboard for spiritual formation.

Implicitly communicative truth depends on one’s sense of logic rather than his prior knowledge of Christian doctrine. Often times, by stripping a piece of art of its religious exterior, truth can bypass the obligation of religion, and the pressure of knowing and embodying the stories that come with it. With implicitly communicative art, man has a new set of materials, a new world, and new laws to work with, all of which either challenge or affirm his beliefs about God. This process of discovery is essential in developing an understanding of the self. Without the journey, the truth is not able to take root in human understanding. Implicit art allows man to interact with the journey. By allowing truth to grow from a nurtured seed, from implicit discovery, it sets roots in the ground of understanding and becomes a part of man rather than just a stamp of approval or denial on his faith.

The purpose of studying the uses and benefits of implicit communication through art is to acknowledge that it requires deep thought and philosophical reasoning that is often overlooked in the artistic process. The process of communicating truth implicitly through art is far more complex than one’s love of music, or painting, or storytelling. It is an intricate process of theorizing, communicating, and unveiling truth. Just as Christ appeared to the world, veiled as a

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<sup>88</sup> Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 166.

man, so that one day man could unveil the truth of Him, implicitly communicative art is a veiling of truth, so that one day man can unveil it.

Studying the value of implicit communication in art leads to questions that require further study. How should Christians go about presenting art so that it effectively communicates religious truth? Are there limits to what is acceptable as a work of art that benefits the kingdom of God? How can the Church facilitate art that fosters implicit truth-discovery? What are the values of *explicitly* communicative art? How do we assure that each method of communicating truth is doing so to its fullest potential? Discovering the value of implicit communication lays the foundation for more meaningful art and more excellent depictions of truth. Since the understanding informs art, this specific understanding informs it with eternal truth. By exploring the values of communicating truth implicitly in art, one discovers that reason and imagination are not rivals in the pursuit of faith, but partners.

Then, by better understanding the partnership between reason and imagination, man can also better describe, exemplify, and embody his faith. To seek first the kingdom<sup>89</sup> is to first seek how it works, and how it all adds to the beautiful sum of the living God. Then, all else will be added; all the art, creativity, images, and works. The understanding of the kingdom will be wrapped with beauty and praise. The universe is a collection of God's creativity. Every object, being, emotion, and imaginative thought springs from one eternal source. There is nothing in it that contradicts the truth of His being. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."<sup>90</sup> It is not enough to understand that all of

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<sup>89</sup> Matthew 6:33.

<sup>90</sup> Psalm 19:1, ESV.

creation speaks the truth about the Lord. It is also important to understand what creation says about Him. Only then will man be able to live according to His purpose.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Romans 8:28.

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