

## CREATIVITY AS WORSHIP

by Michael L. Radcliffe

*"Everyone is born creative; everyone is given a box of crayons in kindergarten. Then when you hit puberty they take the crayons away and replace them with books on algebra etc. Being suddenly hit years later with the creativity bug is just a wee voice telling you, "I'd like my crayons back, please." from "How to Be Creative" by Hugh McLeod*

Worship is something very important to emergent church. Emergent church can sometimes take the form of alternative or creative WORSHIP. But let's not confuse the two... Defining creativity can be a bit of a mine-field. A bit like defining Worship. Creativity is a basic impulse. Some of the earliest and simplest of cultures have made creative marks. From stone-age paintings to ancient China, from early churches to bedouin tents, from renaissance patronage to Hoxton Square. The traditions of different forms of creativity within church history are endless, varied and amazing.

I hear this phrase quite a lot:

*"I'm not a creative kind of person. It's alright for you - you're an artist. I'm a petrophysicist / secretary / accountant/ (delete as appropriate). I can't do creativity."*

Regardless of who you are or what you do, we all do creativity - You came up against a mini-problem at work today. You made a mental leap, and you got around it. You wear black rather than red. Or green rather than blue. You preferred the shoes you bought to the other 200 you saw that day, after spending what seemed like ages trudging round shops. You went to the hairdresser and asked for that haircut, after thumbing through magazines and talking to friends. You painted your living room that colour, and hung those paintings up. You graffitied that wall the other day.

Its easy to be suspicious of creativity - you never know what you're going to get. It's a fear we all have - the same fear I get as an artist. A fear of sticking your neck out and looking stupid. A fear of being laughed at. A fear of what might happen if things get too leftfield. Fear of a blank canvas.

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.  
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.  
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.  
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?  
Actually, who are you not to be?  
You are a child of God.  
Your playing small does not serve the world.  
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so  
that other people won't feel insecure around you.  
We are all meant to shine, as children do.  
We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.  
It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.  
And as we let our own light shine,  
we unconsciously give other  
people permission to do the same.  
As we are liberated from our own fear,  
our presence automatically liberates others."*  
Marianne Williamson

This is not a Christian-ised version of the 'Nietzscheian' will-to-power idea, but a fulfillment of our need to worship the God who created us.

Everyone has potential. As we confront and are confronted by Yahweh, the more human we become. We are allowed and encouraged to be real, to be the people we were created to be. Accepted. It's OK to love, be sad, happy, worried, elated, jump for joy, listen to music, be creative, eat Smarties, express anger, ..., (that's not an exhaustive list).

"Why be creative?"

Well, why not? It's something that comes very naturally. "Art needs no Justification" as Hans Rookmaaker once said. It's frustrating having to spend time justifying creativity, when you just want to get on and do it. It's not really about creating funky services or great works of art (well, alright, if you really HAVE to). It's about worshipping God by developing the reach of who you are as a person. And that includes your creativity.

It's also about developing your reach in community. Remember the cliché about a community being "more than the sum of its parts" ? A community helps you to develop responsibly, whilst encouraging others to do the same. And encouraging you to encourage others. Or it can squash and stifle creativity.

Like anything, creativity is open to abuse. But for a long time (too long) creativity has been virtually banned because of the fear of abuse.

Would you ban prayer because it can be abused?

Would you ban power structures because they were open to abuse?

Well, maybe.

And as Walter Wink has highlighted so eloquently in his "Powers..." books, a church community can have an identity with attributes just like a person can. A church can be friendly, sad, pathological, creative, psychotic, philanthropic,... (again, not an exhaustive list!) And a church community can also be self-aware or not - It can be self-aware about whether it wants to be Christian, feed the poor or foster creativity.

A creative church is an appealing one. Appealing in appearance, and it appeals to the whole person. It hits you at every level, and asks questions of you.

Someone once said to me that they thought so-called "Creativity" was self-indulgent. It might be I suppose. But we've been given permission and encouragement by the big I AM to be as creative as we're capable of. We all have. Your frontal lobe was built that way. It's an act of worship to be creative. It would be rude not to....

*"Therefore, I urge you, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12:1*