# REVIEWS

*New Art for Church Buildings*
*published for Art and Christian Enquiry (ACE) and The Council for the Care of Churches (London: Church House Publishing), £1.00*

Given that image and symbol were among the first casualties of the Reformation, it is surprising to find so many works of art in Church of Scotland buildings. The many examples of fine Communion ware from the seventeenth century are evidence not only of the Church's encouragement of the making of beautiful things but, in the absence of any surviving comparable secular oeuvre, virtually the only proof of an unexpectedly rich period of Scottish craftsmanship. In Carriden an early nineteenth century fresco of the ascended Christ surrounded by children, on the roof of the baptistry, has recently been restored. On the front face of Dundee West (formerly Roseangle) are the sculpted heads not of the traditional saints or apostles but of Luther, Knox and Chalmers. Just as striking, in a tradition which is supposed to favour plain buildings, are the many interiors from the nineteenth century which feature the most elaborate and ornate paintwork, like Dumbarton West and Port Seton Chalmers Memorial.

Today, there is a growing number of interesting and significant commissions. Roland Fraser's triptych in wood in St. Machar's Cathedral commemorates the fourteenth century archdeacon and poet John Barbour. Tapestries designed by Hannah Frew Paterson explore the theme of creation with local reference (Cardross) and commemorate the Normandy veterans (Edinburgh's Canongate Kirk). Other examples include the mural of the Last Supper in Langside, the sculpture celebrating childhood in Dunblane Cathedral, the Communion cloths in St. Giles', and the new set of windows in the restored Glasgow's Sherbrooke St.Gilbert's by Paul Lucky and Susan Bradbury.

Such situations may need no encouragement from the recent leaflet *New Art for Church Buildings*, which in modest dimensions makes a statement which is as timely as it is significant. The church at large,

however, still needs to hear and to take to heart its opening *credo*:

> Worship calls out all our sensibilities. We expect words and music to engage us. We are worked upon, often unconsciously, by architecture. Painting and sculpture each in their different ways also have the power to draw us deep into the understanding and the believing which belong to worship. The church building has therefore been a vital and critical setting for works of art created specially for it.

Generously illustrated, the leaflet goes on to elaborate upon the function of church art and to discuss questions of commissioning and of standards. A useful bibliography is provided, as well as a list of recent works of art in English places of worship.

Many useful suggestions are made on the subject of commissioning new works. The leaflet rightly warns that church and artist, with their very different 'raw materials' (doctrinal, ecclesial on the one hand; colour, texture and form on the other) can often find themselves at cross purposes. However, in the experience of the Church of Scotland's Committee on Artistic Matters, which has both the great privilege and the awesome responsibility of approving designs for furnishings and works of art in its buildings, there is often a missing stage in the process, namely the prayerful study on the part of Kirk Session or its nominees to arrive at a brief which is expressive of faith and Gospel, and, where appropriate, local Christian and social history and the contemporary context of the church's witness. In the absence of this, a design proposal can lie in a no man's land, less than suitable for a place of worship and less than the artist might have produced if his/her creativity had been given enough to bite on.

One regret about the leaflet might be its use of the idea of *education* to sum up the function of such works of art. In the Reformed tradition, discomfort with artistic media could be dispelled when they were seen to have a didactic purpose (Edward Robinson's *The Language of Mystery*, included in the reading list, is very good on this). In this way the artistic

wild card could be moderated and controlled. Even if the word is used in its widest and best sense (as no doubt intended here), it is a pity to be in danger of playing to these fears and to seem to suggest that this is the main impulse and goal of the creative process in the church context. The artist, Christian or not, listens to the creativity at the heart of the Gospel as it is reached for and expressed, albeit in a faltering way, in the hearts of the people of the church, and, in conjunction with what he or she sees, creates a new thing. The result of this dynamic is not an object of abstract beauty so much as a conversation in which the artist helps the viewer to reach deeper, in mind and spirit. That way beauty lies.

Another regret, probably a casualty of the brevity of the leaflet, is the near exclusive focus on the established artist and on the cathedral. The potential for artistic expression belongs to everyone and everywhere, and there have been many examples recently of an artist, with the Committee on Artistic Matters acting variously as interpreter and go-between, working with groups of school pupils to create a significant local work of art. Examples include Lynsey McIntosh and Battlefield Primary School on the mosaic on Noah's Ark at Langside, Kate Henderson and local children on the stained glass window at Longniddry, and the community mural on the church wall at Easthouses. The Church of Scotland Guild has recently completed a large scale banner-making project. Such examples remind us of the need to pursue these important matters 'from top to bottom' in the church, acknowledging the issues and demands that arise from working with people who are gifted but not professionally trained. Beyond the scope of the leaflet also is the employment of artistic media to challenge church and society to take injustices to heart. Two Edinburgh churches (St. John's Princes Street, Polwarth) regularly display large scale murals on issues of our times.

The leaflet is prepared by Art and Christian Enquiry, a body which accompanies, encourages and critiques the welcome renewal in our times of the place of the artist in the expression of the Christian faith. Both the body itself and the leaflet are much to be commended.

*Douglas Galbraith*

*An Outline of Christian Worship*
*(Gordon Wakefield: T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1998 (HB) and 2000 (PB))*

As its title suggests, *An Outline of Christian Worship* is the successor of W.D. Maxwell's book of the same title. Maxwell's original underwent several editions up to 1963 and was a pioneering work, which was the foundation of future scholarship. Maxwell's subtitle referred to 'developments and forms' of worship and sought to show how worship developed from the New Testament onwards.

Gordon S. Wakefield, the distinguished liturgist, attempts to bring Maxwell up to date and identifies several areas that were omitted by Maxwell, namely, the areas of initiation, hymnody and the developments of the ecumenical movement, particularly the Joint Liturgical Group. Maxwell's bibliography, though comprehensive in its day, has become antiquated in light of modern scholarship.

In his preface, Wakefield intimates that the book's purpose is 'to offer a beginner's introduction to assist the journey through the thickets and minefields of liturgical historical history and to inform understanding of the ecumenical situation'. The main chapter headings are as follows: the origins of Christian worship, the development of church order, division between East and West, the Reformed Rites, the Church of England liturgy, the Puritans and their successors, Presbyterianism and Methodism, Post-Reformation Catholic developments, the Liturgical Movement, critique and new directions and the liturgy of time.

One of the strengths of the book is its lucidity, as Wakefield conveys the plethora of material on worship in a digestible form, using the latest biblical and theological research. He has the unique facility to draw out the substance of scholarship without being dense or overly academic. That is exemplified throughout his work. One feels that the writer is giving only a nosegay of the wealth of material at his disposal. However, the intoxicating nature of the text is very hard to resist and the reader is drawn into the work, with an insatiable urge to know more; that, I fear, is Wakefield's natural enthusiasm spilling out on to the pages of his book.

Wakefield manages to stamp his own distinctive mark on the material discussed and it is more than being led through the latest research in liturgical studies. He often, throughout the book, makes distinctive asides showing very subtly strengths and weaknesses of a particular liturgy. Often, too, humour is employed to make a point, but not in a flippant or deriding way. This is exemplified on page 155 when discussing recent liturgical reforms and, in particular, the change in language from the thou to you form of address to God: 'But the 'you' has prevailed and more easily than seemed possible, though some Churches have rites in both forms and there is often in prayers either read or extempore a confusion of both, which people do not seem to mind, if indeed they notice it'.

One of the most interesting chapters of the book is 'Critique and New Directions', which deals with the problems of ensuring that liturgy remain relevant. One issue dealt with was the link between worship and social justice in Western Christianity and, in particular, can we have authentic worship in light of the Holocaust? The conclusion reached is that the Eucharist is at the heart of Christian worship and it is only in the light of the Eucharist that the Holocaust makes any sense.

In the conclusion, no pat solutions are reached. Indeed, the problems of Christian worship are highlighted but with the proviso that worship is vital for Christianity. This may mean balance in worship is not always maintained or un-Christlike acrimonies may appear 'but [worship] preserves the faith and unites God's people in contemplation of those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have they entered into the human heart, but which God has prepared for those that love him'. (page 229)

This is a vital reference book for those who have the responsibility of leading worship. If read critically, it addresses pertinent questions relating to worship. What is at the heart of worship? Should it be trendy for the sake of popularity? A strong pastoral concern permeates its pages and

an acknowledgement is given to the supernatural element of worship that surpasses mere human understanding.

*COLIN G. McALISTER is a tutor in Christian Studies, University of Aberdeen.*