

“COME, SPIRIT, COME”

ON ART AND REFORMED FAITH

Claudio Carvalhaes

Every time I am in a worship service I pray, “Come, Spirit, come;” come and fill me, come and disrupt me, come and convert me, come and twist me, come and make me clean, come and draw me near to the edge of a greater love. Come even if I cannot see, even if I cannot hear, even if I cannot know.

At the Worship and the Arts: Preparing for Pentecost gathering at Stony Point Center New York,¹ I prayed again, “Come, Spirit, come.” The event brought together artists from various disciplines such as music, dance, theater, spoken word, visual and liturgical space design, as well as theology students, professors, and church people in general. The presence of the artists enabled us all to think and act differently, even disruptively. We played, sang, danced, performed, wore masks, made collages, and got in touch with a plentiful variety of artistic sources that opened our awareness for the Spirit to work in our lives. For creative minds, possibilities of new approaches to worship burst open every moment of the day. The event was intended to create avenues of dialogue between the arts and Reformed worship. For three days we shared in the ways artists create their work. Workshops on each artistic expression gave us all an array of endless possibilities with which to create dialogues between our bodies and different mediums. From this array of influences, we as participants were charged with the task of creating a liturgy for the Pentecost worship service on the last day. At the end of the event, we celebrated a creative liturgy that included elements usually left out of Reformed worship, such as body movement (walking, dancing, moving from one place to another), liturgical objects (clothing, colorful fabric, a table that provided a whole meal for the community with breads, wine, olives, olive oil, grapes), and shared stories.

The artists served as resources to address this liturgical theme. Professor Janet R. Walton from Union

Theological Seminary based the framework for the conference on the relational structure *yes-and*. This formulation can be related philosophically to Hegel’s *both/and* system. This *yes-and* injunction helped us both to open ourselves into the new worlds of artistic resources and experiences, and helped us go beyond our comfortable boundaries of expectations. It helped us both to bring these resources and experiences into our liturgical gradient of possibilities and challenged us to add something else into this conversation. The success of the gathering was evident not only in our final performance/worship but also in the openings that erupted daily in an expanding encounter of the realm of God.

When thinking about the relation between art and liturgy/worship, some of us asked questions about how art can relate to our ways of worshiping God; how can art influence our ways of creating our liturgies. These questions guide this article, as I want to push beyond the practical and experiential aspects proposed at Stony Point and hint at some of the inescapable theological and liturgical consequences of the relationship between art and liturgy.² In order to do that, I will rely on one of the workshops in which we worked with masks to think about the relationship between masks, seeing/unseeing, and veiling/unveiling of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Lately, we are seeing an increased use of art in worship settings. This new format of worship and art, known as *contemporary worship*, is growing everywhere within and outside the borders of historical Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant (including Pentecostal and nondenominational churches). Art (theater, dance, music, painting, other visual arts, and new technologies) is commonly being used in worship services as a way to enhance the Christian tenets or to re-authenticate accepted dogmas through mediums

that go beyond the spoken word. It is used to expand the senses of the believer with the Christian message and to contextualize the message in our modern (or for some, post-modern) world. This approach to art is raising the theological challenges in which pastors, churches, and theologians are currently engaging, such as the creation of new formats of worship, faith, and community, as well as new religious languages with outside (secular) mediums, codes, and regulations. In this article, I do not want to pursue this avenue because it usually does not change the core of theological understanding, but only revises old beliefs into new formats for liturgical performance.

I want to approach the theme of this gathering from *an-other*³ perspective and try to find new ways to relate art to theology and liturgy/worship. To invite artists into a liturgical creation and give them freedom is a bold and faithful move. It is also risky to allow oneself to go beyond the formatted grid of expectations of the theologically allowed. To invite artists into a *sacred* space is to give the body prominent accent, more attention than the church usually gives; it is to let the body flow and move beyond and against the rigidity of Reformed services. Moreover, this dialogue with *an-other* perspective is challenged and stretched by the revealing of the unexpected.

Moving out of and beyond what was given to us in the Stony Point gathering, I want to think about the relationship between art and liturgy/theology as a disruption/interruption/disfiguring of our faith. I want to stress *an-other* way in which Reformed faith can be understood and practiced. From that starting point, I hope to name new theological possibilities that will expand the resources for liturgical experiences.

REFORMED FAITH AND DISRUPTION

The Calvinist tradition was always suspicious of the use of art in the liturgical order. Against the backdrop of the Roman Catholic Church, Calvin considered art, of lesser importance to worship at best, and a dangerous temptation toward idolatry at worst. Art, for Calvin, was to be used for the teaching of faith, not to be a central part of worship. Moreover, it was to be linked with science in the service of enhancing perception of the glory of God. Calvin says,

To be sure there is a need of art and of more exacting toil in order to investigate the motion

of the stars, to determine their assigned stations, to measure their intervals, to note their properties . . . Likewise, in regard to the structure of the human body, one must have the greatest keenness in order to weight, with Galen's skill, its articulation, symmetry, beauty, and use. Indeed, men who have either quaffed or even tasted the liberal arts penetrate with their aid far more deeply into the secrets of the divine wisdom.⁴

Art was always inside the parentheses of the functionality and limits of Christian reason (I.XI.12). Influenced by Augustine, Calvin saw art as a dangerous distraction that would lead people astray from God, a sensual and provocative tool that could easily cause the believer to deviate from a godly mind. Art was too close to pleasure, and pleasure was something to be avoided altogether. Even music could not venture into modulations of tonality, as it might place the singer in a state of enjoyment that would corrupt the believer's true faith. Moreover, it could render a pure heart impure and divert true motivation away from the holy worship of God.

Our senses are always on the verge of forsaking the strongholds of reason and escaping the godly realms of a proper Christian life. When not properly used, art was seen as an interruption of the order of things, as a path away from God rather than the enhancement of one's faith. If it was not to enhance our knowledge of God, art was to be dismissed. Unframed art introduced into the borders of faith was always a dangerous risk. A stubborn element of our Calvinist legacy, this suspicion of art, however outdated, informs contemporary understanding of art in our churches today.

In the past, Reformed worship services were based on the idea of purity, clearness, and logic. Under theses unmovable frames one was limited to finding the holiness of God within the sacred spaces of church and temples. Later on, Calvin's ideas were consistently narrowed down by scholasticism, Puritanism, and fundamentalism. Thus, what occurred in these sacred spaces was further limited: no impurity was allowed, be it in thought, emotion, or intention; no foreign matters, no deviation from order, no disturbance of progress, no disruption of linearity in the service. Nothing. Neither people nor outside events should change the inner structure of the Reformed service. By keeping the increasing boundaries of purity safe, the very structure of the liturgy warranted the presence of God in the midst of the people. Thus, it must not be

disturbed. Notably, in this model and in Calvin's theology, worship participants do not give to God but receive everything by grace and faithfully respond through acts of faith. Calvinist worship is intended to place divine order over people's disorder, God's grace over people's sin. To change the worship service is to trust human sinful nature, which naturally tends to deviate from God's will. The worship order was given to the people precisely because of this distrust of the human capacity for faithful practice; ordered worship prevents the unpredictable and thereby guards against the human propensity for sin. Creativity and improvisation are excluded under the control of ordered bulletins and critical watchfulness for deviation. Again, this increasing preoccupation with order, security, purity, and exclusion was due to theological developments based on Calvin's wariness. The abandonment of art or the limiting of its presence (mainly in music and architecture) slowly stiffened Calvin's position on the relationship between worship and the arts. As time passed, these theological changes achieved the status of being faithful preservers of Calvin's own theological positions.

How do we recover and expand the use of art in Reformed worship services?⁵ How do we think the ways of the Spirit outside of the boundaries of our worship services? How do we include what was left out? In order to do that, I will propose *an-other* approach to religion by adding to our Reformed faith a conception of disruption, lack of the unconceivable, the uncontrollable, the unbelievable, the out of order, even maybe the filthy, the illogical, the repressed, the outside, the erratic, and the mistaken.

There is a possible understanding of religion as "that which at the same time ex-propriates and re-appropriates,"⁶ the *re-liquaire* of religion that binds back creating meaning, purpose, and order, and the *re-liquaire* that lets this connection become unbounded, disrupted, faulty of its desire since it does not know how to *re-connect* to that which has no origin. Moreover, religion entails the symbolic, that which pulls together, and the diabolic, that which disintegrates. Leonardo Boff defines both words:

Symbol/symbolic comes from *symbaleein* or *symballesthai*. It literally means to throw (*ballein*) together (*syn*). The meaning is: to throw things in a way that they stay together. In a complex process it means to re-unite realities, put them together from different perspectives and make different

forces to converge . . . Diabolic comes from *diaballein*. It literally means to throw things away, in a disordered way and without direction; to throw away is disarray. Dia-bolic . . . is everything that separates, scatters, tears apart.⁷

The *dia-bolic* and the *sym-bolic* relate to the abundant life Jesus proposes in John 10:10: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."⁸ We should prepare for a faith that entails all of human life, the understandable and the not-understandable, the meaningful and the meaningless, the mindless gap, the very incapacity to believe properly, the brokenness that resists mending, the disruption that cannot be put back together, and the void that cannot be resolved. Faith entails a disruption that takes the believer to an uncertain place, like *chora*.⁹ It is when our faith makes us strangers at home—so near and yet we cannot see God; when our faith abides in the shadow and light of doubts, when the known is turned opaque, unsolved, helpless, rendered illogical.

Art and religion flow in the same mode: they create and destroy, erupt and disrupt, bind and tear apart. It is something like a cleaving faith: separating and fusing, adhering tightly and letting it loose at the same time. It should not be difficult for Christian believers to rely on God's grace and also let the religious aspect of disruption be part of one's faith. Doubt, filth, despair, unbelief, disbelief, fear: all of this should influence the perspective of the theologian and the liturgist when they give a talk about God or prepare a worship service, not only to find a remedy but also to let what cannot be healed, the wound of our disbelief, open.

It might be that art's call is a way to expand the possibilities of God's impossibilities and experiences in worship services. Instead of narrowing down the (in)human experiences to a limited set of possibilities, the theologian/liturgist should let the Spirit float free in the unpredictable experiences of human life. If the Spirit is free as the Calvinist faith supposes, one should *expect* its unexpected movement around us. Freedom of the Spirit does not mean nihilism but an uncontrollable way out of our attempts to control. The Spirit moves back and forth between the controlled and the uncontrolled, the known, the unknown, and all that might be in this slippery between.

Art is a privileged place in which faith can be re-enacted, re-furbished, re-encountered, and transformed again and again. From this disrupting perception of the *re-formed* faith, let's think

theologically, or *a-theologically*,¹⁰ on the theme of the gathering: the Pentecost. As we pray “Come, Spirit, come,” I hope some artistic disruptive theological possibilities arise and re-form our faith once again, like the Protestant movement always intended: a Reformed church always reforming itself.

RALPH LEE—THE WORKSHOP ON MASKS

The artistic and theater director Ralph Lee, a puppeteer, mask-maker, and creator of larger-than-life figures, led one of the workshops during the gathering on the theme of *masks and storytelling*. Mr. Lee is the creator of the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade in New York City and has staged his work throughout the United States with the Mettawee River Theatre Company since 1976.¹¹

He brought some of his own masks and taught us a little about the mysteries of mask-making and how one can tell stories using them. From an array of different masks he encouraged us to choose one of them for exercises. He taught us how to get used to the mask and to sense whatever the mask was telling us or how it was shaping us. Our mask choices were a way of connecting with ourselves and one another. Alone or in pairs, we exercised ourselves in this mask, this figure, role, person, aspect. Using the masks we had to create a story and tell it to our partner without using any words. Our partner had to follow our movements, mimicking our gestures. We could use the space, our bodies, and any sound the way we wanted in this creative process. Then we were supposed to tell a short story with the mask, again without words, to the whole group.

In this process, binaries such as inside/outside, fear/courage, inward/outward, words/body movements, words/sounds, seeing/unseeing, freedom/constraints, perception/rationality, limited/unlimited, feelings/logic were blurred into other unformed possibilities. We discovered ways to see, to not see, to hear, to perceive, and to understand. We realized that we could tell a story without words, that our bodies were a powerful tool, and through our clumsy gestures, some better than others, we were able to perform something unexpected. As each one of us performed, we could not be sure of what was being enacted, but we could guess, imagine, try to follow somehow. Is she performing the wind? Perhaps. Is he performing a sad clown? Yes. No! It might be a lonely drunk guy. Perhaps. Throughout the whole workshop, Mr. Lee’s brilliance helped us to blur

our rational, logical, symmetrical understandings into a more fluid space in which we could make our own discoveries, let ourselves go a little beyond our common patterns, and find ways to show other possibilities about ourselves. As we did so, we became lighter and happier, learning that we can live and trust not only our minds, but our bodies. To end the workshop, we went outside to see a beautiful flying fish float over our heads. Each one of us was allowed to handle the yellow-reddish fish for a while. There were children around and they were mesmerized by this unforgettable flying fish. We all became like children running after the fish.

Mr. Lee is an artist-in-residence at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Every liturgy in which he participates, our eyes grow bigger in awe, fascinated with his ways of telling stories. His many characters twist our perceptions, confuse our expectations. Like larva, they expand our flat beliefs, engaging us in something that we cannot quite get at. His funny, scary, but always welcoming “friends” mask and unmask the whirling of the Spirit, always blowing and whispering of both the known and the unknown.

MASKING AND UNMASKING

Masks are related to representations culturally, religiously, and ritually. They have been used, among other ways, to mark cultural and religious values, changes, relationships, power, and to establish rituals of passage. Moreover, masks were related to the understanding of the self, of personhood. As George Ulrich says,

A mask is any device that wholly or partially conceals the face. It is significant to note the word “person” derives from a Greek word meaning mask or more accurately, the role played by an actor in a dramatic performance. Thus our faces reveal our social selves: who we are in relation to other members of our society by virtue of the roles we play in it. Persona, “the mask,” is related to personality, the self or ego we reveal to the world. Masks have the ability to conceal, change, or transform the “person” behind the image into something or someone else other than who we are.¹²

As for Christianity, masks were always a suspicious device. George Ulrich says that “The early Christian

church took a dim view of masking and suppressed it whenever possible. This was partly due to its association with pagan roots, and partly because of the immoral behavior that was often released through the anonymity afforded by the mask.¹³

In our daily language, masks are often related to disguise, falsehood, or lack of transparency. This idea is related to the anxiety caused by not seeing and, by not seeing, being unable to control. Since Western religious truth is platonically understood as something lying underneath a surface, in the depths of a certain place, masks are debunked as superficial, improper to knowledge—a device that only hides the person from honesty—a hindrance to redemption. In order to be redeemed, one needs to be sincere and transparent, wearing no masks at all.

On the other hand, masks can become an important device for faith. Masks entail a certain condition of belief. For masks to work in a performance setting, the audience has to believe and trust that the actor wearing a mask is somewhat the character portrayed in the mask. Set by this contract, this relation is a *fiduciary* one,¹⁴ a relation made out of a bind, of a trustworthy connection. This trust in the actor wearing the mask creates a hermeneutical doubling, a double-sided presence and absence that blurs reality and storytelling. The audience is always in and out of the mask, maybe wondering about the real face of the actor and the plot of the story that catches us entirely, inadvertently. Thus, as one looks at the mask, one keeps moving from reality to fiction and back. In his 2004 production, “The Heroic and Pathetic Escapades of Karagioziz,” Ralph Lee draws from the folk puppet theater traditions of Turkey and Greece and creates a situation that challenges his audience. Most of the actors wear their masks above their heads, and the spectator has to look both to the actor’s face and the mask. That situation blurs the presence of the face of the actor with the presence of the actor in the mask. Who is who? Where does one look? To what does one pay attention? Who is speaking? Whom should I trust? One cannot escape the limits of the fuzzy, blurry, disguised, and troublesome faith/vision in this play. This doubled vision works like a *fold*,¹⁵ which adds unending possibilities to the story.

By wearing a mask, one is trapped in a reduced sight, a sight that does not have enough amplitude or elasticity. The wearer of the mask must learn how to live with this limitation. However, the condition of the

actor’s limited sight is what gives the audience the very possibility of an expanded vision. The mask expands our view through characters, times, locations, and stories. Thus, the question becomes: do masks reduce *and* amplify the vision?

Masks have different forms, colors, sizes, conditions, and limitations. They have an expandable notion of the fold as the inbetweenness of presence and absence. Masks help us with the process of becoming, masking and unmasking our unknown (im)possibilities and (im)probabilities. Masks relate to eternal rites of passage, from larval stages to (un)finished personas. For Jacques Lecoq, a French theater master, larval masks represent “semi-formed faces.”¹⁶

English speakers recognize the term larva as referring to an immature stage in the developmental cycle of an animal, usually an insect. A caterpillar, for example, is the larval stage of a moth or butterfly. In Latin “larva” originally meant either a “mask,” or a spirit or ghost. Thus, the caterpillar is a “mask” that the butterfly wears until it is transformed into a moth. The caterpillar does not simply change; it becomes something else.¹⁷

On a theological note, masks are like the unfinished/improbable/unsettling work of the Spirit in our larval in(de)finite caterpillar/butterfly lives. Masks are like ghosts, maybe the Holy Ghost, visiting us unexpectedly, sometimes horrifying us, sometimes delighting us with unspeakable visions and sensations. Masks can be theological devices to help us understand notions of seeing and unseeing, of veiling and unveiling, especially within the section of systematic Christian theology called *pneumatology*, or things concerned with the Spirit. The Spirit can be a mask, never totally revealing, never completely withdrawing from God’s glory. God’s face must always be masked: “. . . you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.”

Being prevented from seeing, we are also prevented from fully knowing and, thus, fully believing. Paradoxically, as the mask/ghost necessarily reduces the possibility of the sight, it expands the vision/faith (and doubt) by manifold openings and closures, blurring opposing fields and folding unending ways of seeing. It both blinds us and makes us see through an unmastered light.

For this article I chose two ways of speaking about masks, the Spirit and faith:

SEEING AND UNSEEING— A (UN)FORTUNATE CASE FOR PRESBYOPIA

How to control the wind? How to see this motion? What do we do with this free motion of the Spirit? Can we affirm it is here or there? Yes and no since it is neither here nor there, but it might be both here and there. It comes and goes without announcing its arrival or its departure. Does its effacement come from our beliefs, or do our beliefs make it indistinguishable? How much do our theologies let the Spirit free or how much do they stand between the Spirit and its freedom? If our task is to unveil the works of the Spirit, how do we do so without veiling the Spirit as well? How does the Spirit manifest among us? How much do we allow the Spirit to manifest? What are the proper belief venues, theological conduits, experiential paths in which the Spirit is allowed to proceed?

Let me start by sharing one experience I had during my first years of ministry: a member of my church had a daughter who was sick for a long time. She tried everything, from doctors to the healing tools within our church, in order to see her daughter healed. Nothing worked. Secretly, and out of despair, she sought a “pagan” religion and her daughter was healed. She then came to me in double distress, telling me her story.

She was feeling bad first because she took her daughter to this “evil” religion, and second because her daughter was healed. This might be strange at first but it does make sense. For a person who grows up with very strict ideas of good and evil as the ground to understanding the sacred, it was like evil becoming good, which confused her completely. What are the boundaries of evil and good? If her daughter had not been healed, everything she had learned in the church about this evil religion would be authenticated and everything would have remained in place. However, this healing moment shook the grounds of her proper religious knowledge. Her knowledge was displaced and, thus, her faith. Her daughter had been healed and she was overwhelmed by it. This woman was taken by a strange mix of guilt and relief, fear and happiness, shame and peace, disorientation and gratitude. What should a pastor do in this situation? As a good Calvinist, the only thing I could think to tell her was to use Calvin’s central doctrine of God’s sovereignty and to tell her that God’s sovereignty was always beyond our graspable knowledge, that there was unmastered freedom in God that could appear in unpredictable

ways. It was a time when I had to think in expanded ways beyond my own expectations and limits. The love of God would always surpass our grid of understanding; it would, through ineligious words, unspeakable gestures, and a *mazing* grace, transgress, displace and rupture our beliefs, challenging us by putting our most certain theological thoughts into shame and our faith into a region of risk. I just told her that God had unpredictable ways of touching us and that she should trust God’s care for her. I then prayed with her, and she didn’t know if she should thank God or ask for forgiveness. In the end, she did both.

Of all the ungraspable movements of the Spirit, how much can we see? How might faith help us see? What can we see if God cannot be seen? What if our faith is the very condition of our unbelief? What if faith renders us blind and we cannot see what the Spirit does?

Maybe our Reformed faith is already blurred, perhaps since the very beginning, by a certain kind of *presbyopia*. Let’s ponder on this defect of the eye. It might have something to do with re-formed faith. Presbyopia is defined as

*a defect of vision consequent upon advancing age. It is due to rigidity of the crystalline lens, which produces difficulty of accommodation and recession of the near point of vision, so that objects near the eyes cannot be seen distinctly without the use of convex glasses . . . reduced ability to focus caused by loss of elasticity . . . There is no getting around it—this happens to everyone at some point in life . . . When we perform near work . . . we may have headaches or eyestrain, or feel fatigued . . . Eyeglasses with bifocal or progressive addition lenses are the most common correction for presbyopia. Bifocal means two points of focus . . . because the human lens continues to change as you grow older, your presbyopic prescription will increase over time as one can expect your eyecare practitioner to prescribe a stronger correction for work . . .*¹⁹

Calvin has taught us to read the Bible carefully, closely, taking care with every step of the interpretation. This necessary work renders us irreducibly presbyopic, and we cannot escape the fatigue of our eyes and the consequent reduced ability to see the work of the Spirit and to grasp a proper meaning of the Word of God. The *proper* understanding will always depend on the sight of the reader. Who can see/oversee the work of the Spirit

properly with a clear vision? We need glasses, lenses to help us see things. Those lenses/glasses are the cultural, political, sexual, artistic, and social components that define our sight. In this process, we are always favoring something in spite of other things. We need help in our reading of the Bible, and according to Calvin, our reading is always guided by the Spirit. As in *monovision*, a type of lens that corrects presbyopia, “one eye wears a distance prescription, and the other wears a prescription for near vision. The brain learns to favor one eye or the other for different tasks. But while some people are delighted with this solution, others complain of dizziness or nausea, or miss the depth perception they once had.”²⁰ What are the lenses that the Spirit gives to us? How do we learn to adapt? How do we move from dizziness to delight?

We could say that our sight, according to Calvin’s notion of sin, would be naturally bifocal, trifocal, and we cannot focus properly in any close reading of the Bible. We are always damaged by a certain loss, a *loss of elasticity* that makes our faith/belief unable to stretch to the movements of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we always need to pray to God for a stronger correction, for help from the Spirit. Our sight depends on Whom we cannot see enough, clearly, properly. That is why we ask God for forgiveness for our sins, for our shortcomings, for our nearsightedness (and/or farsightedness). Paul, some believe, had problems with his vision. This problem was described by him in this way: “Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh . . .”²¹ Paul’s vision, faith, and knowledge were all partial. He says: “For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part . . . For now we see in a mirror dimly . . .”²² Calvin comments on these words:

These words do not simply indicate that *faith is imperfect* so long as we groan under the burden of the flesh, but that, *because of our own imperfection*, we must constantly keep at learning. Nevertheless, [Paul] implies that the *immeasurable cannot be comprehended by our inadequate measure and with our narrow capacities*. Paul declares this also of the whole church; to each one of us his own *ignorance is an obstacle and a hindrance, preventing him from coming as near as was to be desired . . .* The greatest doubt and trepidation must be mixed up with such wrappings of ignorance, since our hearts, especially inclined by its innumerable and varied temptations that constantly assail us with

great violence. But it is especially our conscience itself that weighed down by a mass of sins, now complains and groans, now accuses itself, now murmurs secretly, now breaks out in open tumult. (3.2.20)

Our imperfect faith battles helplessly against unbelief and against blurred sight. When faith is *the* channel to enjoy God’s love and be part of God’s church, we try to clean every obscure aspect that might pose a threat to a possible clear faith. A blind faith is always related to an inaccurate faith, a faith that is still raw, uncertain, insecure, even savage—in need of expansion and proper knowledge, that is, vision. A faith that does not see with clear eyes is an imperfect faith. Like Thomas and his obscure faith, we are always reprimanded for our lack of faith. However, it was Thomas’ unbelief that let him touch Jesus. He placed his finger inside of Jesus’ wound. His “disease of unbelief” (3.2.18) was cured. Is the “disease of unbelief” what draws us to a cure of belief? How can we be cured if unbelief is what draws us to God? Moreover, faith cannot be acquired or accumulated; it is a gift from God, as we see in Romans “. . . according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.”²³

What about those who are not gifted by God? If faith is so important to our relationship with God, why are some left out? How do those who are lost, those who are left on the fringe, on the edge, survive their lack of faith? Is it fate? Is it God’s plain choice?

Unbelief is what grants us the very possibility of believing. Without unbelief we would not need to believe. Without having our eyes damaged by this *loss of ability*, we would not have to search for constant reduction of this loss by the lenses given to us by the Spirit. A faith that does not need lenses, that proclaims a clear eye, is not faith. It is trapped in the very illusion that hinders us from trusting God. We can only trust God because we don’t see clearly. Its contrary and also true: What gives us the possibility of belief is what prevents us from fully believing. Sometimes gifted by God with a “small drop of faith” (3.2.20) we have epiphanic moments, moments that stretch us by their gifts. However, God’s gifts are always contaminated by our imperfection, “wrapped in ignorance” so much so that one cannot be totally clear of such a great manifestation. Have we got it all? Was I fully there during this epiphany? Did I get all the excess? Was I left out because of a certain lack of perception and experience?

Our seeing is the very condition of our impossibility of seeing, and the impossibility of seeing is what gives us vision. I am not advocating for blindness as a way toward God, but instead, there is always an exceeding element in what our faith can manage to grasp; there is always a surplus and, at the same time, a lack regarding our understanding of God. That excess and lack makes our faith distorted, “wrapped in ignorance”, and this is the joy that drives us closer to God by humbling our theological assurances.

VEILING AND UNVEILING

Masks are related to veiling and unveiling. The unveiling (taking off the veil) of the mask is the veiling and unveiling of the outside and the inside. What does this mask tell me or avoid telling me? What is this mask hiding from me as it shows me quite clearly what is unveiling to me?

Hélène Cixous, a French philosopher, tells us of how she was born with myopia and much later in life regained her vision through an operation. Almost blind, she would see the world appearing to her by a certain unveiling, coming to her by sudden apparitions:

She had been born with the veil in her soul . . . She and Doubt were inseparable . . . She never knew safety. Seeing was a tottering believing. Everything was perhaps. Living in a state of alert. Presence comes out of absence . . . emerging from effacement, she saw the world's rising . . . Struck by the apparition she burst out laughing . . . Yes, said the world. Come, future, come, you coming ceaselessly, never arriving, come, coming! It didn't stop coming, apparitioning carried on. Coming to see. And who is coming? You or I? She had not realized that eyes are lips on the lips of God . . . And what was given to her that first day was the gift itself, giving. I'm coming to the world. I am climbing day after day the steps of visibility. Every day diminishes the imprecision of imprecision . . . How to measure this slow and powerful advent?²⁴

Now, after the surgery, she is able to see *properly*, but she mourns the loss of her improper sight. She says of the “bizarre benefits” of not seeing properly:

The blur, the chaos before the genesis, the interval, the stage, the deadening, the belonging

to non-seeing, the silent heaviness, the daily frontier-crossing, the wandering in limbo . . . Limbo: the region of the myopic, purgatory and promise, dubious environs, the sojourn of the just before redemption . . . Keep forever the world suspended, desirable, refused . . . I shall always hesitate. I shall not leave my people. I belong to the people of those who do not see.²⁵

Living with this expectancy of apparitions that will make us laugh, our tasks as artists/theologians/liturgists lie between the seeing and the unseeing of apparitions of the Spirit, the veiling and the unveiling of the grace of God, the traces of God's trace. Our trembling task is rendered incapable of describing God properly. We are left desiring: come, Spirit, come. Is God here? Has God arrived? Has God already left? The blurring of our eyes is always tainted by the mirrors we see around us. I would like to propose, not without fear and trembling, that perhaps our theologies are always a mistake, always marked by a fatal error, an unrecoverable mistake. If this is so, we should venture our attempts through the uncertainties of our trembling task: doing theology in the midst of confessions of mistakes, asking God's forgiveness for our constant theological faults and our uncorrected eyes.

On the other hand, there is a graceful excitement in not being able to see properly, in having to wear a mask that prevents us from saying/seeing things properly, in depending entirely on the mysterious work of the Spirit. There is a certain grace in keeping the Word of God suspended, open, refusing any certainties that tend to diminish its powerful un-limitations and expansive possibilities. There is a certain solace in this impossibility of assurance. There is a promise of a certain presence, an eventual presence of God in this limbo. By keeping the Word of God almost ungraspable, we leave an unclosed opening that lets the Spirit move anywhere, anyhow, entering a journey of dubious environs, bifocal sight, the sojourn of the just before redemption. As Calvin says:

The godly heart feels in itself a division because it is partly imbued with sweetness from its recognition of the divine goodness; partly grieves its bitterness from an awareness of its calamity; partly rests upon the promise of the gospel, partly trembles at the evidence of its own inquiry; partly rejoices at the expectation of life; partly shudders

at death. This variation arises from imperfection of faith, since in the course of the present life it never goes so well with us that we are wholly cured of the disease of unbelief and entirely filled and possessed by faith. (3.2.18)

Our eyes can never measure anything accordingly, much less the unveiling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Pentecost alludes to Babel; both events are incomplete, unending, unfinished. One was incomplete due to human desire and the other was incomplete due to God's desire, since the Spirit is still coming, still renewing the whole creation. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was/is/should have been the unveiling of the Spirit's possibilities through the veiling of its impossibilities and vice versa. How to grasp its intangibility? How to defend ourselves from this untenable blow? How not to be burned by this fire? To answer these questions is to give a proper answer regarding the proportions of God's love. But again, what is the height or depth of God's love? How far does its extension go? As Paul says: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."²⁶ Our very attempt to answer these theological questions is the very attempt to kill God. As Nietzsche puts it:

Whither is God? He cried: I will tell you. We have killed him—you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from this sun? . . . Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God?²⁷

By giving measurements, proportions, exact locations, proper ways to believe, engage, and experience the Spirit, we are killing the Spirit, attaining its free movements, narrowing its flow, circumscribing its territory, saddening its happiness. On the other hand, hoping that this immeasurable love will always come to us without ever knowing exactly how, where, or when, we keep undoing our mistaken theological attempts to unveil what cannot be unveiled. The condition of our unveiling of the Spirit will always bring forth, as the condition of this action, the veiling

of the work/presence/apparition of the Spirit. Thus, with fear and trembling we guess the Spirit's unveiling by murmuring what cannot be properly heard. Not to see properly is not to hear properly as well. As Cixous puts it: "The joy of the unbridled eye: you can hear better like this. To hear you have to see clearly."²⁸

In that sense, neither the speaker nor the listener can fully appropriate what is said or seen regarding the Spirit. The veiling/unveiling of the Spirit is a surprise, as the fire of Pentecost fired up the disciples as a surprise. Being fired up, taken, being put in a passionate mode, loving God not with faith but with a burning passion. Fired up by this sudden apparition we speak in tongues, foreigner tongues, *como uma certa graça que toca a pele com força e doçura,, uma graça que se esparrama pelos vãos do nosso corpo causando um estupor que mais se assemelha a um fogo que não se consome.*²⁹

The apparition of the Spirit is always taken by others as excess, as a lack of manners, with a faulty faith, as being outside of the boundaries. The veiling/unveiling of the Spirit appears as an uncontrollable fire that goes where it wants, performing its desire where it wants, destabilizing frontiers as it moves, changes, provokes, and ungrounds stable locations, experiences, beliefs, and lack of beliefs. What to do with this apparition? How to tame it into our proper set of clarities? How to prevent the Spirit from going beyond our prescriptions and even beyond our needs? How to veil its *im-properties, improper-ties*? How to be saved from this fire? Should we want it?

Where is the next apparition of the Spirit? Where was the last one? Like Marcellus in *Hamlet*, the theologian/liturgist/artist is always appalled and propelled by the unveiling of the Spirit and cannot name it properly: "What, has this thing appear'd again tonight?" How do we be faithful to the Spirit? How do we announce this appearance if we cannot see it properly? How can we hear the noise of its arrival if we cannot see the one who is announcing it? Sometimes we can only describe what cannot be described by trembling metaphors, indirect communication. A powerful example is given by Helen Keller, an amazing woman who could neither see nor hear. She uses this spellbound metaphor to describe the arrival of her teacher, Ms. Sullivan, who would change her life completely:

Have you ever been at sea in a dancing fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in, and the great ship, tense and anxious, groped her way toward the shore with plummet and

sounding-line, and you waited with beating heart for something to happen? I was like that ship before my education began, only I was without compass or sounding-line, and had no way of knowing how near the harbor was. “Light! Give me light!” was the wordless cry of my soul and the light of love shone on me in that very hour.³⁰

Oddly enough, sometimes the arrival of God comes without our theological compass and our biblical sounding-line. We shall keep on waiting “at sea in a dancing fog,” hoping and praying for the coming of the Spirit: “Come, Spirit, come.” Like Helen Keller, we never know how near or far away the Spirit might be. As the tense and anxious ship of the Spirit, of the surprising, of the unnamable seem to arrive, we might cry the wordless cry of our soul: “Light! Give me light!”

CONCLUSION— ADDING ANOTHER FLOOR FOR ART

Masks help one think in liturgies and theologies of doubling, copying, folding the unmastering work of the Spirit. Art could be the fold that would help theologians and liturgists to deal with the unframed work of the Spirit, a place in which one lets one’s faith dance in the movement of the Spirit, a place in which masks would veil and unveil the presence and absence of the Spirit. To start with, one should pray a doubled prayer. The blurring of the work of the Spirit makes us always pray twice “*Come, Spirit, come*”—like Jesus on the cross prayed, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*”³¹ A doubled, folded prayer is a prayer done in anguish and need. By praying twice, repeating the words twice, doubling the utterance and folding the body, one emphasizes the plea, making clear how much one wants, needs, desires. A double-worded prayer comes from a troublesome heart, fearful of not being properly heard, of not being able to see what one was supposed to see, of not having much to give, of not having enough faith. The first “come,” as well as the first “my God” of Jesus, is the come/my God of certain knowledge, of reason, of certainty, of faith—a masquerade faith. But the second “come/my God” is the “come/my God” uttered out of despair, made of lack, of shame, of a face without a mask or with a mask that covers the nudity of a body without hope or faith. Metaphorically, the first “come/my God” is made of daily written prayers; the second “come/my God” is

made of enfleshed words, with nerves, blood and bones, bodily sighs, a solid, full-hearted embodied “come/my God” as if trying to convince God/the Spirit to come if not by love, at least by mercy. This doubled prayer is an utterance that is created out of imprecise regions of our bodies. Jesus knew how to pray better than us. As for us, the use of doubled prayers is a way of asking the Spirit to help us pray: “Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”³²

The Reformed faith is caught up between the nearsightedness and/or farsightedness of certainties, between what one sees clearly and darkly through a glass and what one does not see at all due to the presence of a greater light. Within the visible and the invisible, the work of the Spirit in us is timely, not given to procrastination. It needs to be done *mediately* by the immediate forces of the Spirit. We start, as we always should, with a prayer: “Come, Spirit, come,” hoping that the Spirit will help us with our dubious environs, unclear moves, doubting faith, folded bodies, and the world’s uncertainties.

Radically believing in the freedom of the Spirit, Reformed liturgists and theologians should add *another floor*³³ to the liturgies: a floor of arts, a floor where the Spirit can work in unsettling ways, veiling and unveiling itself through the many masks of life. Peter Brook, a famous theater director, has added a *sacred floor* to his theater, which he calls a *Holy Theatre*:

I am calling it the Holy Theatre for short, but it could be called The Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible: the notion that the stage has a deep hold on our thoughts . . . Many audiences all over the world will answer positively from their own experience that they have seen the face of the invisible through an experience on the stage that transcended their experiences in life.³⁴

Seeing the invisible made visible and the visible made invisible are the tasks before theologians and liturgists *looking* to the movements of the Spirit, seizing its mobility, its devices, its disguises, its unpredictable showings. Theater has done it by providing a space for people to somewhat experience this transcendence. How should liturgists and theologians use church spaces to provoke an expanded notion of

transcendence through art, how to reach back, in Peter Brook's words, "toward a memory of lost grace"?³⁵ How do we reach further, toward a memory of unseen/unthought grace? How do we reach back and forth as we search for ways to unmask the apparition of the Spirit in our world? Where is the Spirit of God these days? What are the masks the Spirit is using, if any? What are the jokes and tricks and serious thoughts of the Spirit? How do we see and hear the rumors of the Spirit? How do we prepare for it? How do we get there in time? How do we fold, back and forth, the work of the Spirit in our bodies? How do we survive the scars and marks, the cuts, the pain, and the pleasure of this fold? How do we be faithful to what cannot be seen/heard/seized properly? In other words, how do we re-act, re-tell, or make sense of what cannot be described; these crushing shades of dark and light epiphanies; this labyrinthine, blinding luminosity; this unfathomable darkness; this unrepeatable event? "It may not have an empirical or historical basis but it happens to be the virtual sensation of a somatic moment of totalization and dispersion."³⁶

Adding another floor for art in liturgies is not to create *an-other* space for it. On the contrary, it is allowing the *other/the Other* to come, coming indefinitely. Art can become a partner in liturgies, in ways of choreographing faith or lack thereof, in confessions and trembling affirmations. It can help us answer the expanded question of the hymn we sang at Stony Point: "How then Shall I Live?" As the folding of the Spirit unfolds its hallucinatory grace, its masquerade love, its larger-than-life abundance, we proceed to answer "how then we shall live?"

Maybe, by expanding the theological and liturgical indexes, sources, partners, ways, and *other/Other* possibilities, one might be better equipped both to see and to not see. By opening up the church gates and adding a floor for art we are expanding theological possibilities that might include some of those we have left out for too long; those who were never blessed with the gift of faith, those who cannot believe properly, those who assume their loss of elasticity, their improper ways to adjust to the necessary core of beliefs. Is there a space for these people in church pews? Calvin says that only one within the hundred is a true spectator of God's glory (1.5.8). What if, in this world (theater) of God's glory, our gaze becomes a gaze of love and not so much a gaze of faith? Art might help us to go from faith to love and passion. What we do, choreograph, perform, and liturgize in worship should

be actions of passion first and not of faith. As Derrida says, "eyes are organs not of vision but of passion."³⁷

Then, one might see our liturgical movements expanding our desiring bodies, our perceiving ideas, challenging our faith, dealing with the tragic sense of life, enlarging our hearts, and hopefully holding our smiles a little longer. Art might help us enhance our faith by enhancing our vision. However, it might also help us enhance our passion, a passion for the unknown. If I cannot see clearly the movements of the Spirit, I might be able to love in expectation. And my prayer will be kept in spite of any lack of faith: "Come, Holy Spirit, please come."

Claudio Carvalhaes is an ordained minister from Brazil and a member of the Presbytery of Southern New England. He is pursuing his doctoral studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in the fields of systematic theology and liturgy.

Notes

1. October 17–19, 2004.
2. For those interested in further study of this relationship between the theological, the artistic and the aesthetic, see Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics. A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton, NY: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989); and Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring the Sacred. Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For the relationship between arts and worship see Janet R. Walton, *Art and Worship. A Vital Connection* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991).
3. *An-other* refers to the presence of someone or something different from ourselves, the *other*—that which differs from our ways of thinking, experiencing, sensing, worshiping God, etc. The other is what is not recognizable within our similarities, or shared or accepted in our *common* grasp of the world. The other always confuses us, makes us think in other ways, expanding and disrupting our sense of our sameness.
4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed., John T. McNeill. Trans., Ford Lewis Battles. Two volumes. The Library of Christian Classics. Volume XX and XXI. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), book I, chapter 5, section 2. From now on, the identification of book, chapter, and section will be embedded in the text by the simple presentation of the corresponding numbers in this sequence. For example, the notation (I.X.12) refers to book I, chapter XI, section 12.

5. Even though I am not using the *Book of Order* in this article, it is a very good resource with which to frame a dialogue between art and the Reformed faith since it has a great deal of flexibility and encourages creative expression in worship.
6. Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion* (New York & London: Routledge, 2002), 78.
7. Leonardo Boff, *O Despertar da Águia. O dia-bólico e o sim-bólico na construção da realidade* (Petropolis, RJ: Vozes, 1998), 11–12.
8. John 10:10, New Revised Standard Version.
9. Chora is Plato's term, like a place which is knowable but not determined; traceable but never captured; verifiable but never defined.
10. See Mark C. Taylor, Erring, *A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984).
11. For further info about Ralph Lee and his theater company please check his Web site: www.mettawee.org.
12. George Ulrich, *Masks*. LORE Magazine, vol. 39, no. 3 (Fall 1989), 2–9, a benefit of museum membership, 1996 Milwaukee Public Museum, Inc. www.mpm.edu/collect/mask.html
13. Ibid.
14. Fiduciary: “of, relating to, or involving a confidence or trust; as a. held or founded in trust or confidence; b. holding in trust,” from Merriam-Webster’s 11th Collegiate Dictionary.
15. “Above the soul sings of the glory of God inasmuch as it follows its own folds, but without succeeding in entirely developing them, since ‘this communication stretches our indefinitely.’ A labyrinth is said, etymologically, to be multiple because it contains many folds. The multiple is not only what has many parts but also what is folded in many ways . . . If we go back to the model of the Baroque fabric, it could be stated that knowledge is known only where it is folded. Ideas are so folded in the soul that we can’t always unfold or develop them, just as things themselves are inextricably wrapped up in nature. Malebranche’s error is to have believed that in God we see completed unfolded ideas. But even for God’s notions have folds that adorn infinite understanding.” In Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold. Leibniz and the Baroque*. Trans., Tom Conley (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3, 49.
16. Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body. Teaching Creative Theatre*. Trans., by David Bradby (New York: Routledge, 2001), 166.
17. Ibid.
18. Exodus, 33:20, New Revised Standard Version.
19. Definitions quoted from the following Web sites: www.linkspider.serversystems.net/dictionary/lookup/Presbyopia; www.websters-dictionary-online.org/definition/english/Pr/Presbyopy.html; www.allaboutvision.com/conditions/presbyopia.htm. Italics are mine.
20. www.allaboutvision.com/conditions/presbyopia.htm.
21. 2 Corinthians 12:7, New Revised Standard Version.
22. 1 Corinthians 13:9,12, New Revised Standard Version.
23. Romans 12:3, New Revised Standard Version.
24. Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils*. Trans., Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 6, 8, 10.
25. Ibid., 12–13.
26. Romans 8:38–39, New Revised Standard Version.
27. Friedrich, Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. Trans., W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 181.
28. Cixous, op. cit., 12.
29. “Like a certain grace that touches us with force and gentleness, a kind of grace that overflows in the gaps of our bodies causing a stupor that looks like an unconsumed fire.”
30. Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*. Eds., Roger Shattuck, Dorothy Herrmann with supplementary accounts by Anne Sullivan and John Albert Macy (New York and London: WW Norton & Company, 2003), 25.
31. Mathew 27:46, New Revised Standard Version. Italics are mine.
32. Romans 8:26. New Revised Standard Version. Italics are mine.
33. Deleuze, op. cit., 3–13.
34. Peter Brook, *The Empty Space. A Book About the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 42.
35. Ibid., 43.
36. Tom Conley, “A Plea for Leibniz.” In Deleuze, op. cit., xii.
37. John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 32.