

## ■ President's Message

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# The Arts: Extraneous or Essential?

The pace of CBE's ministry is surging breathlessly. Organizations, churches and institutions ask us to hold booths, speak at events, and join their board of directors. We have more requests than we can possibly respond to. The deluge is both exciting and overwhelming. More importantly it represents a change. It suggests that the message of gift-based rather than gender-based ministry is in demand as never before. How did this happen?

Ultimately it represents a movement of God. It also reflects the prayers of many, the arduous work of scholars, staff, volunteers and you — the CBE community. Your faithful support meant we had the resources to market CBE's ministry widely. And the Christian community has responded. Just recently CBE was asked to lead workshops at Urbana 2003. This is a significant opportunity. How do we explain the change?

I believe the arts played an important role in this change. What do I mean? *Mutuality* editor Joanne Nystrom Janssen is CBE's communication guru. She reminds our staff not to tell people how to feel but to draw them into the experience.

For example, when describing the act of hitting a ball with a bat, rather than explain the physics of swinging a bat, describe the wind rushing past clenched fingers as the shoulders turn into the ball. See the difference? The second enables one to experience the game personally. It's like the difference between telling people slavery is wrong, or giving them a copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Both are needed; both are important.

While we recognize the importance of exploring the theological foundations of biblical equality, we also celebrate the power of art to infuse biblical truth under one's skin. Isn't this what Jesus did through the parables? The stories deliver the truths. They go down smoothly, yet once in your belly they explode. They alter us because they enable us to feel the impact of sin, of love, of redemption. This is a function of art.

Perhaps this explains the momentum a book like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* gave the abolitionists' cause. We all recognize the poignancy of political comics, or the power of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I think something like that is happening at CBE. As more and more people in the arts express the truth of biblical equality, more people understand at a core level the truth, beauty, and joy of living in authentic biblical community.

Am I suggesting life is either intellectual or experiential? No! I am saying that life is both. And more importantly, we need to live not with detached intellects or uninformed passion, but with hearts and heads quickened to behold the transcendent beauty of Galatians 3:28: In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female.

As the movement of biblical equality finds expression not only in academic communication, but also in the arts, we indeed feel the wind rush past our faces as we sit in our open cockpit plane, flying through the clouds, heading towards the sun, and the Son. May the arts always focus our gaze on the Holy One!

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*Mimi Haddad is the president of CBE.*