Institute for Christian Teaching
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

CREATIVITY AND CULTURE

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I. INTRODUCTION

We suggest that human creativity is enhanced by cultural awareness and identity; there is a fundamental bond between creativity and culture that reflects essential humanness and creation in God's image. We suggest that creativity is an innate response; it is initiated by God through creation.

By virtue of its very nature, creativity is a challenging study and has certain inherent limitations; 1 nevertheless, we shall see a somewhat impressive match between aspects of social science research and theological initiatives. As expected, we shall also see some correlation with artistic activity and art criticism (creativity is not limited to the arts here). We shall follow a limited but effective horizon.

Accordingly, we shall begin by first viewing the meaning of man as a cultural being and developing a definition of creatvity. After making a link between creativity and culture theologically, we shall scrutinize substantiating scientific and artistic research.

Secondly, we shall consider the concluding results and implications of our study for Seventh-day Adventist education in general and our colleges in particular.

II.MAN AS A CULTURAL BEING: HIS HUMANNESS

Brian Walsh and Ray Middleton's research on man as created in God's image shows that man's nature is basically that of a cultural being; man is given a "cultural mandate" in Gen. 1:26,27; 2 Hans LaRondelle's studies appear to concur with this. 3 Human activity, whether with "hand" or "mind" and is therefore "cultural," 4 reflects in small the activity of the great God in whose image man is made. 5 Indeed, all human activity should glorify God (see Ps. 24 & G. Oosterwal's comment). 6 Man's ability to create is akin to that of the creator. Ellen White says, "All created things, in their original perfection, were an expression of the thought of God...Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator--individuality, power to think and to do". 7

Human creativity goes back to the original command in Gen. 1:26,27 and therefore seems closely related to man's cultural nature (also his interrelated social nature 8). Walsh and Middleton regard man's cultural-social nature as virtually equivalent to his human nature. 9

Similarly, the psychiatrist Alfred Adler says that the human ability to self-actualize is innate and is related to man's social nature. 10 Adler's statement seems to be

another way of showing the reality and power of the "cultural command" (cultural and social are inseparable 11) in Gen. 1:26,27. Man's cultural activity is the arena for his creativity.

III.A DEFINITION OF CREATIVITY

Accordingly, since man's cultural-social nature provides the canvass and context for the creative "brush", we are now in a better position to define our critical term. Human creativity constitutes a manifested and attempted response to an innate and original cultural mandate that links man with God in activities; this manifestation is characterized by "originality, variety, fluency, and flexibility." 12

This definition harmonizes with a number of concepts stated by Ellen White. She describes creativity in the context of man's nature and his likeness to God. 13 She then makes a classic statement in the same context (these words echo sentiments in the last part of our definition): "It is the work of true education to develop this power to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thoughts." 14 It seems to me that Ellen White is powerfully pushing forward the concept of "creativity".

It seems also that Ellen White describes creativity in a type of self-actualizing context as Adler. 15

While not accepting all assumptions of Whiteheadean philosophy, it is interesting to note that he also identifies the self-actualizing nature with creativity. 16 The Christian perspective provides the true paradigm for the true insights of the philosophers. Frank Gaebelein says, "All truth is God's truth." 17

IV. CREATIVITY LINKED WITH CULTURAL/SOCIAL: SCIENTIFIC AND ARTISTIC EVIDENCE

The theological evidence, with some philosophical support, clearly identify creativity with man's social-cultural nature; we also find some confirming reports from the social sciences. We would expect such.

For example, research indicates that family social life can be structured to promote intellectual and creative development in very young children. 18 In other words, the family cultural environment is linked with the creative process. Indeed, Prof. Coon cites indicating research that the social interaction of groups in "brainstorming" tends to stimulate creativity in the participants. 19 In fact, experiments show that social interaction with creative people, and thus creating a new cultural environment,

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tends to make people more creative themselves. 20   Here
the modeling process takes place. 21 This modeling is per-
ceived through the social construct of culture. 22   Thus
creativity is at least a socially and culturally enhanced
entity. In other words, creativity can be identified with
context and environment. 23   Our theological study would
lead us to expect these conclusions.

All of this could suggests the identification of
personality and self-concept with creativity--since self-
concept and personality are socially developed. 24   Yes,
Prof. Coon and others show evidence for a "creative per-
sonality". The creative personality is identified with
such characteristics as divergent thinking, openness to
new experiences, flexibility, fluency in combining ideas,
a high degree of verbal fluency, etc. 25 Beyond a certain
a certain point there is little correlation between IQ and
creativity. 26 However, as we observed, there is evidence
that creativity can be learned. 27 Learning is declared a
social process. 28 This may be more significant and true
than many have imagined.

It appears that creativity (and perhaps learning also)
may go very deep into human nature and personality itself.
In fact some scholars of aesthetics make this very connec-

tion. For example, Harvey Cox and David Miller appear to assert this. 29 Also Dennis J. Sporre says, "creativity in the artistic sense is an intrinsic part of being human." 30 Accordingly the sociologist Bruce Cohen cites the researcher and theorist George Mead who brings creativity and personality together:

> George Herbert Mead saw the self as divided between the `I´ and the `me´.....In Mead´s theory the `I´ refers to that aspect of personality that is spontaneous, unpredictable and creative. The `me´ is that aspect of personality that is predictable and conforms to the requirements of society, performs roles, and adheres to established norms. 31

Similarly, George Leonard links an innate brain function with creativity and learning. He talks about an experiment that suggest that an area of the brain may be naturally creative. He says:

> But no one can be rescued from learning; learning is what human life is. Brain researcher John Lilly and others have tried to cut the connections between the inner self and the world of the senses from which the stuff of learning comes. In these sensory deprivation experiments, the subject is suspended, nude, in a tank of tepid water. His eyes are blind folded, his ears are plugged; he breathes through a face mask.He becomes, as far as possible, a disembodied brain. But the brain is not content to rest. It reshuffles past learning, builds rich new inner worlds in which the self seems to move and learn....There are no neutral moments." 32

language tends to be the larger portion of a culture. 39 And integrated into every culture is a type of religious view of life. 40. We may have an insight here.

Creativity may have a larger correlation with macro-culture and civilization at large. Historian Arnold Toynbee identifies the capacity of a civilization for growth and differentiation with the retention of creativity. 41 In his study of our Western cultural heritage, Prof. Henry Bamford Parkes comes to a somewhat similar conclusion. Moreover Prof. Parkes affirms that the progress of Western civilization has been dependent on a highly imaginative and creative re-ordering of experience through symbols. 42

All of this suggests that the societal events, creativity, and culture may be interrelated. Indeed functionalist social theory (emphasizes the integrated nature of institutions), the most accepted today, seems to require it.43 For example, freedom in a society tends to stimulate creativity--as we would expect. 44

Accordingly, some have indicated that the marvelous flowering of Greek creativity and artistry in the fifth century B.C. may be due in part to assertions of Greek cultural pride--pride resulting from the defeat of the Persian world power. 45 Likewise very recent scholarship

now attributes the "Harlem Renaissance"--with its "most concentrated outpouring of African-American artistic talent" during the 1920s--directly to the cultural pride produced by Marcus Garvey. 46 Also it seems to me that the European Renaissance was in great part a revival and recovery of cultural roots and moorings--the Graeco-Roman tradition.

From what we have observed then, creativity seems to be clearly linked to cultural awareness and identity. In fact, there is great similarity in literary works on this very theme of cultural identity among developing nations;this is the case despite their diversity of location and culture. Many have experienced notable cultural depreciation as the anthropologists tell us. 47 Culture is a fundamental human quality. It must finally experience freedom of expression. Almost intuitively popular accounts make the connection between creativity and culture. 48

V.CONCLUSION:IMPLICATIONS FOR SDA COLLEGES

Our colleges must stand as monuments to personhood and humanity in harmony with Christian principles. Culture is such a large part of this personhood. Recognition should be given to various cultures for providing more insight into scholarship and teaching. The cultural insight and challenge of Delbert Baker were probably key elements in our better understanding of the ministry of William

Foy. 49 There is more gold to be discovered.

There seems to be a clear connection between creativity and culture. Some are concerned about the level of creativity in our schools. 50 Perhaps greater attention to culture may stimulate he other. Greater recognition of cultural diversity may have a similar effect to interdisciplinary studies--interdisciplinary studies stimulate creativity. 51 There is a concern about the state of the arts and humanities in our schools. A better understanding of culture may help us. Culture, creativity, and essential may be closely interrelated. This may provide a prime motivator that is so needed in education. 52

The concept of man as a cultural being springs from his essential humanness as God's image bearer. True education seeks to enhance this developing image that is strongly cultural in nature. Creativity springs from being true to creation design. Man must imitate God in the free and creative act. This free and creative act comes from the deep and innate aspect of man. Only God knows its depth.

ENDNOTES

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