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# THE GARDEN AND THE GARDENER: FILM, CREATIVITY, AND THE GIFT OF CREATION

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*Abstract*

In his essay 'From God the Artist to Man the Creator', Jean-Louis Chrétien considers the possibility that human creativity can participate in divine creativity. As created, creative beings, Chrétien suggests that our art and other creative enterprise may become a site for participation in God's act of creation. This article takes its lead from Chrétien, reading his essay closely before considering the poetics of film, and the possibility that cinematic art is a significant locus for such a theology of participation. In order to explore this further, I engage the film theory of Laura U. Marks, suggesting that the form of cinematic representation facilitates the theological potentials of the medium. I then offer an analysis of Andrei Tarkovsky's 1966 film *Andrei Rublev*, which develops the preceding discussion both through the film's thematic content and its formal composition. Throughout, I deploy the twin motifs of the garden and the gardener (Genesis 2:15) in order to conceptualise the vocation of the human artist within the doctrine of creation. Finally, this opens up the sacramental idiom, and the possibility that the work of the artist consecrates the gift of creation.

## *Introduction*

*Solaris*, Andrei Tarkovsky's third film, is composed around the twin motifs of the ocean and the garden. These are manifestly drawn from the first few chapters of Genesis, and they are deployed in order to foreground the doctrine of creation as the film's principal theological interest. The reciprocal images of ocean and garden come to represent chaos and cultivation, the formless and the formed, even concealment and revelation within the corporeal and symbolic order of creation. The ocean in the film covers the surface of the eponymous planet, a roiling, seething body of water with mystical properties. Here, Tarkovsky creates an image parallel to the primordial and creative chaos of the opening verse of Genesis, for the great ocean-world of Solaris is endowed with the powers of creation, possessing a miraculous capacity to bring into existence matter, life, and even consciousness. Yet, while the ocean lends a strange enchantment to the film and propels its science-fiction narrative, *Solaris* begins and ends in the garden. The very first images are of rich and verdant life beneath the pellucid surface of a small lake. Bright green reeds pulse in rhythm with the rippling water, as clear as glass, the image accompanied

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by the sound of the lake's hidden source, trickling and spilling over somewhere out of sight. Then a wide shot of the lake, which is revealed to be within the garden of a small country house. The story's protagonist, Kris Kelvin, is now seen for the very first time, wandering through the overgrown shrubbery, pausing occasionally among the plants and on the banks of the lake. And then there is an inescapable allusion to Genesis: while Kelvin walks through leafy paths in the distant background, Tarkovsky focuses on a large and ancient oak in the foreground, as if it were some tree of life and the centre of the entire garden.[1]

Tarkovsky's preoccupation with the doctrine of creation, in *Solaris* and in his other films, stems from his conviction that the vocation of human creativity is a spiritual one. His remarkable hybrid of memoir and film theory, *Sculpting in Time*, ends with a final question that probes the theological nature of this vocation:

> Perhaps the meaning of all human activity lies in artistic consciousness, in the pointless and selfless creative act? Perhaps our capacity to create is evidence that we ourselves were created in the image and likeness of God?[2]

This essay asks a similar question: what does it mean to be a created, creative being? To ask this question is not only to ask where the gift of human creativity comes from, but to ask where it may lead. As such, it is a question which opens up the wider framework and inquiry of a theology of participation. To this end, this essay draws significantly on Jean-Louis Chrétien's essay 'From God the Artist to Man the Creator'.[3] By interpreting film through the lens of Chrétien's theology, I consider whether cinematic art is an apposite site for such a theology of participation to develop. The motif of the garden is at the centre of this enterprise. Theologically, the garden represents creation, given gratuitously and in abundance to Adam and Eve in the myth of Genesis. Just as they were called by God to till this garden and to keep it (Genesis 2:15), I suggest that the theologian may understand the vocation of the artist through the motif of the 'gardener', who is called to tend and attend to creation through her craft.

Two sections follow. The first is devoted to an exposition of Chrétien's essay and the framework it provides. From this foundation, Chrétien's understanding of creation and creativity can be applied to filmmaking, and the second section begins this task with a formal analysis of cinematic art, for the form of cinematic representation facilitates some distinct potentials for a theology of participation. With these theoretical foundations laid, I then engage Tarkovsky's 1966 film *Andrei Rublev*, which develops the preceding discussion both through its thematic content and through its formal composition. Interestingly, this film conceptualises art through the language

[1] As mentioned, the film also ends in the garden, completing this particular ring composition. On that final occasion, however, the garden that Kelvin finds himself in is revealed to be a recreation of his home which the planet Solaris has formed in the middle of its seething, chaotic waters. Kelvin himself wanders through the familiar pathways until he reaches his family's *dacha*. There, on the steps leading up to the front door, Kelvin falls to his knees and embraces the figure of his father—also recreated by the planet. The image is a scriptural allusion to the return of the prodigal son, and Tarkovsky's composition seems to be modelled on Rembrandt's painting of that subject.

[2] Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (Bodley Head, 1986), 241.

[3] This essay is collected in Chrétien's volume: *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art* (Fordham University Press, 2003), 94-129.

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of sacramentality, and this essay concludes by considering again the vocation of human creativity according to Chrétien's rubric, this time through the grammar of sacramental theology.

### *Creation, Creativity, and Participation*

In an earlier passage of *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky writes that 'directing in the cinema is literally being able to "separate light from darkness and dry land from the waters". The director's power is such that it can create the illusion for him of being a kind of demiurge.'[4] In a very different book, written nearly twenty years later, the late French phenomenologist Jean-Louis Chrétien argued that:

> Art is thus twice over the site of a divinisation of man: first of all, by the exercise of his arts and the production of his works, man becomes like God […] Second, man's comprehension of the divine art at work in the world elevates him above this very work, and makes his relationship with God that of one artist to another, each knowing, even to different degrees, the secrets of art.[5]

Despite their significant contextual differences, these two quotations both emphasise the profound connection between art and creation, artist and God. A theology of participation is the key idea through which both authors do this; Tarkovsky's allusion to Genesis and reference to the artist as demiurge speaks to the participatory nature of artistic creation via analogy, while Chrétien's account of the human relationship with God as 'that of one artist to another' designates artistic creation as collaboration with the divine act of creation.

Indeed, Tarkovsky's description of the creative powers of the filmmaker is a striking introduction to Chrétien's opening question: 'How did the artist become a creator?'[6] Yet this is only half the question in his eyes, as he invites the reciprocal query: 'How did the creator become an artist?'[7] For Chrétien, these questions are indissoluble from one another, and he suggests that they 'form a whole' because, 'once God is thought of as the supreme artist, it is inevitable that one would come to place the artist as a being within God's divine order, and make the artist's power to produce new forms a reflection of the power of God.'[8] Chrétien traces this 'inevitable' line of thought to the earliest identifications of 'divine creation itself as art,'[9] finding its beginnings in the influence of Greek philosophy and biblical literature. Here the notion of God as demiurge or craftsman is briefly examined, where Chrétien compares the absence of *creatio ex nihilo* in the Greek tradition with certain biblical passages which describe God as a kind of demiurge, creating out of something and not out of nothing (for example, Isaiah 64:8, which compares God to a potter working with clay, and the Letter to the Hebrews 11:10, where God is given the name τεχνιτης—meaning 'architect' in the context of this verse).

[4] Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 177.
[5] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 119.
[6] Ibid., 94.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid., 95.
[9] Ibid.

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And so Chrétien arrives at a key term in the essay: *techne* (τεχνη, which means craft, art, work, or even skill, in the Greek, and which is the etymological root of the English words 'technical' and 'technique'). It is the term *techne* which leads Chrétien to his first major observation: at some point in Western thought, we separated the concept of manual craft from the concept of art. This, according to Chrétien, has shaped our understanding of creation (both human and divine) in a way that must be interrogated further. Here Chrétien introduces the concept of participation through the context of Plotinus and his Neoplatonic dualism. He claims that 'the Platonic term "participation" clearly indicates that art is above the artist, in the intellectual realm: it must not be confused with the artist himself, or with his projects.'[10] In other words, in Plotinus's thought, there is a distinction to be made between the form of art as it is conceived and the crafted form of art as it appears in the flesh, a dualism of the artist's 'idea' and the artist's sensible 'product'. Chrétien, working in the tradition of French phenomenology, pushes back strongly against this dualist metaphysics, which he reads in Plotinus's account of participation. Above all else, Chrétien is troubled most by the notion that a sense of superiority emerged with the separation of art as 'idea' and art as 'product'; for, aligned with this dualist separation, is the value judgement that conceptual artistry is in some way superior or prior to physical, bodily craftsmanship.

This seems to be Chrétien's primary motivation for opposing the Neoplatonist account, but there is little room in his essay for a detailed engagement with the metaphysics of participation. Naturally, a sufficient account of participation is also well beyond the scope of this article, but it is important to clarify my reading of Chrétien's position, as well as my own critical perspective, albeit briefly. Broadly, I think that Chrétien positions human creativity within a theology of participation through the idea that the human maker collaborates with God in some sense. My evidence for this is the way in which Chrétien casts the artist's 'relationship with God' as 'that of one artist to another,'[11] while still insisting on the infinite difference between divine and human creativity. In this respect, I see some significant parallels with Trevor Hart's work, in which human making is viewed as something near a collaboration with God's creative act. According to Hart, our own creativity, craft, and 'making' participates in 'the unfolding of "creation" and in God's making of new things and making all things new.'[12] More recently, Andrew Shamel has argued convincingly that human art—in the form of storytelling and myth-making—can 'participate in God's own economy of call and response, the gift of being and the emergence of the novel and the beautiful.'[13] Like Chrétien's account, both Hart's and Shamel's also rest on a fundamental analogy between human and divine creativity, even while the limits of such an analogy are made absolutely clear (namely, that humans cannot create *ex nihilo*, which remains the exclusive domain of God's creation). Nonetheless, this fundamental analogy, which is essentially the central Thomist analogy introduced in Question 13 of the first part of the *Summa*, considers creativity to be a vital aspect of the *imago dei*, and therefore a vital aspect of what it means to be created in this image.

[10] Ibid., 98.

[11] Ibid., 119.

[12] Trevor Hart, *Making Good: Creation, Creativity, and Artistry* (Baylor University Press, 2014), 331.

[13] Notably, Shamel draws extensively on Chrétien in his theology. Andrew Shamel, *Theology and the Mythic Sensibility* (Cambridge University Press, 2024), 11.

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In the short space of his essay, Chrétien leaves the metaphysics of participation largely unexplored, but I think the Thomist starting point is implicit throughout his account: creation participates in God by virtue of God's position as the source and cause of all that is. As Andrew Davison articulates it: 'Creation receives itself from God: a participation in—or from—that eternal source.'[14] It is this fundamental participation in (or from) God's being which then opens up the possibility for participation through act—including art and craft—and Davison also elucidates this possibility himself:

> In creating, God shares some likeness of himself with his creatures. What God bestows, he bestows generously and, indeed, creation is generous twice over: firstly, in that it is a *gift*; secondly, in that it is a *generative* gift. In creating, God acts to create agents, creatures with the power to act. God not only causes but, in causing, bestows upon creatures the power to be causes themselves.[15]

In this way, the gift of God's creation proliferates creativity in God's creatures. Although he does not refer explicitly to art and creativity himself, Davison lucidly and succinctly captures something that I think is crucial to the idea that human creativity can participate in divine creativity: that the artist's creativity is a response to the *gift* of creation. This is one of the most important dynamics that I hope to include within the twin motifs of the garden and the gardener; if the garden stands for the whole of creation, then the vocation of the artist is to tend and attend to that garden, shaping and reshaping it, but always aware of the reception of the garden as gift—specifically the kind of 'generative gift' described by Davison, because it empowers creatures with our own creativity. However, rather than focussing on the metaphysics of participation, Chrétien instead engages in a lengthy analysis of the notion of the *ars divina*—the idea that God the creator is the 'supreme artist'—and the idea that creation and the natural world has been seen, metaphorically, as a work of divine art. According to the value judgement which positions art as 'idea' over and above art as 'product' (outlined above), which Chrétien suggests has been brought to bear on the notion of the *ars divina*, the 'art' of God as creator becomes superior and prior to the 'product' which is sensibly experienced—that is, the incarnational world and the phenomenality of creation. Chrétien shows the influence of Greek thought on the *ars divina*,[16] but finds the strongest expression of the idea in Augustine, in whose work he recognises 'a veritable doctrine of the *ars divina*,' which is 'not merely a fleeting or circumstantial analogy.'[17] Augustine writes: 'That supreme art of the omnipotent God through which all things have been made from nothing, which is also called his wisdom, also works through artists to produce things of beauty and proportion, although they do not produce from nothing.'[18] So, for Augustine, human art does indeed participate in the divine art, although creating from nothing remains the unique capacity of God. The question, then,

[14] Andrew Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 217.

[15] Ibid.

[16] There is not sufficient space in this article to outline this in full, but it constitutes a lengthy discussion in Chrétien's essay, moving from Neoplatonism to the Stoics (especially through Zeno) and emphasising their contextual importance for Christian theology. 99-102.

[17] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 102.

[18] From question 78 in St. Augustine *On Eighty-Three Different Questions*, translated by David L. Mosher (Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 198.

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is whether or not human art can legitimately be called a form of 'creation'. Augustine (who in this passage refers specifically to sculpture) names this human activity '*ars*' in his Latin, but does he really mean craft, that is, the *technical* production of manual labour which is dependent entirely on the earthly elements, and which is 'able only to transform, and not to create?'[19]

This question is another way of formulating the issue of differentiating between 'art' and 'product', 'creation' and 'work' or 'craft'. In particular, by problematising this differentiation, Chrétien seeks to challenge the suggestion that 'art' is to be considered superior or prior to its 'product'. Such a notion constitutes a central aporia for Chrétien, threatening the entire concept of the *ars divina*; for, if we affirm 'the infinite superiority of the artist over the work,' then 'God envisaged as artist is always beyond and above his work,' such that there appears to be 'an insurmountable fault between the artist and the work, a space of indetermination.'[20] In the dualist cosmology of the Neoplatonists (and others), this fault line between artist and work poses no problem; in this cosmology, there is indeed an insurmountable gap between the infinite and immaterial reality of the divine, and the material, finite world of phenomenal experience. However, this paradigm poses profound difficulties within Christian theology, where the doctrine of the incarnation is essential. Chrétien recognises this and suggests that the incarnation resolves the central aporia inherent in differentiating 'art' and 'product' within the *ars divina*:

> The union of God and man in a single person is the union of divine art and one of its works in a single being. Nothing can be more perfect, and the principle of indetermination introduced by the superiority of the artist over the work here finds its limit and ceases to play a role. God can make a masterpiece by uniting himself to his work.[21]

Via the doctrine of the incarnation, then, Chrétien offers a new conceptualisation of the *ars divina* as a unity of art and work. Such a unity eschews a hard dichotomy of creator and creature, and posits that the divine artist and the divine work of art become one reality in the second person of the Trinity.

By revitalising a doctrine of the *ars divina* in this way, Chrétien answers the first of his two reciprocal queries: how did the creator come to be called an artist? Following this, he returns to the second query: how did the artist come to be called a creator? In other words, how did human artistry become invested with the potential for participation in the divine creation? The first port of call in Chrétien's response comes a few pages earlier, with the medieval philosopher John Scotus Eriugena, who attributes to humanity the power to create when 'pondering man as the image of God.'[22] Chrétien builds on Eriugena's insight, connecting his thought to that of Augustine's some four centuries earlier, and particularly to the notion (which he finds in Augustine's writings) that 'art imitates art, a higher art from which it is derived, and which continues to act through it.'[23] The vital point Chrétien wishes to make here is that the notion of calling the human

[19] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 102.
[20] Ibid., 113.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., 112.
[23] Ibid.

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artist a 'creator' 'does not issue from a profane tradition wherein rebellious man takes the place of the God he rejects,' but that such a notion is in fact 'born in Christian theology itself, and more precisely in the Augustinian lineage.'[24] It is not, then, some Promethean heresy to attribute the capacity for creation to human artists.

Having established the grounds for a legitimate theology of human creation, Chrétien then frames this theology in the terms of participation (although, as I discussed above, he eschews any thoroughgoing exploration into the metaphysics of participation). The theologian he draws on most in this regard is Nicholas of Cusa, the fifteenth-century Renaissance humanist and cardinal. Nicholas himself writes that 'all human arts are images of the infinite and divine art,'[25] and Chrétien expands on this, pointing to a remarkable image that Nicholas uses to illustrate this model of participation: the self-portrait. The painter's self-portrait, Chrétien suggests, is created in the image of the artist in the same way that humanity is created in the image of God, the divine artist. Chrétien goes even further, arguing that a self-portrait which truly 'comes alive' will be an image 'which has in itself the power to turn itself towards its model,'[26] that is, towards the artist.[27] This lays the foundation for Chrétien to adopt Nicholas's assertion that the creations of human art 'are nothing other than likenesses of his intellect, just as God's creatures are likenesses of the divine intellect. This is how man possesses an intellect that is a likeness to the divine intellect in the creative act (*in creando*).'[28] Thus Chrétien responds to the second of his reciprocal queries. How did the artist come to be called a creator? Because the artist, created in the image and likeness of God, actualises this divine likeness by participating in the creative act.

With this response, Chrétien engages with the same ideas that a number of Anglophone philosophers and theologians have also explored, although he does not engage their work directly. Perhaps most notably, in *The Mind of the Maker* Dorothy L. Sayers argues that the 'creative mind is the very grain of the spiritual universe,'[29] which leads her to suggest that our theological anthropology must foreground humanity's capacity for creativity. What is more, Sayers (writing several decades before Chrétien) seems to anticipate Chrétien's desire to recognise creativity in a broad range of human making, and not only in the rarefied air of what we might be tempted to think of as 'conceptual art'. Christine Fletcher draws this out of Sayer's work particularly well: 'Given the unpredictability in human life, and the doctrine of humans as bearing the image of God, Sayers was right to say that all human beings are creative; it is not a special gift reserved for the artists.'[30]

This is echoed by Trevor Hart, who strongly cautions against the idea that human artists manifest creativity in some unique or special way: 'In the modern imagination

[24] Ibid., 113.

[25] From Nicholas of Cusa's *Idiota de Mente* ('Metaphors for Mind'). Cited in Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 121.

[26] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 122.

[27] I am reminded, here, of Céline Sciamma's film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. In the film, the narrative of which concerns the art of portraiture, one concept stands out: the mutual and reciprocal 'seeing' of model and artist; the idea that the sitter will turn herself towards the painter and see the painter with the same intensity of sight with which she herself is seen. Art sees the artist.

[28] From Nicholas of Cusa's *De Beryllo* VI ('On the Beryl'), cited in Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 122.

[29] Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (Harper Collins, 1987), 185.

[30] Christine M. Fletcher, *The Artist and the Trinity: Dorothy L. Sayers' Theology of Work* (The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 89.

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… the true artist is a one in a million figure, set apart identifiably from and elevated above the crowd of ordinary men and women by the possession of some remarkable gift or talent.'[31] Hart rejects this view of the artist as some kind of extraordinary 'genius' and laments the 'theorists eager to disentangle the products of "Art" from the wider patterns of human making and cultivation.'[32] Instead, Hart takes pains to ground his understandings of art and craftsmanship in the language and understanding of the Hebrew scriptures, drawing on translations of Genesis in a very similar manner to the way that Chrétien draws on Isaiah 64, and on the Greek word τεχνιτης in the Letter to the Hebrews, which I discussed above. The result is an understanding of creativity that recognises the potential for human *poesis* to participate in God's *creatio*, but which carefully insists on the fundamental and incommensurate difference between the two.

Chrétien shares this emphasis on craftsmanship and concludes his essay by returning to the distinction between 'art' and 'product', framing it now in terms of the body, *techne*, and the manual labour of handiwork. Chrétien begins by affirming that all human artistry is fundamentally embodied: 'Every human work is manual: always and everywhere it is our hands at work, even when they do not labour.'[33] This is a deliberately provocative claim, which will immediately raise certain objections: Are the hands really 'at work' when a musician hums a new tune? What of the storyteller who, for whatever reason, cannot use her hands, only her voice? The temptation to dismiss this particular claim of Chrétien's out of hand is strong, but I think it would ultimately be a mistake borne from an overly literal reading. Instead, I think Chrétien intends to adopt the hands as a metonym for our embodiment. He does so in order to challenge any notion that conceptual 'art' has priority or superiority over physical 'product', and also to emphasise once again that the difference between 'art' and 'product' seems to collapse in on itself once these categories are challenged in this way.

Chrétien points to Heidegger as an extreme example of this, who suggested that even thought should be considered '*Handwerk*'.[34] Again, this particular line of thinking in Heidegger is controversial, and a full analysis of its origins and development is beyond the scope of this article, but Chrétien utilises it in order to push his own ideas even further: once one realises that thought is still an embodied act—whether one actually considers it to be *Handwerk* or simply an activity that is indissolubly connected with the thinker's body—any notion that art can be purely conceptual and somehow 'disembodied' seems unlikely. Crucially, this metonymical distinction is how Chrétien is able to maintain the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity; human creation, he suggests, is always the work of our hands, even when it participates in the *ars divina*, but 'divine creation takes place by the spoken word alone, an incommunicable word that makes being spring forth from nothing.'[35] What is achieved by the deconstruction of the dichotomy between 'art' and 'product', however, is the crucial point that human handiwork can participate in divine creativity despite this infinite

[31] Hart, *Making Good*, 21.

[32] Ibid., 22.

[33] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 124.

[34] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: From* Being and Time *(1927) to* The Task of Thinking *(1964)*, edited by David Farrell Krell (Harper Perennial, 2008), 380.

[35] Chrétien, *Hand to Hand*, 124.

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difference. Even though humanity never 'creates' in the same sense as God, the labour of human hands nonetheless participates in the creative act. Human artistry and human works, then, both in the sense of craft, skill, technique, or technology (*techne*), as well as in the sense of conceptual art, are no less sites for participation in the *ars divina*.

### *Images and Likenesses: Cinematic Representation and Tarkovsky's Andrei Rublev*

What are the implications of Chrétien's conclusions for film? To begin with, his emphasis on human artistry as 'the dignity of manual labour'[36] is particularly fascinating given the manual and technical nature of cinematic production. Cinema, after all, is a fundamentally *technical* enterprise. While Tarkovsky claimed that 'cinema was the first art form to come into being as a result of a technological invention,'[37] it is equally true that new technology continues to transform the medium. From the advent of the talkie to the first use of colour, from the invention of CGI (computer-generated imagery) to the rise in use of motion capture, cinema is very much a technical work. Film art unites the *techne* of scientists and inventors with the *techne* of human bodies and hands. It is the hands of the filmmaker that position and operate the camera, the hands of the editor that cut and splice a reel of celluloid, the hands of the projectionist that bring the image to the screen. Even the digitalisation of these processes remains the work of human hands, across keyboards and touchpads, but also on the deeper levels that Chrétien recognises; for the hands are *at work* even when they are not physically labouring. Likewise, the cinematic work is itself received in its embodiment by an embodied viewer. If human art participates in the *ars divina* by virtue of its phenomenal, corporeal workmanship, as Chrétien suggests, then film art certainly possesses the capacity for participation in this way—hand to hand, *corps à corps*.

Filmic representation depends on this embodied reality of the art form. But how can an art form that is physically nothing more than projected light and recorded sound be considered an embodied experience? Perhaps surprisingly, there is a major project within film theory which foregrounds the body in the film experience in precisely this way: film-phenomenology. Vivian Sobchack, who is often considered a progenitor of film-phenomenology, even draws an analogy between the body of film and human anatomy: the camera and microphone as eyes and ears; cranes, rigs, and dollies as limbs and motor functions; director and cinematographer as the brain and central nervous system which directs the motion and the senses of all.[38] Meanwhile, the philosopher Steven Shaviro writes that '[cinema] assaults the eye and ear, it touches and it wounds. It foregrounds the body.'[39] In the work of Laura U. Marks, however, embodied perception in the film experience is conceptualised very specifically, through the sensation of touch.

In her theory of 'haptic visuality', Marks suggests that the senses of sight and sound have been consistently misunderstood as incorporeal forms of perception and sensation. But to say that vision and hearing are somehow disembodied is as nonsensical as saying that taste or smell are disembodied. What must be restored, she argues, is the fundamental idea that all of our senses, including vision and hearing, are forms of contact with the corporeal, phenomenal world. And so touch unexpectedly becomes the

[36] Ibid., 125.
[37] Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, 82.
[38] Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 2-6.
[39] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 260.

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key sensation within the film experience, according to Marks, because it might reconnect vision and hearing with the body. While this is surprising, it is notable that she is not alone in conceptualising this art form of projected light and recorded sound through sensations of touch. Jennifer M. Barker developed a film theory of 'cinematic tactility', understanding tactility as something much more than superficial, skin-deep sensation: 'Tactility is a mode of perception and expression wherein all parts of the body commit themselves to, or are drawn into, a relationship with the world that is at once a mutual and intimate relation of contact.'[40] Positioning her project within the legacy of Merleau-Pontian phenomenology, and influenced by the film-phenomenology of Vivian Sobchack, Barker aims, like Laura Marks, to restore the idea that cinematic art is a form of embodied contact with the world. To borrow Marks's phrase, it is high time to 'rematerialize our objects of perception.'[41] Film, she argues, is a mimetic form of representation, facilitated by prior contact with the phenomena it represents.

In this respect, by emphasising the tactility of cinematic light, scholars like Barker and Marks build on the philosophical tradition of conceptualising vision as a form of touch. In his short treatise *Optics* (*La Dioptrique*, 1637), for example, René Descartes compared vision to touch through an analogy to a blind man's walking stick.[42] Similarly, in the twentieth century, Emmanuel Levinas wrote that the 'visible caresses the eye. One sees and one hears like one touches.'[43] Still more recently, Hélène Cixous wrote of the 'eyes as miraculous hands' in her short semi-autobiographical text 'Savoir' (the title of which plays on the two French verbs 'savoir', 'to know', and 'voir', 'to see'.)[44] While neither Barker nor Marks position their own work within this particular line of philosophical thinking, both scholars certainly access similar analogies and ways of thinking about visual sensation.

However, both offer novel ways of conceptualising sight and vision through the sensation of touch, and Marks has a particularly original strategy for doing so. She deploys the metaphor of synaesthesia, suggesting that the sights and sounds of the film experience are synaesthetically reconstituted across the viewer's body, becoming a fully corporeal experience. Synaesthesia is the sense reception by one part of the body in response to the stimulation of another part; for example, the reception of a certain sound as a colour, or the reception of light as taste.[45] In the same way, Marks suggests, film mediates the sense-perception of other embodied experience by reconstituting it as audio-visual perception. I think we can push this further, even adopting some of the language that Chrétien uses. For the hands are often the focal point of the whole body, the point of contact between one body and another, such that tactility and haptics become the threshold of our experience in the world, even when it is the other senses that

[40] Jennifer M. Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and Cinematic Experience* (University of California Press, 2009), 3.

[41] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), xiii.

[42] The treatise is collected in René Descartes, *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology*, translated by Paul J. Olscamp (Bobbs-Merril Co., 1965), 65-75.

[43] Emmanuel Levinas, 'Language and Proximity' in *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Duquesne University Press, 1998), 118.

[44] Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, *Veils* (Stanford University Press, 2001 [1998]), 9.

[45] There are a diverse array of types of synaesthesia recognised within psychology, such as chromesthesia (seeing various colours when hearing certain sounds), lexical-gustatory synaesthesia (experiencing different taste sensations when hearing certain words), or auditory-tactile synaesthesia (feeling a tactile sensation when hearing particular sounds).

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are actually in operation. In a very real sense, the eyes grasp for sights and the ears catch hold of sounds.

Thus, the audio-visual medium of film expands radically in light of Marks's theoretical work. Film mediates the corporeal perception and sensation of our embodied being in the world, such that the body becomes the centre of the film experience. One finds a similar idea in Gilles Deleuze's remarkable two-volume work on the cinema, when he writes:

> The body is no longer the obstacle that separates thought from itself, that which it has to overcome to reach thinking. It is on the contrary that which it plunges into or must plunge into, in order to reach the unthought, that is life. […] It is through the body (and no longer through the inter-mediary of the body) that cinema forms its alliance with the spirit, with thought.[46]

For the theologian, the crucial point that emerges from this is that film represents creation haptically and somatically.[47] Independently of one another, Deleuze and Marks both consider filmic representation through the analogy of a fossil, that is to say, an object which represents phenomena mimetically, by virtue of a prior contact with the organism it witnesses. The film image is created by photons that enter the lens and explode against the celluloid that fossilises the image. To experience film is to view the touch of light against the camera, and thus—metaphorically—to be thrown into the corporeal phenomena of creation and *to be touched* by the filmmaker(s), by other viewers, and by the body of film itself. Film attends to creation without reducing or diminishing it; rather, it reconstitutes the embodied experience of the world as a different kind of embodied experience. It has the power, in this way, to receive and celebrate the corporeal world for what it is, the gift of creation, allowing the film artist to play the role of the gardener who tends to this gift.

Of course, interesting and insightful as it may be, such theoretical reflection on film often seems unfulfilled until it is concretely applied to the art form. For this reason, I want to draw this section to a close with an analysis of Tarkovsky's 1966 film *Andrei Rublev*. Narratively and thematically, this is a film which is actually about the theological vocation of human artistry, yet the film's formal composition also opens up some fascinating connections with the theoretical focus of this article. At face value, *Andrei Rublev* tells the story of the eponymous iconographer, who lived and worked in fourteenth-century Russia. Yet the reality of the picture is an episodic narrative composed around an ensemble of characters, all of whom are engaged in various forms of technical and artistic craft. There is the iconographer himself, Rublev; there is also the apprentice iconographer, Foma; a group of skilled stonemasons; and the remarkable character of Boriska, the young bellmaker, who is the protagonist of the film's final narrative episode. Perhaps, though, the most interesting artist/craftsman

[46] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 195.

[47] Naturally, not every film-theologian shares this prioritisation of the embodied nature of the art form. Joel Mayward, for example, argues in his excellent chapter 'Love Is Smiling through All Things' that some film art is best conceptualised by the theologian as 'pneumatological.' Drawing on Robert Sinnerbrink, Mayward elaborates how Terrence Malick's films 'evoke a camera-spirit.' Joel Mayward, *Life above the Clouds: Philosophy in the Films of Terrence Malick*, edited by Steven DeLay(State University of New York Press, 2023), 244-45.

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in the film appears only in the very brief prologue. This is the character of a nameless peasant, who constructs and pilots a hot air balloon in the opening sequence.

But why does a film about the relationship between art and religious faith begin here, with a work of mechanical invention that—unlike a painted icon—seems devoid of any theological significance? The answer has everything to do with Chrétien's interpretation of art, craft, workmanship, and the principal concept of *techne*. The film opens with an image of the contorted, bulging anatomy of this flying machine, tethered to the ground in front of the white stone walls of a large church. Ropes bind and compress the envelope into a strange shape; it is not immediately recognisable as some kind of blimp. Three men busy themselves with the tethers and a crudely constructed basket. One man stokes a fire, funnelling smoke and hot air into the canvas. All of this serves to illustrate the technical complexity of the machine, and therefore the *techne* of those artists who have crafted it. In a hurried escape from an approaching mob of townsfolk, who think that the machine is unnatural, the balloon takes flight, the peasant euphorically crying out 'I'm flying, I'm flying,' as Tarkovsky portrays this maiden flight with vertiginous shots from a low helicopter or aeroplane. The viewer soars with the camera and with the contraption itself over marshy plains and small townships, the giddy laughter of the peasant artist accompanying the sequence, as he revels in his creation. Ultimately, though, the flight ends in disaster as the balloon careens downwards, crashing violently on the plains. The final shot of the sequence is of the envelope amidst the wreckage, deflating and letting out smoke, the canvas falling limp like a collapsed lung, and the escaping air gurgling in the bank of a stream like a dying breath.[48]

In this prologue, the film's principal themes of art and human creativity are introduced through a work of technical craftsmanship that is no less a work of art than Rublev's own icons. Though the peasant's flying machine is devoid of those holy images with which Rublev's creations are imbued, its construction is still a creative act which participates in the *ars divina* in the manner that Chrétien sets out, by the virtue of human ingenuity and handiwork. The peasant's flight is significant because it represents, through the mechanics of an *air* balloon, both *inspiration* and *aspiration*; two vital elements of human creativity and artistry. In an interview with the Russian film journal *Iskusstvo kino*, Tarkovsky revealed that he and the other filmmakers had originally intended the peasant's flight to be a winged flight: '[We] decided that the wings were the problem. In order to eliminate comparisons with Icarus we invented the balloon. […] I consider that it did away with the false romance of the sequence, and gave it a fresh and unique quality.'[49] This deviation from the original screenplay is important. If the initial conception of a winged flight had been preferred, the prologue would have situated itself entirely within an allusion to the myth of Daedalus and Icarus; with the balloon, the prologue is able to create a connection of a different character, which Maya

[48] Robert Bird suggests that Tarkovsky may have been alluding to the legend of Kriakutnyi with this episode. Kriakutnyi was believed to have undertaken the first human flight in 1731, also in a kind of primitive hot air balloon. Bird points out that this particular legend was celebrated by the Soviet Union in 1956 (just ten years before the release of *Andrei Rublev*), and so it would have been fresh in the zeitgeist. Robert Bird, *Andrei Rublev* (BFI publishing, 2004), 19.

[49] 'Interview with Andrei Tarkovsky', *Iskusstvo kino* 4 (1967): 78. In fact, Tarkovsky echoes this comment in *Sculpting in Time*, 80: 'We spent a long time working out how to destroy the plastic symbol on which the episode was built, and reached the conclusion that the root of the trouble was in the wings. And in order to dispel the Icarus overtones we decided on an air balloon. This was a clumsy object put together from skins, ropes and rags, and we felt it rid the episode of spurious rhetoric and turned it into a unique happening.'

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Turovskaya describes as 'an image of man's potential, and of his spiritual striving to go beyond the ordinary bounds of his life on earth.'[50] The whole film expands thematically from this prologue, as each of the following nine episodes explores a different aspect of creativity and the 'spiritual striving' of the artist that Turovskaya observes.

Naturally, the film treats the spiritual vocation of the artist from the perspective of Christian theology, most notably through the focus on Rublev's iconography. Yet the lens of Christian theology is even more pronounced on two further levels. First, the film's working title was *The Passion According to Andrei*, which clearly identifies Rublev as a 'Christ figure'. Second, the concept of artistic creativity is consistently taken up in the film through trinitarian models and images. The most prominent of these is that of the three monks (Rublev, Kirill, and Daniil), all of whom are iconographers. Turovskaya goes as far as to describe the film's portrayal of Rublev as a portrayal of 'not one artist but a "Trinity",'[51] suggesting that this decision of Tarkovsky's is fitting, given Rublev's most famous icon, *The Trinity* (c. 1410). At the very least, the decision to situate the figure of Rublev as one of three monk-artists illustrates the religious and communal dimensions of his artistic vocation. The fictional Rublev's call to deification (which is even more pronounced given the historical Rublev's canonisation in 1988, two years after Tarkovsky's death) is a call to participate in the *ars divina* through his immediate social and religious context. Such is the nature of all artistic participation, the film suggests; the artist participates in the fullness of the divine life insofar as she encounters, communicates and collaborates with those around her.

This is why the final, climactic episode of *Andrei Rublev* tells the story of Boriska's bell making, which is the most collaborative and communal instance of artistry in the film. Boriska, a boy orphaned at the beginning of the episode, must save himself from poverty by taking up his late father's role and forging a bell for the local prince. When he claims that his father has passed on the secret of his craft, he is given authority over some hundred workers, and so begins a vast collaboration of artists, craftsmen and labourers which challenges Boriska logistically and technically, testing his spirit and his skill. Ultimately, it is this immense (co)operation orchestrated by Boriska which leads Rublev to the decisive moment where he breaks his vow of silence and determines at last to return to icon painting. This moment is motivated primarily by the joy Rublev sees moving through the crowd at the bell's consecration ceremony; 'You've created such a feast, such a joy for people,' he tells the boy, who lies in the mud weeping uncontrollably while his bell rings out amidst the celebrations. It is at this moment, as Rublev realises the affective power of art to touch and to communicate with others, that he seems finally to understand the earlier words of his fellow monk, Kirill: 'It is a great sin to reject a God-given gift.' If by 'sin' some sense of de-creation is inferred here, then conversely it can be understood that the artist only participates in the fullness of creation by exercising her creative gift, which is shared with those around her in a feast for the senses.

The metaphor of 'feasting' is crucial in this context. In *Andrei Rublev*, it is used to describe Boriska's work because of the communal and collaborative power of art. Rublev sees the crowd of townspeople and workers sharing euphorically in the boy's creation,

[50] Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry* (Faber & Faber, 1989), 78.
[51] Ibid., 38.

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and it motivates him to break his vow of silence and once again to exercise his gift for painting; there are feasts now for him to prepare too. And so the metaphor of 'feasting' becomes essential to understanding the vocation of the artist. In the first analysis, it is a soteriological metaphor, within which is contained all the themes of participation, fullness of life, and communion that are so vital to Tarkovsky's Eastern Orthodox tradition. Indeed, in his *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Vladimir Lossky concludes with a final chapter titled 'The Feast of the Kingdom', in which he emphasises the goal of theosis ('deification'), which is full participation in and union with the Trinity, as a heavenly feast: '"a banquet of faith", wherein all may participate.'[52] This represents Lossky's understanding of the eschatological and soteriological dynamics of theosis, but for him the doctrine is also indissolubly connected with the doctrine of creation, at the heart of which is the incarnation of Christ the Logos. Moreover, Lossky positions the creativity of creatures within this dynamic of divine creation, eschatology, and theosis:

> All things were created by the Logos who is as it were a divine nexus, the threshold from which flow the creative outpourings, the particular logoi of creatures, and the centre towards which in their turn all created beings tend, as to their final end. […] And their end and final fulfilment lies in union with Him or deification.[53]

Such 'final fulfilment' is then conceptualised through the metaphor of feasting in Lossky's final chapter, and Tarkovsky uses the same metaphor in *Andrei Rublev* to describe artistic creation, identifying human creativity with theosis and participation.[54] In the film, Rublev recognises the 'feast' that Boriska has created for all present at the bell's consecration, while Kirill chastises Rublev for giving up iconography, precisely because his artistic gift constitutes a call to his own spiritual fulfilment and communion with God. And Tarkovsky is not alone in deploying the metaphor of feasting in this way: David Ford, for example, in his book *Self and Salvation*, makes extensive use of the metaphor to describe the soteriological significance of art. 'Christian vocation can be summed up as being called to the feast of the Kingdom of God,' Ford writes, before attempting 'to savour the joy of that feast in more vivid ways through a painting, a set of meditations and a poem.'[55]

From the flying machine of the prologue to the final collage of images depicting Rublev's surviving icons and frescos, there is not one character who could be described as a purely 'conceptual artist' (if such a thing even exists). Every artistic character in the film creates only through the labour of their hands, which become—as Chrétien suggests—the site where any distinction between conceptual art and physical craft collapses. Tarkovsky's focus on artistry like stone making, bell founding, or carpentry is deliberate, designed to interrogate this distinction. Likewise, in the episode 'The Last

[52] Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (James Clarke & Company, 1991), 247.

[53] Ibid., 99.

[54] Given the film's subject matter, Eastern Orthodox theology—and particularly the theology of iconography—is contextually vital and this should not be understated. Alexander Hart analyses this context particularly well with specific reference to Pavel Florensky and Tarkovsky's own iconographic aesthetic in his filmmaking. Alexander Hart, 'Saintly Cinema: Modelling the Icon in The Flowers of St. Francis and Andrei Rublev', *Journal of Religion and Film* 29, no. 1 (April 2025): 1-38.

[55] David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 272. The painting is Raphael's altarpiece for the church of San Giovanni, in Monte; the meditations are Thomas Traherne's; the poetry is Micheal O'Siadhail's, which introduce a personified 'Lady Jazz' walking the streets of Chicago.

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Judgement', Tarkovsky portrays Rublev's and Daniil's meticulous work as they paint an altarpiece by hand in Vladimir. Art, craft, and labour are indissolubly connected in the film. The spiritual vocation of the artist is wrapped up in this phenomenality, and therefore in the collaborative and communicative nature of art, which moves all those who share in the feast of its creation.

The motif of 'feasting', of course, also conjures up another theological dimension for consideration: the Eucharist and the wider grammar of sacramental theology. It is this dimension that I wish to explore briefly now, in drawing this essay to a conclusion, for the sacramental idiom provides a fascinating way of conceptualising the relationship between art and the doctrine of creation. The sacramental understanding of 'gift', for example, sheds light on the colloquial metaphor of an artist being 'creatively gifted', while the concept of participation can be substantially developed by conceptualising art idiomatically as a 'consecration' of experience in the world.

### *Conclusions: The Vocation of the Artist and the Grammar of Sacramental Theology*

In his essay 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes the work of a painter through the sacramental idiom. Designating the painter's art as 'a response' to the corporeal data of her existence, her *être au monde*, Merleau-Ponty lists a range of quotidian phenomena ('the body, the life, the landscapes, the schools, the mistresses, the creditors, the police, and the revolutions') and then describes these phenomena sacramentally, as 'the bread her work consecrates.'[56] It is no accident that Merleau-Ponty deploys the sacramental metaphor here, connecting the various 'bodies' of creation on which the painter sets her eye with the bread of the Eucharist. Indeed, the eucharistic metaphor is apt given Merleau-Ponty's vital emphasis on the body in his phenomenology: 'The body is the vehicle of being in the world.'[57]

Yet the significance of his use of the sacramental idiom here goes beyond the foregrounding of the body, foundational though this is. In case there is any doubt about the extent to which Merleau-Ponty commits to sacramental language in this essay, it will be worth examining his choice of words. The English translation of this passage chooses the verb 'consecrate', as I have used in my quotation above. While this word does indeed bear sacramental significance, it is open to a latitude of interpretations, not all of which necessarily capture the full theological significance at play here. The same is true of the French verb '*consacrer*', which is the word the reader would expect to find in the original French given this translation. However, the word Merleau-Ponty actually chooses is nothing less than the noun '*sacrement*': '[…] *le pain dont elle fait son sacrement*.'[58] Literally, then, this passage describes the various worldly phenomena addressed by the painter not as 'the bread her work consecrates,' but as 'the bread of which *she makes her sacrament*.' Given this very deliberate choice of words, the reader must take seriously the sacramental dimension of Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics; the artist creates, consecrating the 'bread of the world' through her work, making a sacrament of the corporeal phenomena she images.

[56] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, translated by Richard C. McCleary (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 64. French edition: *Signes* (Les Éditions Gallimard, 1960).

[57] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (Humanities Press, 1962), 84.

[58] Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, 64.

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There is hardly a more definitive expression of participation in the *ars divina* than this. Via the sacramental idiom, the artist can be said to celebrate the gift of creation in a role analogous to—although never commensurate with—the celebrant at the Eucharist. What is being celebrated here is at once the gift of creation and the gift of *creativity*. As Louis-Marie Chauvet has suggested, for example, divine creation and sacramental response represent a schema of 'gift' and 'return-gift' which facilitates participation in this way:

> The 'reception' of the world as creation, that is, as 'gift', implies the 'return-gift' of the offering. Thus, the confession of creation is itself charged with sacramentality. […] Making visible the gesture of presenting the gifts at Mass […] is the way faith confesses in action that God is creator.[59]

It is telling, too, that Chauvet refers to human creativity as he expounds this schema of 'gift'/'return-gift'. He writes that 'creation calls upon human creativity,' and that, precisely because the divine creation cannot be reduced to human creativity, 'it calls humanity to *make a "world"* out of the universe which it receives.'[60] In other words, according to Chauvet, human creativity is called upon for creation to be received for what it is. The colloquial metaphor of describing artistic talent as 'gift' speaks to this same theological understanding of the relationship between creation and human creativity. Simply put, if human beings are called to actualise the image and likeness of God in which they are created, and if this likeness includes the gift of artistic creativity, then practicing, nurturing, and sharing this gift constitutes a form of participation.

It is through this sacramental grammar that I wish to consider the motif of the garden in future work.[61] As has been a theme throughout this essay, the work of the artist is indissoluble from the craft and labour of human hands. At the same time, it can never be said that a human artist creates from nothing, as if out of some conceptual *nihil*. Art is always *techne*, as practical as it is cerebral, involving the realisation of creative vision through tools and work and technique; all of which is represented by the motif of 'gardening'. And so the human artist is reflected in the archetype of the gardener, who shapes and transforms the garden given to her, participating in its creation, cultivating its landscape and recreating around her by sowing seeds or forging pathways.[62] Just so we talk of human ingenuity in terms of 'making connections', or of creative theory in terms of forming 'seminal ideas', from the Latin for 'seed'. By considering the motif of the gardener now, as an archetype of human artistry, I hope to emphasise a theology of

[59] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (The Liturgical Press, 1994), 551.

[60] Ibid., 550.

[61] Indeed, there is so much more that could be said here in this essay. One particular aspect which has been left untouched in this article, for example, is the temporality of film-art. Time is another vital category for considering the way that human creativity might participate in the divine act of creation, and Tarkovsky's hybrid of memoir and film theory, *Sculpting in Time*, gestures towards the temporality of film with its title. At one point in the book, he makes the importance of time absolutely clear: 'Time, printed in its factual forms and manifestations: such is the supreme idea of cinema as an art.' (63) I have written elsewhere about the theological significance of time and film, for instance in my monograph *The Theological Power of Film* (Routledge, 2024), and in my article 'The Cinematic Gaze as "a Long, Loving Look at the Real": Andrei Tarkovsky and Walter Burghardt's Theology of Contemplation', *The Heythrop Journal* 63, no. 2 (May 2020): 425-37.

[62] And here the theologian is apt to acknowledge the first post-resurrection appearance of Jesus: mistaken for the gardener by Mary Magdalene outside of the empty tomb (John 20:11-18).

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artistic participation through biblical and sacramental idioms, drawing on the earliest traditions and the foundational sources for the Christian doctrine of creation. Just as the vocation of the gardener is to tend and attend to the garden, the vocation of the artist is to tend and attend to the gift of creation, through the gift of human creativity.[63]

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest to be declared.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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