

The Beauty Option: Why Art Matters

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David D'Or and David Eaton share a bow with the Evergreen Symphony Orchestra at the National Concert Hall in Taipei, Taiwan.

Over the years I have been a vociferous advocate concerning issues relating to music and the Unificationist perspective regarding creativity and art. The issue has deep meaning for me, for I consider beauty to be imperative in our witness to the truth that eventually can create a culture in which true love is paramount. As a performing artist for 40 years in our church, I've had many opportunities to use my talent for providential purposes, both within our community and with artists who are not members of our church. At the heart of my creative endeavors has been my motivation to use my God-given abilities as a musician to promote the ideal of godliness and to cultivate a culture of peace.

I recently returned from conducting two concerts with Israeli vocalist, David D'Or and the Evergreen Symphony Orchestra at the National Concert Hall in Taipei, Taiwan. The concert was produced by the Tzu Chi Foundation, a Buddhist organization founded in 1966 that boasts three million members and scores of chapters throughout the world. Tzu Chi (which means "relief and compassion") is headquartered in Taipei and has done an amazing amount of humanitarian work, including providing assistance in the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, the Japan tsunami and relief efforts into North Korea.

In addition to running several schools, hospitals and free clinics in Taiwan, Tzu Chi has its own cable television network that broadcasts the news of their global-relief efforts as well as programming original content that promotes the ideals and vision of their organization — 24/7. They clearly understand the importance of using mass media and art to get their message to a larger segment of the public.



Tzu Chi Master Cheng Yen, said to be the Mother Teresa of Asia. (Photo credit: Taiwan Today)

While in Taiwan I was able to meet the Tzu Chi Founder, Master Cheng Yen (a Buddhist nun, now 76) and several of the organization's key leaders. They explained that music and art are important aspects of their outreach. Their belief in the spiritual power of music plays heavily into their philosophy — and their funding efforts. Tzu Chi has collaborated with David D'Or on numerous occasions, both in Taiwan and in the United States, and he has composed and recorded music based on Tzu Chi teachings with the express

intent of raising funds for their charitable work and propagating their message of compassion. For the two concerts presented last month I arranged one of the Tzu Chi songs, *Family*, especially for this occasion.



Concert Poster for the Tzu Chi "Voice of Love" Concerts

Because music is an especially effective means to evoke spiritual atmospherics, nearly every religious tradition has utilized it for ritualistic and ceremonial purposes. But the power of music goes beyond that which is ceremonial or ritualistic. In Father's autobiography, he says:

"People often think that politics moves the world, but that is not the case. It is culture and art that move the world. It is emotion, not reason, which strikes people in the innermost part of their hearts. When hearts change and are able to receive new things, ideologies and social regimes change as a result."

Father made this assertion in the context of his establishing the Little Angels. In her speech of April 25, 2013 True Mother recalled that era and how, when our church was dirt poor, Father had the vision and foresight to create the Little Angels School and the wonderful performing troupe that would "strike people in the innermost part of their hearts" and effectively open people's mind to the truth of Divine Principle.

When Father purchased the Manhattan Center in 1976, it was for the expressed intent of transmitting Divine Principle via television. He spoke of how "music and religion go hand in hand" in bringing people to God. Yet, in our church today, there is very little in the way of serious support for the arts. When compared to the resources allocated to say, conferences for clergy, educators, diplomats or politicians, support for artistic enterprises is very small – almost non-existent. That's not to suggest that these other endeavors are not important, but if we are to advocate the Divine Principle's paradigm of conjoining truth, beauty and goodness, then the "beauty" component needs to be valued – and supported – commensurate to the truth and goodness components.

We know that the family, schooling and popular culture are the three most significant factors in the inculcation of values in young people. The "celebrity-industrial-complex," with its penchant for promoting and aggressively marketing materialist, secular and often immoral content, is ravaging our youth. Our children are far more likely to be influenced by Lady Gaga and Kanye West than their local politicians or their teachers. The pervasive power of popular culture contributes to the downslide of our social wellbeing. The Celebrity-Industrial-Complex is usually at odds with the values needed to create a godly culture. We need to provide alternative choices.

The good work our church does to promote family values, interfaith unity, sexual purity and responsible media, economic and political policies is obviously necessary. But equally necessary is the need to advocate and support the creation of art that can begin to influence our society in positive ways. If we don't support the arts, it will be a continual, uphill battle to gain a measure of success in dealing with the pernicious and pervasive influence of the popular culture.



David Eaton with Tzu Chi volunteers, including Charles Chan (to Eaton's left) and Annie Lin (to Eaton's right).

My plea here is to balance our outreach programs so that the “beauty” aspect in the truth/beauty/goodness paradigm receives greater emphasis and support. Many of our children have artistic talent, therefore it is important to channel that talent into principled artistic expressions with principled motivation.

Producing a Unificationist version of the TED Talks with principled content could be a good first step. Small concerts featuring artists who share our values could also be done. Music education and internships for those interested in the media arts could be the basis for a crop of young talent to channel their creative juices into a broader approach to witnessing. We could eventually develop our own Cable Network as the Tzu Chi Foundation has using Manhattan Center as a production entity.

As Father said, using art and culture is the best way to effect change. If so, it seems imperative that we support projects that can assist our effort to convey our ideas to a larger populace.