



Technology: Design and Humility

What if design were about humility and thinking of others?

Adrienne taught design at her local college. She wanted the students to design an outfit for a couple attending a church wedding.

"I have become increasingly unhappy about the clothes worn at weddings. I like clothes to be celebratory, but some weddings are becoming all about the clothes. I feel it's perceived as a context for designers to showcase their work, and the religious context gets forgotten. I started the session by showing lots of images of clothes people wear to weddings. I asked students to research images of wedding clothes worn by guests and write an analysis of them. We discussed the images using the following prompts:

- What are your first impressions?
- What do you think governed the choices?
- What are people saying through their clothes?
- What do the choices suggest the event is about?

"Then we looked at the wedding service and discussed what was important about it. I handed out copies of a Christian wedding service and vows. We devised some criteria for choice of design that would be appropriate in the light of those:

- The designer has a responsibility to be appropriate to the occasion and to serve the guest and the bride and groom. It is not for showcasing the designer's flair.
- It's a religious ceremony, so clothes should have an element of modesty.
- The guests are there to support the bride and groom and not to steal the limelight or draw attention to themselves.
- It's a celebration, so clothes should be celebratory.

- The designer should think about how the clothes will look in photographs; they should not leave people with regrets.

“Many students felt the designer had a double brief since the same clothes are used for both the religious ceremony and also the reception that follows. The student designs reflected that, often using short jackets, wraps, and other devices for the women to create two different looks from the same outfit. On the whole, students went for simpler and more elegant designs with very good fabrics rather than showy outfits. I adjusted my evaluations to include the criteria we had devised.”

What’s going on here?

Adrienne **saw** design as a way of encouraging students to think of others and serve and to reflect on the meaning and purpose of a wedding.

She **engaged** students in a design activity that made them think about connections to a faith context and actively devise criteria in a way that focused on serving.

Adriana **reshaped her practice** by changing the context for the activity (the new brief), adjusting her assessment to match, and using images and questions to change the focus and look at the purpose to which skills were put.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Serving is an expression of **love**. Service should distinguish the Christian way of life — at work, in the home, and in relationships. The possession of gifts and talents bring with them responsibility; they are for serving others, and that includes design. Love accepts limits in terms of the needs of others. Serving involves a lack of selfishness, for it means taking the spotlight off ourselves in order to pay attention to the needs of others.

What difference does it make?

This way of approaching design underscores the responsibility of designers rather than seeing creativity as something on which no limits are imposed. Love imposes limits. With any gift comes a responsibility to use it with wisdom. This approach also changes the context in which the designer works to a religious one, even if the designer does not share that faith.

Where could we go from here?

These concepts of serving, responsibility, and the limits imposed by love can be applied to other creative projects and other parts of the design curriculum.

Digging deeper

Adrienne saw design as service. The concept of service is an important one for Christians, for Jesus took the word servant and gave it a new and radical meaning. He took a word that described a lesser person under the authority of others and redefined it in terms of leadership and greatness. As the “servant King” he washed his disciple’s feet and expected his followers to be willing to act similarly (John 13:14-15). Jesus made it clear that in the kingdom of God those who are greatest are those who serve God and others.

The duty is now emphasized of serving God in the world, in every position in life. Abraham Kuyper

In 1 Corinthians, Paul describes love as “not self-seeking.” He also talks about pleasing others rather than ourselves in order to build up other people (Romans 15:2). This does not mean self is effaced or personal needs are never met. Jesus talked of loving others as we love ourselves. We can uphold the dignity of people and their entitlement to be treated as God’s children, and that includes us.

What the earliest Christians were struck by, and what they returned to again and again, was that in Jesus they had seen (and the stories testified of this to those who had not seen) a way of being human which nobody had ever imagined before. This was a way of generosity and forgiveness, a way of self-emptying and a determination to put everyone else’s needs first. N. T. Wright

Adrienne stressed responsibility in design rather than just following a trend or displaying flair. Gifts carry the responsibility to use them wisely. In the Bible Samson was gifted with enormous strength, but he wasted that gift rather than using it wisely. Possession of a gift is not enough.

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