

Was something monumental and irreplaceable lost when Christianity faded? Robert Fulford thought so, when he elegantly described the receding tide of Christianity following the second world war in his column [Christmas Confessions of an Unbeliever](#) (The National Post, 24 December 2005).

I cannot agree.

For one thing, the works of the great composers, painters and architects are still available to be appreciated. Our appreciation may be on different terms than the original artists intended, but since we are not blinded by mediaeval superstition, I think it very possible our appreciation is greater and fuller than it could be at the time the art was created. As an example, most people now love listening to Handel's Messiah at Christmas time. They are not concerned, as were the people of Handel's time, that the work is scandalous, even heretical, because it uses the techniques of opera to tell the nativity tale.

Fulford's conclusion that our collective life, absent the religious impulse, grows steadily less serious and shallower is amazing. Is he suggesting that contemporary art is somehow inferior to that of earlier times? Surely he must know that this suggestion has been made in every time period - it is simply a matter of perspective. In a century or two it will become clear what is the best and most enduring from our time: the dross that distracts us will have blown away. In the meantime we need to have confidence and faith that the people around us are creating wonders, just as people of every period have done.

Yes, faith. Not faith in some remote and unknowable supernatural being, but in the ordinary people around us. This kind of faith, I believe, gives our collective life a greater significance than it could ever have when humanity's best works were dedicated to the glory of god and the saving of souls.

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