

Deeper roots for our beautiful gospel

GCAMM seminar With Barry Whatley

Anything of importance to say?

As with the experience of beauty in nature, unless the Christian faith has an understanding and place of the arts it will inevitably fail to win the allegiance of those for whom they are the most important aspect of life. For they will see in the Christian faith only what strikes them as flat, moralistic, and platitudinous... Unless the experience of beauty in nature and the arts is encompassed and affirmed, the Christian faith will seem to have nothing of interest or importance to say. This is not, however, just a tactic to win the allegiance of the lost. The fact is that God is beautiful and the church is hiding this (Richard Harris)

Show them the beauty of Christ

Above all, Christ is the place where Beauty came to shine among us in salvific splendor

Paul Evdokimov

Aesthetics? Theology and Aesthetics?

Aesthetics has to do with perception, how we meet something of beauty with our senses.

Beauty in the eye of the beholder?

The “idol” of beauty and the law of diminishing returns... leads ultimately to the denial of beauty (Douglas Campbell)

Aesthetics? Theology and Aesthetics?

As Christians we believe that a proper aesthetic, one that is a handmaid to worship, is anchored in God. Aesthetics – what we perceive through our senses as ordered, winsome, striking, appealing, lovely, even sublime – points us beyond to the source of beauty, the One in whom and through whom and for whom all things are made.

“Theological” aesthetics considers the part played by the senses – combined with the faculties of memory, imagination, and language – in the awareness and fuller discovery of God (Aidan Nichols).

Truth, Beauty and Goodness

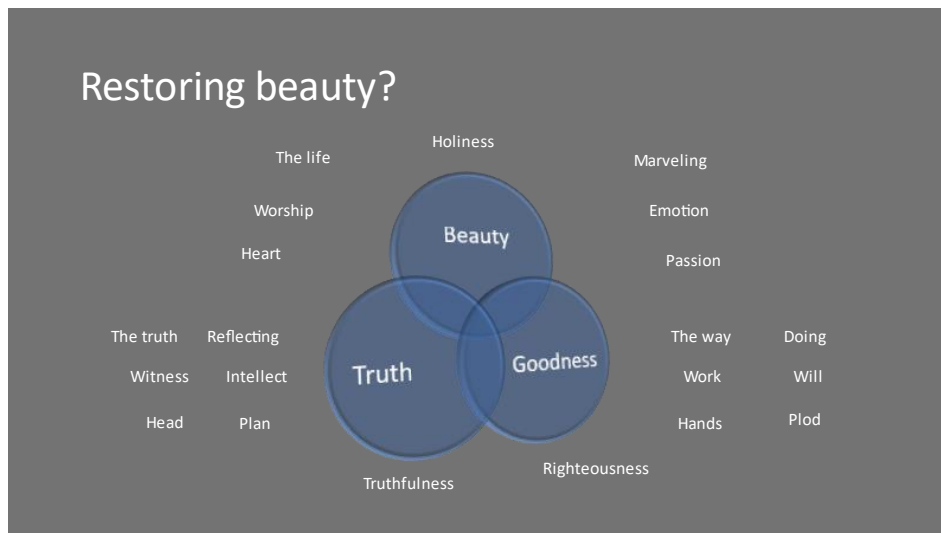
Hans Urs Von Balthasar:

His foundational idea is that the three great classical virtues -- truth, beauty and Goodness – must be given their full place and value if we are to discover God and experience the fullness of our salvation.

(The Virtues) are transcendental in the sense that they “transcend” or go beyond mere appearances and lead us to the very essence of being. And this essence of being, brought to us

through the channels of truth, goodness and beauty, is accessible to us through our very senses, our humanity and our relationships.

Restoring beauty?



The neglect of beauty...

We no longer dare to believe in beauty and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance. We can be sure that whoever sneers at her name as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past—whether he admit it or not—can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love (Balthasar).

The Truth distortion

Restoring beauty?

Our roots... in the beauty of creation

The world charged with the grandeur of God! (Hopkins)

The Creator, like a divine poet, in bringing the world into being out of nothingness, composed his symphony in Six Days, the Hexameron. After each one of his creative acts, he “saw that it was beautiful.” (Evdokimov)

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork...

In them he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,

and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat (Psalm 19)

The danger of idolatry...

If I have looked at the sun when it shone,
Or the moon moving in splendor,
And my heart has been secretly enticed,
And my mouth has kissed my hand;
This also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges,
For I should have been false to God above.
(Job 31.26-28)

To praise the Creator!

To the Biblical man, the beauty of the world issued from the grandeur of God; His majesty towered beyond the breathtaking mystery of the universe. Rather than being crushed by the mystery, he was inspired to praise the majesty. And rather than praise the world for its beauty, he called upon the world to praise its Creator (Abraham Heschel)

To think of God man must hear the world. Man is not alone in celebrating God. To praise Him is to join all things in their song to Him. Our kinship with nature is a kinship of praise. All beings praise God. We live in a community of praise (Heschel)

Wordsworth

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea;
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder—everlastingly.

As kingfishers catch fire

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Bodies forth that indoors each one dwells;
Selves, go itself: myself it speaks and spells
Crying, What I am is me, for that I came.

Scriptural underpinnings...

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without

excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened... (Romans 1.19-20)

Rooted in our humanity – the image of God

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

The shining forth...

The “shining forth”

The beautiful, then, is as a shining forth, an epiphany, of the mysterious depths of being, of that interiority that is a witness to the intimate relation between the body and spirit (Evdokimov)

The shining forth

The artist and the poet...

The image in ruins...

The community where the image is restored

Colossians 3.14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Rooted in Christ the ultimate source of beauty

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1.15-17)

Rooted in Christ the ultimate source of beauty

He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men... The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world (John 1. 2-3, 9).

The classical understanding of beauty

Three characteristics:

1. Clarity or radiance
2. Proportion
3. Integrity

Christ has radiance through being the Art of the Father, where the Word illuminates the mind that contemplates him. He has proportion because he is the fullest likeness of the Father. He has integrity because his form is the Father's form (Thomas Aquinas)

Form??

We might tend to think that "form" is simply the envelope of an inner reality of no particular importance, that what counts is the inner treasure. But this is a gnostic notion not one that fits the biblical or even classical understanding of form. Form was central to the very nature of the object.

What stamps anything with identify is its form (Chersterton)

Form??

There is a synergy, a indissoluble unity between the form and the essence of a given thing. We see this in the striking form of a human face, particularly through the window of the eyes. The "form" of the face points to the essence of the person, the mysterious deeper reality of the soul.

The Christ-form...

Christ reveals to us "not merely human being, but in a direct and plenary way, the divine Being itself."

He is the "glorious evidence of divine agency in the world"... In Christ, he offers himself for contemplation; "the self-disclosure of God comes to a climax in Jesus Christ" (Nichols)

The beauty of the Cross?

God's beauty embraces death as well as life, fear as well as joy, what we might call the ugly as well as what we might call the beautiful (Karl Barth)

The beauty of the Cross?

This is one of the great mysteries of "beauty" that only revelation and the Spirit of God can make clear to us. No human reasoning or contemplation unaided by revelation could perceive beauty in a violent and unjust death on a barren hillside.

The beauty of the Cross?

By God's grace we can see and marvel, not in the visible and agonizing suffering of the Servant, but "in the self-emptying of divine love, at the exceeding wisdom, truth and beauty inherent there". The "form" seen here points to the "love that the Trinity is". In Christ there is a revelation of the glory and the beauty of God that is thrown open to the heart made alive by grace.

And us?

As we contemplate and perceive the beauty and glory of God revealed in Christ, most powerfully in the pascal mystery, are transformed, re-“formed” by the all-surpassingly beautiful form of God’s love revealed through Christ.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,[e] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 4.18)

The practical theology – missiology –
of beauty?

A great ally in creation!

An even greater ally in the spark of the image of God in the eyes of a beloved child!

The greatest ally of all – the all-surpassing beauty of Christ revealed in the incarnation and the self-giving love on the cross!

Making our message beautiful?

The Return of the Prodigal Son

A Story of Homecoming

... the one who stayed at home also became a lost man

The father of the prodigal son is not concerned about himself... His children are his only concern

As the Father, I have to dare to... trust that real joy and real fulfillment can only come from welcoming home those who have been hurt on life’s journey