

# Beauty

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. -Gen 1:26-31

"...most of the Christian criticism of popular culture has focused on *content* while ignoring *form*. A generation after Marshall McLuhan, the Church still behaves as if the forms of culture, especially the forms of mass media and the role they play in our lives, are value neutral." - Kenneth Myers All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes (21-22)

Review:

Looking at art in terms of beauty, truth, and goodness

Like buying a car; price, seating capacity, speed, fuel efficiency, safety ratings. A car may be bad or good as a whole or some of these areas individually may be good or bad or not to our taste

These things each have their own spectrum of merit and the whole may exceed or fall short of the sum of its parts as well. One can see how quickly it becomes complex to talk about art as simply "good" or "bad" if one is willing to consider

What is artistic beauty?

When we talk about beauty we're dealing with it's emotional impact, which the combination of creativity and technical merit produce.

It should:

- Draw us to the Creator of all beauty
- Increase our love for this world
- Grow our longing for the world to come

Can some of you give examples of works that strike you as particularly beautiful and describe what make it beautiful to you?

A difficulty here resides in the impact of describing beauty upon the beauty itself. If I read from The Rape of the Lock as follows:

WHAT dire Offence from am'rous Causes springs,  
What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things,

I sing -- This Verse to C---, Muse! is due;                    \*John Caryl; asked Pope to write poem  
This, ev'n *Belinda* may vouchsafe to view:  
Slight is the Subject, but not so the Praise,  
If She inspire, and He approve my Lays.

    Say what strange Motive, Goddess! cou'd compel  
A well-bred *Lord* t'assault a gentle *Belle*?  
Oh say what stranger Cause, yet unexplor'd,  
Cou'd make a gentle *Belle* reject a *Lord*?  
And dwells such Rage in softest Bosoms then?  
And lodge such daring Souls in Little Men?

There's a beauty inherent in the heroic couplets & a joke for the insider who knows that the poem was mocking an incident where a suitor had clipped a lock of hair from the head of the object of his affection. But the joke crumbles when I say, Pope is exaggerating the seriousness of Lord Petre clipping Arabella Fermor's hair to encourage the Catholic families to stop feuding.

Similarly, trying to describe what makes the spires of a Gothic cathedral inspiring or why the repetition in the Hallelujah chorus is inspiring but the redundancy of The Song that Never ends is insipid can distract us from the beauty of Handel's composition.

At the same time, developing a vocabulary with which we can talk about different types of art, understanding its history and reasons why critics recognize some as better than others, and gaining breadth and depth of exposure to works of art increases our ability to appreciate art and to have our souls nourished by the beauty of works of art.

There's a struggle in learning to talk about beauty especially in terms of form and structure. Learning the difference among Baroque, Classical, and Romance music can enhance appreciation of all three. Knowing how to scan - read the meter of - poetry can open one's eyes to nuances that increase our delight in a poem.

Acquaintance with these things helps distinguish among the beautiful, the functional, the sentimental, the kitschy, and the ugly. We learn what may have been a lucky stroke of the brush and what is true mastery of an art. I would encourage you to do that work.

“What we find [in creation] is not only a functional mind at work but also an artistic imagination. The kind of world God made is a model of what artists should strive to make and what all people should delight in. The Christian doctrine of creation, therefore, affirms as good the artistic concern of both the creative artist and the audience with form, beauty, and artistry.” Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination* (71)