

REFLECTING TRUTH IN BEAUTY

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Summary:

As the emergent church explores the arts as a means of expression, communication and devotion, it requires a theological foundation on which to speak of Truth in terms of something as apparently subjective as beauty. This paper proposes both a Christological foundation and the imperative for the Church to embrace beauty as embodied in art as a necessary means of reflecting the Truth and goodness of God, His glory.

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PREFACE

It is unusual to include a preface in a paper of this sort, however one is appropriate here. A great debt of gratitude is due to John W. de Gruchy and his book *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice*. In the course of this book, de Gruchy provides an illuminating discourse on aesthetic theology which almost single handedly changed the entire course of this study. De Gruchy led to the seminal thought of John Calvin, Hans Urs Von Balthasar and Karl Barth among others. These names may not be the first that come to mind when considering the topic of beauty and art; however, they bring a remarkable corrective to how we contemplate this topic. These are also not names commonly associated with the emergent church, however, as will be shown, they provide the theological imperative for the emergent church to embrace the arts. The research for this paper began with books discussing beauty and art in the typical ways that we have become accustomed. In the finished product, references to these books are notably absent. In some regards, the study presented here is unavoidably somewhat a summary of de Gruchy's comprehensive work. The work at hand, however, reflects further study of the primary sources as well as the particular application and working out of this theology with respect to the emergent church.

1. INTRODUCTION

I have learnt to love you late, Beauty at once so ancient and so new! I have learnt to love you late! You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. You were with me, but I was not with you. The beautiful things of this world kept me far from you and yet, if they had not been in you, they would have had no being at all. You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight. You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet odour. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love of your peace.¹

St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 10-27.

Robert Webber rightly posits in his book *The Younger Evangelicals* that “the current media revolution has pointed to the need to *communicate faith through more complex and variegated means*.”² Through out human history, images have been a crucial means of communication, yet it is reasonable to say that at no other time in history has humanity been so bombarded by a rapid proliferation of multi-sensory media as it is today. The Church’s history of its appropriation and rejection of visual media is a study all of its own, yet as we look to the future, we are confronted with an emergent church that is looking to regain the place of the arts as a means of expression, communication and devotion.³ The evangelical church has historically shunned visual arts in the service of the church and offered limited theological reflection on

¹ St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (England: Penguin Books, 1961), 231-32.

² Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 66.

³ *Ibid.*, 205ff.

aesthetics. Webber rightly and importantly points out, “In order for evangelicals to become more attuned to good art, they will have to come to a good theology of art making.”⁴

If you were to ask a random group of people, Christians or not, what is “good art,” you would get little consensus. They may find some common ground on topics such as color harmony or elements of composition, but agreement on the fundamentals of aesthetics is elusive at best when approached from this abstract starting point. Our concept of what is beautiful in our culture is often vigorously defended as individual, but we must ask if this is really so. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term beauty as “the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit.”⁵ Our concept of what is beautiful is based on our response to what we see, hear, smell or feel. If this is so, is not the answer to our quest to be found in the author of all creation.

Before delving into that question we must turn to the specific question of this paper, can Truth be appropriately reflected in beauty? The term Truth as used here is not the subjective truth of postmodernity, rather the Truth as understood in orthodox Christianity. We must ask if it is even possible to speak of Truth in terms of something as apparently subjective as beauty. As will be shown, these questions are inherently flawed for they all begin with an anthropological understanding of beauty rather than a Christological foundation. True beauty is revealed to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ, “for by him all things were created” (Colossians 1:16, ESV), and it is Jesus Christ who is “the way, and the truth and the light” (John 14:6), therefore the locus of any conception of beauty or truth must not be in our judgment, but in Jesus Christ.

⁴ Ibid., 208.

⁵ “Merriam-Webster Dictionary”, [document on-line]; available from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/beauty>; Internet accessed Jan 10, 2007.

2. BEAUTY AND ART – A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Discussion of beauty in evangelical circles often drift to the book of James, “For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes” (James 1:11, ESV). Others may drift to the book of Proverbs, “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30, ESV). Arguably, these verses are often taken out of context and interpreted as a condemnation of beauty, however, James is speaking of the temporality of beauty in creation (also cf. Is 40:6-8). In Proverbs, the passage is speaking of the greater qualities of a woman, and in a similar manner, Peter speaks of “imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:4, ESV).

The confusion around beauty is further amplified when we delve into the world of art. The Decalogue contains the entry, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image [some translations say *idol*], or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Exodus 20:4). The word “image” is translated from the Hebrew *pe’osef* which should be understood as a “divine image.”⁶ The LXX bears witness to this rendering using the term *eidōlon* which is best understood as a “cultic image or representation of an alleged transcendent being.”⁷ In other words, the censure is not against creating works of art, rather against creating a particular work that we worship as God.

Philip Ryken laments in his introductory comments to his discussion of Exodus 31:1-11 that the evangelical church has largely abandoned the arts and artists.⁸ While this is in part connected with the Iconoclastic movements of the past, faulty exegesis of these passages has not

⁶ L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

⁷ Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker. *A., Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000).

⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, Preaching the Word, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 945-46.

helped the contemporary situation. Whether or not Ryken's polemic is entirely justified, it does point us a fundamental question, is there Biblical instruction pertaining to beauty and art?

First, consider the command regarding the priestly garments that Aaron was to wear as given in Exodus 28; "And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty" (Exodus 28:2). The word translated as beauty in the Hebrew text, *tip 'äoret*, is variously rendered here as beauty or ornament while in other instances it is rendered as glory, splendor or radiance.⁹ The LXX uses the Greek word *timén*, which carries the sense of something that is honored and valued.¹⁰ Clearly, the artisans are command to create something that the people will experience as beautiful to reflect in some dim way the glory and beauty of the Lord. Continuing in Exodus 31:

²"See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, ⁴to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. ⁶And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: ⁷the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, ⁸the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, ⁹and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, ¹⁰and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, ¹¹and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do" (Exodus 31:2-11).

It is clear enough in the passage that not only does God give special gifts—spiritual gifts¹¹—for the creation of works of beauty, and that He is the source of the ability to create art.

One can hardly then conclude that the creation of works of beauty are sinful, however, the

⁹ Koehler, *HALOT*.

¹⁰ Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Somewhat oddly, the NIV translators chose to render the phrase as "to give him dignity and honor."

¹¹ Not all commentators agree. U. Cassuto points out that it specifically does not say the Spirit of the Lord, rather the Spirit of God. He takes this to mean that it is referring to wisdom and thus these are "intellectual qualities." U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: 1951; reprint, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1974), 401-02.

making of idols, representing the creator with the created is prohibited. Ryken provides for us four “fundamental principles for Christian theology of the arts: 1) the artist’s call and gift come from God; 2) God loves all kinds of art; 3) God maintains high standards for goodness, truth and beauty; and 4) art is for the glory of God.”¹² Poignantly, Ryken further points us to the place, or person in whom we can understand these principles, “through the character of God as demonstrated in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”¹³

3. TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF BEAUTY

Calvin

The reformer John Calvin may seem like an odd place to embark on further theological reflection on beauty and art, yet Calvin wrote, “sculpture and painting are gifts of God.”¹⁴ He insisted, however, that the legitimate use of the gifts are works that “the eyes are capable of seeing,” in other words no representation of God.¹⁵ Clearly Calvin spoke against icons or other works of art in the church,¹⁶ yet he suggests that some people receive a particular gift from the Holy Spirit to create works for the benefit of the rest of humanity.¹⁷ His support for this notion comes from the previously discussed Exodus 31 passage where the gift from the Holy Spirit is given to Bezalel and Oholiab to aid in the construction of the tabernacle.¹⁸ Calvin avoids extended discussion of the fine arts, although in terms of arts in general he declares that we ought not to “neglect the gift freely offered in these arts...[or] we ought to suffer just punishment for

¹² Ryken, *Exodus*, 946-47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 947.

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), I/11:12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I/11:1-15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II/2:14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II/2:16.

our sloths.”¹⁹ While Calvin was concerned about art “in the sanctuary,” he considered it “quite appropriate in the public square.”²⁰ This notion carried forward to the Puritans, who rejected visual art in meeting halls, yet as well demonstrated by men such as Jonathan Edwards, art for pleasure was quite acceptable.²¹

Karl Barth

We turn our attention to Karl Barth who also turns to God’s glory as the entry point to discuss beauty. Barth declares “God’s glory is the indwelling joy of His divine being which as such shines out from him, which overflows in its richness, which in its super-abundance is not satisfied with itself, but communicates itself.”²² Barth proceeds to question whether God’s glory is sufficient to convince and persuade on its own.

If in dealing with the knowledge of God’s glory we had to be satisfied with the *brutum factum*, and therefore of a blind spot in our knowledge; if we had to count and declare ourselves convinced and persuaded when face to face with this dark spot. The question would inevitably arise whether this was worthy of the knowledge or revelation of the God who is truth.²³

Turning to the concept of beauty, “If we can and must say that God is beautiful, to say this is to say how he enlightens and convinces and persuades us. It is not merely the naked fact of His revelation or its power, but the shape and form in which it is a fact and is power.”²⁴ If beauty is somehow that which gives shape and form to God’s glory, how are we to understand beauty? To this end, Barth directs us to a threefold experience that is beauty. God “acts as the one who

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 43.

²¹ Ibid., 44.

²² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. II/1, *The Doctrine of God* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag A.G., Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1964), 647.

²³ Ibid., 650.

²⁴ Ibid.

gives pleasure, creates desire and rewards with enjoyment.”²⁵ We do not say then that God is beautiful in the Platonic sense of some external abstraction or principle, rather that beauty radiates from God.²⁶ God is the “basis and standard of everything that is beautiful and of all ideas that are beautiful.”²⁷

God’s beauty is that which attracts us to God’s glory.

It [God’s glory] is not merely a glory which is solemn and good and true, and which, in its perfection and sublimity, might be gloomy or at least joyless... That which attracts us to joy in Him, and our inalienable form of His glory and the indispensable form of the knowledge of His glory... We cannot overlook the fact that God is glorious in such a way that He radiates joy, so that He is all He is with and not without beauty. Otherwise His glory might well be joyless.²⁸

Barth further declares that beauty has to do with the “form of revelation,” the “evangelical element in the evangel.”²⁹ Here we have to make a careful distinction of not speaking of *capturing* truth in beauty, rather to speak of *revealing* or *proclaiming* truth through beauty. This becomes increasingly clear as we consider that Jesus Christ, who is the “way and the truth and the light” (John 14:6), is the self-revelation of God, the visible form.³⁰ Jesus Christ “is not only the source of all truth and all goodness, but also the source of all beauty.”³¹ As foreign as it may seem, the importance of understanding beauty, not in terms of some external abstraction or principle, rather as something that finds its source in the creator is critical. If we are going to look to beauty as a means of revelation, communication and worship we must first be clear that any act of art making must first be a response to the revelation of God’s glory if it is to have any true beauty or communicate any Truth. Even art that represents the evils of this

²⁵ Ibid., 651.

²⁶ Ibid., 650-51.

²⁷ Ibid., 656.

²⁸ Ibid., 655.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 662-63.

³¹ Ibid., 664.

world, that seems repulsive to us flows from the Divine revelation of sin and the negation of God's glory appropriate to the subject matter.

At this point, however, we must confess that our corrupt humanity stands in opposition to that which we yearn and strive for, the beauty of God's glory. Nowhere does this become more poignant in Barth's work than in his admonition against portraying the face of Jesus.

No other speaks at the same time of the human suffering of the true God and the divine glory of the true man. This is the function of the face of Jesus Christ alone....No human art should try to represent—in their unity—the suffering God and triumphant man, the beauty of God which is the beauty of Jesus Christ.³²

The essence of Barth's reasoning is that human ability will always fall short of capturing the reality of Jesus Christ, in life, death or resurrection. We run the risk of making Jesus Christ, the Son of God, into something other than what He is; a god of our making, an idol.³³ It would be wrong, however, to take this as a censure against art in general. It is even arguable that Barth not so much censures portrayals of Jesus Christ as much as concedes that any such attempt necessarily sits on the twin knife edges of idolatry and the necessary inadequacy of the work.

Barth in fact was a supporter of the arts. In his work on theological ethics (some caution is needed here since this work predates his *Dogmatics*) he posits, "The word and command of God demand art, since it is art that sets us under the word of the new heaven and the new earth (cf. Is 65:17)."³⁴ He even goes so far as to say, "In the proper sense, to be unesthetic is to be immoral and disobedient."³⁵ For Barth, the purpose of art is perhaps best summed up, if it is possible to summarize faithfully, in the following quote.

Artistic creation will always aim at the unheard of, at that which has never been, at giving shape to the impossible, at impossible shaping. In principle all artistic creation

³² Ibid., 666.

³³ Cf. Ibid., 665-69.

³⁴ Karl Barth, *Ethics*, ed. Dietrich Braun, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Zurich: Theologischer, 1928; reprint, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 510.

³⁵ Ibid.

is *futuristic*. It will always have to come back to reality in order to create *it* anew and see *it* changed and show it to be so—reality that was created by God and has been reconciled to him, but this as redeemed reality in its sensed and anticipated perfection, hence, a clarified and purified reality, although much more undoubtedly involved that clarification, which cannot be expressly understood as the working out of what is true and ultimate and definite in reality. True aesthetics is the experiencing of real and future reality. Art is creation on the basis of this experience.³⁶

Von Balthasar

We turn now to Hans Urs Von Balthasar, who in contrast to the two previous reform theologians, is a Roman Catholic. Balthasar and Barth had an on going dialogue on a number of topics. With regard to the topic at hand, Balthasar, while differing from Barth on a number of points, also looked to Barth for his important Christological corrective. More so than just the Christological, Balthasar clutches to Barth's trinitarian emphasis declaring "we must remain firmly trinitarian in our theology of beauty."³⁷ The distinctive of his theology is what he terms the three transcendentals; truth, goodness and beauty (Barth rejects the notion of transcendentals).³⁸ It is beauty that for Balthasar "sets the seal" on the other transcendentals, truth and goodness.³⁹ Commenting on Balthasar's position, de Gruchy says, "If Balthasar is right, then the neglect of beauty has been devastating not only for the other transcendentals but also for Christianity."⁴⁰ It is not difficult here to see why Barth and Balthasar, while irreconcilable on some points had an amiable dialogue.

The difficulty for Balthasar arises, in part, because "beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained splendor around the

³⁶ Ibid., 508.

³⁷ Hans U. Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph Fessio S.J. and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, *Seeing the Form* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982; reprint, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 64.

³⁸ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 103.

³⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another.”⁴¹ Balthasar laments, “No longer loved or fostered by religion, beauty is lifted from its face as a mask, and its absence exposes features on that face which threaten to become incomprehensible to man.”⁴² He continues his lament suggesting that what is “good” loses its attractiveness without beauty. “Man stands before the good and asks himself why it must be done and not rather its alternative evil.”⁴³ As enlightening as these reflections are, Balthasar does not find rest with these abstractions of beauty. John W. de Gruchy points us to the heart of Balthasar’s theology; “theological aesthetics is about the self-disclosure of the glory (*doxa*) of the triune God that validates itself in the historical form (*Gestalt*) in which the divine splendour is revealed and received.”⁴⁴ Not only then is beauty, and by extension art, necessary to the vitality of Church, it is a necessary means of revelation of God’s glory and truth.

Frank Burch Brown

It would be easy at this point to skip over dissenting points of view; however, often in dissent are needful correctives or at least stones to sharpen our own positions. Frank Burch Brown reacts to the notion that revelation in Christ is the source of all truth and thus in regards to the subject at hand, the source of truth in all things aesthetic.⁴⁵ He asserts, “Christian revelation is not what discovered to us the nature of the truths of logic or quantum mechanics...nor is it, consequently, the sufficient means by which we can discover all other basic truths, such as those pertaining to art and aesthetics.”⁴⁶ At first glance it may appear that he has a valid point, after all, Scripture, our primary record of the revelation of Jesus Christ, has little if any thing to say

⁴¹ Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* : Vol.1, 18.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 109.

⁴⁵ Brown singles out Dorothy Sayers and Balthasar in his polemic, but its likely that he would reject Barth’s even more extreme position.

⁴⁶ Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 20.

directly to these issues. Nevertheless, this betrays a fundamentally flawed Christology and perhaps the dismantling of orthodox Trinitarian doctrine. If, as the Apostle Paul tells us, “For by him [Jesus Christ] 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” (Col. 1:16), then does not even the intricacies of quantum mechanics find its source in Jesus Christ. Brown errs in adopting a far narrower view of revelation in Jesus Christ than is appropriate. To the topic at hand, it is true that we will not read about color theory or principles of artistic composition in the Gospels, but we will discover the one in whom we see true beauty, the measuring rod of all that is true, good and beautiful. Brown exhibits our human urge to define truth, goodness and beauty in our own terms, as if we could discover something that God did not create or reveal to us.⁴⁷

Brown does, however, rightly ask the question of how we apprehend truth and meaning, particularly when it is in aesthetic form.⁴⁸ It is fine to say with Barth and Balthasar that art is an important means of proclaiming God’s glory (including by way of negation), but how is it that we judge aesthetics, let alone beauty when in our corruption “we see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12). Brown rightly directs us to the communities in which we live and move.⁴⁹ At this point it should be becoming clear that the emergent church’s emphasis on community is an essential ingredient in developing the language of art and beauty if art is to effectively communicate truth. Returning momentarily to Barth and his love for the music of Mozart, it takes little imagination to conclude that Mozart would have seemed quite odd in Jerusalem in the time of Christ. That is not to say that they would or would not have found it delightful, however, it likely would have

⁴⁷ This is perhaps a serious danger in Balthasar’s view of truth, goodness and beauty as transcendental, however, this author has not studied Balthasar’s writing sufficiently to authoritatively make this declaration.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

been categorically rejected as being non-Jewish and thus equated with gentile corruption.

Meaning in art, understanding the truth that it conveys is inherently problematic apart from its creative community in the same way a language is meaningless to those who do not speak it.

Although Brown contends with Balthasar, he does retain a sense of standards in aesthetics, in particular art. He concedes that art *can* be religious.⁵⁰

...we are prepared to consider more carefully the ways in which art as we have defined it and conceived it characteristically addresses and engages us in such a fashion as to have potential for religious meaning. Three clusters of artistic traits will be of particular interest here: (1) that art is made in such a way as to be appreciably aesthetic and often beautiful; (2) that it is made skillfully, knowledgeably, and creatively by human agents; and (3) that it is made in forms that can express, fictively represent, and imaginatively transform 'worlds' in a revelatory or prophetic way.⁵¹

Importantly, Brown asserts that:

When art becomes purely a virtuosic display, it has little to commend it religiously or morally, but then it also is weak as art...Even so, the Christian theologian need not be embarrassed to say outright that skilful and knowledgeable artistic making in principle is morally and religiously good, exemplifying an important feature of humanity's having been made in the image of God.⁵²

Brown also speaks of art as revelatory of the transcendent, in a sense playing a role in making the transcendent immanent.⁵³ Here we find an otherwise unexpected intersection with Barth's theology. While Barth does not express it in terms of transcendence and immanence, he speaks widely on Jesus Christ as the locus of revelation of all things divine. Art that reveals the glory of God is by this act creating a means to know something of the person of Jesus Christ, the one in whom we see the Father.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Ibid., 102.

⁵¹ Ibid., 102-03.

⁵² Ibid., 107.

⁵³ Ibid., 117ff.

⁵⁴ Cf. John 14:8-13.

John W. deGruchy

As we continue to move from the more abstruse aspects of a theology of beauty and art to the application of the theology, we turn to de Gruchy. While much could be written about his own theology, suffice to say that he has already provided much of the prototype for the preceding theological discussion. De Gruchy's primary focus is on the transforming potential in beauty expressed in art. He directs us to consider God's call to Isaiah (cf. Is. 6). "Isaiah's call to be a prophet of social justice was an intense 'aesthetic moment' of vision and audition. The awesome glory of Yahweh's holiness was revealed to the startled worshipper with such power that it led directly to his own personal transformation."⁵⁵ De Gruchy draws together from the Hebrew Scriptures "that the beauty of a holy life and the beauty of the holy place are both reflections of the beauty of the holy God," as such Isaiah was "overwhelmed and transformed in the sanctuary by the beauty of holiness."⁵⁶ He continues by grappling with the question of whether it is "Yahweh's beauty that is holy or Yahweh's holiness that is beautiful."⁵⁷ Perhaps it is best understood in Barthian terms such that we experience God's holiness as beautiful.

Summary

We have arrived at the point where we can make the following assertions with reasonable theological support. First, we must understand beauty not in terms of what arouses our corrupt senses, rather by what should arouse our senses, namely the glory of God. We experience true beauty, the truly beautiful when we behold God's glory. Secondly, we see dimly. We see God's glory through the person of Jesus Christ and His revelation of the Father. We also see God's glory dimly through that which He has created. Thirdly, we have a responsibility to proclaim

⁵⁵ De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, 221.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 224-25.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 225.

God's glory, both by illuminating the revelation in Jesus Christ and in creation in general. The significant means of doing this is through the arts (might preaching itself not be considered an art). Fourthly, we neglect the arts at our own peril.

4. TRUTH IN BEAUTY – DIRECTION FOR THE EMERGENT CHURCH

Now that we have determined both the necessity of art in the vast human experience of God's glory and the central determination of undefiled beauty in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ we must turn to its praxis in the emergent church. As Ryken points out, "all too often Christians settle for something that is functional but not beautiful" and when we do produce art it "can only be described as *kitsch*—tacky artwork of poor quality that appeals to low tastes."⁵⁸ It appears that Evangelicals, felling the need for art and beauty, often substituting cheap alternatives as if by not being "fine art" it is some how permissible, misses the point of art.

William Dyrness defines art as "that human activity that goes beyond the useful to embody in allusive color, shape, or sound the joy or pain of being human...that it illuminates something about the world's depth and reality."⁵⁹ We understand the truth of our humanity and the world around us through and in ecclesial relationship with Jesus Christ. Painting a sunset, we paint the splendor of the creators work, capturing our own response to His glory, our experience of the beautiful. Painting the horrors of war, we paint the truth of man's depravity as revealed to us through Jesus Christ. Painting a nude figure, we depict the way we were created, unashamed, yet our own response to the subject may convict us of our fallen-ness. Painting a narrative of a Biblical story, we convey our response to the text, a visual exegesis. Webber posits, "the arts are

⁵⁸ Ryken, *Exodus*, 946.

⁵⁹ William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 99.

not mere enhancements or adornments, not merely functional acts of communication...They embody the message of redemption.”⁶⁰ Echoing the thoughts of Barth, Webber cites Mark Driscoll as saying “‘The artist cannot merely reflect the fallen state of things’ but must also ‘cause a thirst for the beauty yet to be revealed in paradise.’”⁶¹

It will be obvious by now that the topic of icons and the controversies concerning them has been surreptitiously side stepped. In some senses, all art is iconic, yet with Barth we recognize its inadequacy. Arguably, the act of idolatry in art is not in the artist, but the one who views the art. Art is the artists response to reality, to the truth revealed in Jesus Christ, not a primary witness but secondary. Even as a preacher elucidating a passage of scripture is communicating his considered response to the text, so an artist elucidates the truth and glory of God as revealed in Scripture and creation. We hear the preacher’s reflections as we view God’s truth and glory through the artist’s eyes. Even as we would reject a preacher who said he was god, so we must reject art that says “this is god” for that is clearly idolatry. At the same time, even as we do not reject preaching that points to God, we ought not reject art that points to God.

If as Webber suggests that re-appropriating the arts in the Christian community is value of the emerging church—and this author avers it must be so—then with Dyrness we stand at the door leading to a renewal of faith, a renewal intimately linked to deep sensory reflection possible only in art.⁶² Beauty as embodied in art is a necessary means of reflecting the Truth and goodness of God, His glory.

⁶⁰ Webber, *Younger Evangelicals*, 211.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 212-13.

⁶² Although referenced to the conclusion of his book, this is a reflection of the greater message of Dyrness’s book. Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 155ff.

5. APPENDIX - PAINTING

The Rose – 16x20 Acrylic on Canvas

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