The Church’s Cure for the Common Nihilism: How “Beauty Will Save the World”

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We live in a distracting culture. It is a culture entrenched within the Information Age: the age of 24-hour news networks, high-speed internet access and on-demand entertainment. At any one given moment, numerous links, ads, and emails compete for our attention. And for the most part, we love it. We look with anticipation towards our next stimulus, hoping the next text message or website, or movie will be more interesting than the last...or perhaps, more distracting than the last. Michael Hanby suggests that the motive and ultimate cause of this incessant need for entertainment is “less the expression of a celebration of the self, the pleasure principle or a will to power than the expression of an oppressed and more fundamental pathology: boredom.”¹ Why does Hanby classify boredom as “pathology”?

Hanby notes that there is no etymological for the word or concept of “boredom” prior to the “rise of bourgeois society and the triumph of industrialization” around the 18th century, coinciding with the birth of “modern” society.² He states that boredom itself is a twofold failure: both “a failure of the world to be compelling to a subjectiostensibly entitled to such an expectation and a failure or incapacity on the part of the subject to be compelled.”³ This double negation of world and subject effectively strips the modern person of any hope that the world itself could have intrinsic meaning or goodness. Rather than lapsing into this dreaded meaningless void, the modern person fills up his or her days with noise and news.

In order to heal the world of this pathology, the Church seeks to reintroduce modern culture to the objective reality of beauty—the beauty which witnesses to the truth and goodness of Being through its glorious splendour. Beauty can jostle a complacent culture, waking it up, if only momentarily, from its trance-like meandering through the world. Beauty can stir up humanity’s thirst for meaning and transcendence and can thus be the “grace” necessary to lead us back to God. The Church need only to point back into her rich history in order to inundate the modern person with countless masterpieces of music, poetry, drama, painting, sculpture and literature. Beyond the earthly splendour in these works of art, the Church is also the faithful guardian of the Supreme Beauty of Christ. Through her sacred art and her saints, she constantly offers this beauty, the beauty of the Christian life, to the ages.
In this essay, I demonstrate the power of the beautiful to restore intrinsic meaning to a world that has abandoned all hope of finding it. I have organized the essay into two major sections: The first will introduce and examine beauty itself. Using the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Luigi Giussani, I attempt to show how the human search for meaning is inspired by beauty and that it finds its ultimate end in the Beauty of Christ. In the second section, I examine the phenomena of art and artistry and propose that there is a striking similarity between the artist and the saint in their humble service to Beauty.

I. Beauty in Humanity’s Search for Meaning

Defining beauty is a difficult matter. To the modern mind, the concept of beauty is almost immediately identified as something completely subjective: it is in the eye of the beholder. But as Hans Urs von Balthasar⁴ points out in the beginning of his voluminous work *The Glory of the Lord*, beauty must be reclaimed as part of the *objective* structure of being itself:

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 today 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 anyone who sneers at her name as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past—whether he admits it or not—can no longer stand and soon will no longer be able to love.⁵

By reasserting beauty’s identity (unity) with the true and the good, Balthasar re-establishes the *objective* quality of beauty. Everything that exists, everything that participates in being, is *objectively* beautiful and thus simultaneously both good and true. These “transcendental” qualities of being are indeed trustworthy standards for all of our judgments because we can measure offenses against them: “we define ‘living’ as an offense against truth, ‘malice’ against goodness, ‘fragments’ versus unity, ‘uselessness’ and ‘trash’ against beauty.” ⁶ This brings to mind St Augustine’s definition of evil as a privation, that is, an absence of some good. Evil, although permitted by God, is not created by Him since everything which He creates, in the very fact that it is, is good (and true, and beautiful).⁷ It is this distinction between being and non-being that places beauty back into the sphere of objectivity.

St Thomas Aquinas recognized beauty as the *manifestation* of all of the transcendental elements of being.⁸ It is for this reason that Balthasar feels confident in saying that “the beautiful is above all a form,” that is, the encounterable face of being itself.⁹ The term “form,” as it is used here, is incredibly foreign to the modern mind (having been so long divorced from the metaphysical
tradition) and can be hard to grasp. Basically, the form of a thing is what makes it intelligible as a whole: the form lets us know what the thing is. A form is also irreducible to the sum of its parts. i.e., there is something more to me than simply my height, weight and habits. This appearing form or figure (species) is accompanied by a certain splendour or radiance from within itself (lumen). This is the charm (charis) of the beautiful, the attractive magnetism that flows out from the form and strikes us when gazing at it. The experience of beauty, therefore, is a wedding of the species and the lumen of a being, its form and its splendour. Balthasar explains, “We are confronted simultaneously with both the figure and that which shines forth from the figure, making it into a worthy, a love-worthy thing.” It is in this experience of beauty, the “aesthetical encounter,” that these concepts of form and splendour become most recognizable.

According to Luigi Giussani, the encounter with beauty prompts us to ask “ultimate questions” about meaning and purpose that define our original nature as human beings. When we are confronted by beauty, be it in nature or in artwork, it strikes us in the heart, the very core of our being. Embraced by the splendour of the beautiful form, the aesthetical encounter can break us free from the banal, superficial lives we often lead. While we can often become complacent, living lives in a “horizontal” dimension (often no more than a succession of moments and sense experiences), the experience of beauty can reawaken our conscious desire for profound meaning and for mystery, by drawing us into the “vertical” dimension of life: the magnificence and depth of meaning. Giussani calls the drive to discover the very nature of existence the religious sense: “All of the impulses with which nature spurs man forward, all of the steps of human motion—which is conscious and free precisely because it is human—every step man’s original thrust induces him to take—all are determined, made possible, and implemented on the strength of this global, all-embracing impulse that is the religious sense.”

For one who believes, the word “God” corresponds to the goal of the religious sense: God is both the source of all meaning and the end to which the whole of the cosmos tends. For someone who claims to be a non-believer, the word “God” seldom, if ever, corresponds to this ultimate object to which the believer refers. To the non-believer, the word “God” refers to a caricature of God, cartoonishly emphasizing certain features while denying and neglecting others. Yet, to one who takes the word seriously, God is simultaneously “a presence, eternally imminent upon, although living ever beyond the human horizon.” In other words, one realizes that the more rigorous the search for meaning, the faster that meaning recedes from his grasp. Recognizing the immensity and unattainability of the “meaning of life,” humanity comes face-to-face with the idea
of mystery: the awareness that the object of our ultimate desiring cannot be fully grasped using human reason as its measure, and “cannot be reduced to any achievement or point which [we] can reach.”

In The Screwtape Letters, C. S. Lewis documents the fictional correspondence of Screwtape, a senior devil and Under Secretary for the “Infernal Lowerarchy,” to his nephew Wormwood, a junior Temptor. When instructing Wormwood on how to better tempt his “patient” (a young British man), Screwtape often advises that Wormwood simply emphasize the ordinariness of the world. Screwtape recounts a story from the days when he had tempted an atheist man: One day the atheist was reading in the British museum and Screwtape noticed that his thought began to “go the wrong way” (no doubt moved by his surroundings or reading material to contemplate “ultimate” questions). After a struggle against God (“The Enemy,” for Screwtape) Screwtape eventually subdued the man’s profound questioning by encouraging the man to focus on “real life”: his desire for some lunch, and the banal normalcy of a passing paperboy and bus sufficed. Reflecting on the nature of demonic temptation in general, Screwtape later quips: “It is funny how mortals always picture us putting things into their minds; in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.”

Conscious recognition of the religious sense inspires humankind to creatively formulate and express the nature of its relationship with God in its own terms. The very act of creatively expressing a relationship with a God who can never be reached by human efforts reflects that “global” aspect of the religious sense. It is in this attempt, this reaching out, that each religion finds its truth and dignity, because it finds its grounding in our universal human nature. These religions, having their roots in diverse human and cultural soils, will grow and flower in ways as creative as the human imagination itself.

While we have emphasized the striving of humanity towards God, we must also maintain that it is only because this mystery becomes manifest that man even begins this striving towards the beyond. That is, religious creativity is ultimately the response to a mystery which reveals itself to man. The religious yearning of man sincerely hopes for the aid of the divine: “At the heart of the greatest artistic expressions in all places and eras is the presentiment or the affirmation of the hypothesis that the divine can help man.” The Christian claim is that God has definitively revealed Himself by becoming a man named Jesus of Nazareth. God has entered history; he has become a fact: he has lived in our midst (and is still alive!) and has claimed that he himself is the Way. Jesus is unique because he identifies himself with God—both in his words and, effectively, in his actions. He himself says “I am the way and the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). If he is who he claims he is, he cannot be measured by any other earthly standard but
himself since he would be utterly Unique. If he is the Incarnation of the Mysterv, then reason or even the most religious of men, as we have seen before, cannot “measure” him—only God can adequately express God.\textsuperscript{25}

The first prerequisite for understanding anything. Balthasar reminds us, is to accept what is given just as it is, in its totality.\textsuperscript{26} In order to understand who Jesus is, therefore, we must look at the entirety of his life—his foretold birth, hidden adolescence, ministry, death, Resurrection and Ascension—the entire form of his life. “In order to see that each individual aspect in truth receives its full meaning only by its overall relationship to the whole, the ‘art of total vision’ is required. From one arm the archaeologist can reconstruct the whole statue, and the paleontologist can reconstruct the whole animal from a single tooth.”\textsuperscript{27} Such an eye for the complete form suggests implicitly a great deal of experience. To be able to recognize the composer of a specific piece of music from hearing just a few measures requires one to have listened to a great deal of music. Therefore, in order to see the overall shape and contour of Jesus’ life, we must be willing to share our life with him. It is this willingness to “come and see” (John 1:39) Jesus’ life, to accept him in every aspect which he gives himself, which allows us to be enlightened by him.

But as mere humans we cannot expect to apprehend the Mysterv, even if it has become flesh in Jesus and “pitched his tent” among us (John 1:14), unless the Mysterv itself gives us the capacity to apprehend it. Balthasar contends that the experience of faith in Christ in an experience analogous to the experience of the beautiful.\textsuperscript{28} In the encounter with Christ, the definitive expression of God, we are illuminated and drawn by a different light—God Himself. The uncreated light that radiates from the form of Jesus Christ is God’s Glor(\textit{doxa; Herrlichkeit}). the manifestation of God’s power and majesty. Like the splendour of any beautiful form, the Glory of the Lord is both charm (\textit{charis}) and “grace”(also \textit{charis}), since it is freely poured out as a gift. “This glory strikes the non-believer (vision) pulling him into the form and enabling him to believe (rapture). He is pulled into its depths, not simply for an encounter with absolute Being, but into a personal relationship with the tri-personal God (who is also absolute Being).”\textsuperscript{29} The Glory of God the Father shines through the whole of Jesus, the Son, because Jesus comes not to do his own will, but “the will of Him who sent me” (John 6:38). It is in Jesus’ complete and total emptiness (\textit{kenosis}) of himself out of love for the Father that the sublimity of Trinitarian love becomes manifest. And while Jesus’ whole earthly life was indeed a constant referral to the Father (cf. John 14:8-11), nowhere does the revelation of this love become so manifest as in the Crucifixion, when he suffers so thoroughly for the sins of the world and must descend into the abyss of Hell.
It is in the form of the Crucified One—stripped, torn and pierced through—that Jesus, devoid of all earthly beauty, reveals the depths of God’s love, and thus, the Glory—the Supreme Beauty—of God, who “is love” (1 John 4:16). As Isaiah prophesied, “He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (53:2). And yet by embracing this ugliness and even death (“death on a cross!” Philippians 2:8), God’s all-embracing love expresses itself as a Beauty that surpasses a mere worldly aesthetics and perfects it. The cross at Calvary becomes a sort of axis mundi around which the rest of the forms of the world turn, and through which they all have their deepest meaning. In the case of beauty, therefore, one must look at the crucifixion with eyes illuminated by faith to apprehend the “theological aesthetic.” We must keep this in mind when we begin to consider Christian sacred art.

II. Art, Craftsmanship and Holiness: A Catholic Perspective

In the first section I adopted Luigi Giussani’s concept of the religious sense and affirmed the fundamental value, truth and dignity of human religious creativity. Here I propose that artistic expression, as a human phenomenon, is equally true and divinized since it is an articulation of that “all-embracing” impulse that is the religious sense.30

Pope John Paul II’s Letter to Artists, written in 1999, is a magnificent resource for understanding art and artistry from within the Catholic tradition. In the letter, he links artistic expression with what Giussani has called the religious sense:

Every genuine artistic intuition goes beyond what the senses perceive and, reaching beneath reality’s surface, strives to interpret its hidden mystery. The intuition itself springs from the depths of the human soul, where the desire to give meaning to one’s own life is joined by the fleeting vision of beauty and of the mysterious unity of things.31

Artistic creations themselves become “incarnations” (however inadequate) of whatever beauty the artist had caught sight of in the midst of the “creative moment.” Thus the artwork, through its own beauty, can help to bring another person into contact with the deeper reality which the artist had attempted to express through certain colors, shapes, proportions rhythms, harmonies or symbols which he or she had used.

Near the beginning of his letter, John Paul II32 makes a distinction that is essential to the proper Christian understanding of the artistic endeavor: the difference between creator and craftsman. One who creates actually brings something into existence which hitherto did not exist at all. This, the Pope reminds us, is a mode of operation that only God can claim, since it is only he who calls the world into existence ex nihilo, “out of nothing.” When we say the word “create” in a modern discourse, or any derivative of it, we usually mean “to fashion” or “to craft,” and not
creation, in the strict sense. If we say “the potter created this vase,” we do not mean that she summoned the vase from nothingness. Instead we mean that she took clay and gave that clay a certain meaningful form. In this case, the potter is not truly a “creator” but rather a “craftsman.” The craftsman is nevertheless given a share in the creative powers of God: “Through his ‘artistic creativity’ man appears more than ever ‘in the image of God.’” 33 The gift of artistic talent in general bears within itself a sense of obligation for the artist: the artist is driven not to waste his or her talent, but rather to develop it. “in order to put it at the service of their neighbor and of humanity as a whole” (cf. Matthew 25:14-30). 34 But not everyone is born with this artistic “genius”: we are not all capable of painting a Last Judgment or sculpting a David. And yet, while this may be so, John Paul II reminds us that “as Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.” 35

This specific call to craftsmanship is not a challenge to make something beautiful (like an artist, proper), but rather a challenge to do something beautifully: in this case, living one’s life. The sacred artist is responsible for divine material form to heavenly realities in order to allow God’s Glory to shine through them. Analogously, every Christian must strive towards sanctity so that God’s Light can shine through the very form of their lives. This is demanded by Christ Himself (“be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” Matthew 5:48) and echoed recently in the Second Vatican Council’s “Universal Call to Holiness.” 36 This contradicts modern society’s tendency of attributing to artists the creative power of God Himself.

Artists are sometimes portrayed as the ideal anarchists, those who live no thought to law or limit. Simply “will” their artwork into existence. In this portrayal, they literally create new meaning through the formation of their artwork. It is this emphasis on willing, on action, which seems to draw us back into Michael Hanby’s diagnosis of a bored or boring world. By manufacturing their own meaning through their works of art, they are seen as fighting back that intrinsic, suffocating meaninglessness of the world, which threatens us with boredom. If they do not exercise their radical freedom, their ability to choose and do, then they too, fall into the void of nihilism.

This particular worldview, in which beauty and meaning themselves are completely created by the artist, goes against both the Catholic doctrine of creation, and the universal artistic experience known as inspiration. An artist is often inspired by their experience of the world, be it the grandeur of a landscape, the song of a bird, a captivating poem, or even the interior experience of a specific mood or feeling. In any case, the artist is the recipient of this inspiration: their Muse comes to them. John Paul II describes this moment:
All artists experience the unbridgeable gap which lies between the work of their hands, however successful it may be, and the dazzling perfection of the beauty glimpsed in the ardor of the creative moment: what they manage to express in their painting, their sculpting, their creating is no more than a glimmer of the splendor which flared for a moment before the eyes of their spirit.37

The beauty and depth of reality spark the artistic creative impulse. But as we have seen already, this beauty points towards a Beauty greater than itself. The clear spring, the light of dawn and the eyes of one’s lover all “cry aloud that they did not make themselves.”38 Balthasar contests that it is in this sense that “all great art is religious, an act of homagor before the glory of what exists.”39 John Saward explains: “Not every artist has been religious in the sense of being a believer who formally worships the one true God, but all great art has been religious in the sense that it manifests the wonder of being, the beauty of things as they reflect the brilliance of the divine Wisdom that made them.”40

If the artist is to adequately express the inspiration of his or her muse, they must exhibit an inner receptivity and humility. This receptivity is akin to the “lightness of heart” which is necessary to be moved by beauty in the aesthetical encounter. It is the capacity and the willingness to serve that splendour which washes over the artist in the moment of inspiration. Balthasar puts it beautifully: “Externally the artist may appear haughty, but internally he must be a humbly receptive womb for the ‘conception’.”41 Sometimes it can be as if one is giving birth to the beauty of one’s inspiration by giving it a form of corporeal expression: much like Michelangelo “forming” the beautiful sculptures trapped inside marble blocks. To humbly express the “world of the ineffable” is the artist’s “torment” according to John Paul II.42 And yet, in Christianity, the hidden meaning of the world and of human life have become manifest in an unsurpassable and unique way in Jesus Christ. The Christian artist must humbly serve this reality.

Being drawn into the form of Christ through faith, the believing Christian shares in the divine life, and is thus transformed by it. The grace that God lavishes upon believers gives the Christian a new “sensorium,” that is, a new way of experiencing the world through their existing senses. “The senses are not to be discarded,” says Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI),43 “but they should be expanded to their widest capacity” through the gift of the Holy Spirit.44 Christians “no longer see just the externals but the reality that is not apparent to their senses yet shines through their senses: it is the Lord, now alive in a new way.”45 Christian artists, to the extent that they cooperate with God’s grace, should therefore perceive the world differently. Ideally, this broadened sensorium, enlightened by Trinitarian Love and the hope of the Resurrection, should allow them to recognize and express in their artwork the deepest meaning of existence, revealed by
Christ. It is when the artist places his artistic talents at the service of Christ and the Church, for the Glory of God and the sanctification of His people, that Christian art becomes sacred art.

Like the artist who serves the beauty which inspired her—giving it shape, rhythm or color—the saints serve the Risen Jesus Christ. the Incarnation of Divine Beauty, by willingly “stepping back” so that Christ might live through them and their talents. The saint’s holiness is thus a gift which they have freely received due to their fundamental openness and humility in the face of their Lord. The humility which the saint exhibits is far from being simply a void or emptiness—a mere lack of will. Like in the case of the artist. the receptivity of the saint is more like the blank canvas or the formless lump of clay, awaiting the Master’s touch. It is an “active receptivity,” a waiting to do the will of God. It is for this reason that the saints, who conform themselves to the will of Christ, all have Mary as their model. Because of her loving trust and her cooperation with the Holy Spirit, her life was crafted into the masterpiece of God. She is tota pulchra, all-beautiful, because the Glory of the form of Christ radiates from every aspect of her life. The saints are those who constantly point to Christ as their savior. Christ as their destitute and Christ as the source of the Goodness. Beauty and Love which cascades from their lives. Sacred art and the sacred life both share this humble reference to a Beauty far greater than themselves. Ratzinger ties this all together magnificently:

The only really effective apologia for Christianity comes down to two arguments, namely, the saints the Church has produced and the art which has grown in her womb. Better witness is borne to the Lord by the splendor of holiness and art which have arisen in the community of believers than by the clever excuses which apologetics has come up with to justify the dark sides which, sadly, are so frequent in the Church’s human history. If the Church is to continue to transform the world, how can she dispense with beauty in her liturgies, that beauty which is so closely linked with love and with the radiance of the Resurrection? No, Christians must not be too easily satisfied. They must take their Church into a place where beauty—and hence truth—is at home. Without this the world will become the first circle of Hell.

Conclusion

Both the artist and the saint have the ability to make eternal truths visible, audible and legible to the specific time or culture in which they live. Artwork, especially religious and sacred artwork, has the capacity to draw spiritual realities into that stream of sensual distraction that the modern mind is subject to. The beauty of artwork can break modern humanity out of its insistence that “reality” consists only in things measurable and scientifically verifiable. Beauty broadens the horizon of the senses, allowing man to peer into the depths of Being itself, and ask ultimate questions about meaning and purpose. It is only with such an eye for beauty that one can then glimpse the unique
and Supreme Beauty which is revealed by Christ. It is in the saints that the “authentic” Church becomes visible and tangible. These holy women and men allow the Beauty of the Christian life to shine like a beacon from their own lives. The saints are neither bored people nor boring people. On the contrary, the saints’ lives are saturated by inv. the fruit of being loved by a God who delights in the beauty of His creation. (“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” Genesis 1:31.) It is the beauty of His creation that beckons us to look beyond the dark, hopeless world of nihilism and boredom, and invites us to step with Christ into the radiant, invous New Life of the Resurrection.

Notes

1 Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Idiot, Part III, Chapter 5. This paper has been abridged from its original length.
3 Ibid.
4 Hans Urs Von Balthasar (1905-1988) was a Swiss-born Catholic theologian and priest who wrote voluminous works on the Catholic faith, the most famous of which were his Triloft: The Glory of the Lord, Theo-Drama and Theo-Logic. His was a life marked by the love of beauty, whether it manifested in his close friendship with mystic Adrienne Von Stev (1902-1967), or the glorious works of Mozart.
7 See Genesis 1:31.
9 Balthasar, Glory, 151.
10 Saward, Beauty of Holiness, 45.
12 John Gibb, “Love Alone is Believable: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Apologetics” (IgnatiusInsight.com)
14 Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was an Italian priest who founded the Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation. In the homily at his funeral Mass, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger said Luigi Giussani grew up in a house with little bread, but much music. Being touched by beauty, “He was not satisfied with any beauty whatever, a banal beauty, he was looking rather for Beauty itself, infinite Beauty, and thus he found Christ, in Christ true beauty, the path of life, the true inv.” (clonline.org, Homily of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Funeral Mass of Fr Giussani)
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid. 5.
18 Ibid.
20 Ibid. 16.
21 Giussani, Origin, 13
22 Ibid. 21.
23 This beautiful vienette, written by Luigi Giussani, illustrating the nature of Christ’s claim seems worth including here at length: “Let us picture the world as an immense plain where numerous groups of human beings, under the direction of engineers and architects, are busy working on disparate projects to build bridges with thousands of arches serving as links between earth and heaven, between the ephemeral place of their existence and the ‘star’ of destiny. With its infinite number of building sites, the plain is a hive of activity. At a certain point a man arrives on the scene, and his pace embraces the whole frenzied workplace. Suddenly he shouts: ‘Stop!’ The closest to him cease working, and then gradually the others follow until they are all watching him. And he tells them: ‘You are great and noble. You are making...”

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a sublime effort, but it is an unhappy one because you will never manage to build a road linking your world with the ultimate mystery. Abandon your projects, lay down your tools. Destiny has taken pity on you. Follow me and I will build the bridge, for I am destiny.' Now let us try to imagine the reaction of all those people to such a declaration. First the architects, then the work foremen, then the best artisans would find themselves telling their laborers instinctively: ‘Don’t stop working. Keep going. Can’t you see this man is crazy?’ And they would echo: ‘Of course, he must be crazy.’ Resume their work on their bosses’ orders, others might say: ‘You can see he’s crazy.’ There would be just a few who would not take their eyes off this man, for they have been profoundly moved. They would not obey their bosses as the masses had done, but would approach and follow him.” Giussani. Orizz. 32.

24 All biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.
25 Balthasar. Glor. 468
26 Ibid. 467.
27 Ibid. 512.
28 This analogy of being (analogia entis) assumes that while there may be a structural and experiential similarity between God’s glory and of the beauty of Being, for every similarity between the world and God, there is an even greater dissimilarity—the chasm between creature and Creator (Fourth Lateran Council).
29 Ci hak, “Balthasar’s Apologetics.”
30 This is not to say that religion and art, in themselves, can never be used for malicious or obliquely evil purposes.
31 John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Artists” (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, April 4, 1999), Section 6.
32 Pope John Paul II (1920-2005) was a great lover of poetry and the arts. being himself a poet and an actor. He always enjoyed the beauty of nature, and was even known to sneak out during his Papacy in order to ski.
33 John Paul II. “Letter to Artists.” Section 1. Interestingly. John Paul II ties this notion of man’s “creative dominion” back to Genesis’ account of the creation of man, specifically Genesis 1:27-28: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 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 air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”
34 Ibid. section 2.
35 Ibid.
36 Lumen Gentium, Chapter 5.
38 Augustine. Confessions II, quoted in Savid, Beauty of Holiness. 75.
39 Balthasar, Glory of the Lord vol. 4, 12f. quoted in Savid, Beauty of Holiness. 76.
40 It is because of this, Savid argues, that an “atheistic art” is really a self-contradiction, since the intrinsic meaning and beauty of the world which the artist expresses can only exist if a Beautiful and Wise God had created it. (If the world were simply the result of random chance, there would be no inherent meaning in it to express.) Beauty of Holiness, 76.
41 Balthasar, Glor. 251.
43 Pope Benedict XVI has written much about the beauty of the Liturgy and of the beauty of Christian life. He, like Balthasar, is a great lover of Mozart and of the magnificence of nature.
45 Ratzinger, Liturg. 123.
46 In the Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty, Savid argues that the morally good artist, all other things being equal, will be a better artist than an immoral one. This is based on the proposition that the virtuous artist, living a life in harmony with God, will be better able to express the drama of human experience than an equally talented artist who has willfully distanced himself or herself from God, and thus, from an experience of God’s Love. Beauty of Holiness, 81, 82.
47 Josef Cardinal Ratzinger quoted in the beginning of John Savid’s The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty.
48 Hans Urs von Balthasar. Love Alone is Credible (San Fvodor Dostoevskiy. The Idiot. Part III. Chapter 5. This paper has been abridged from its original length.
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48 See Genesis 1:31.


48 Balthasar, Glory, 151.

48 Saward, Beasts of Holiness, 45.


48 John Ciha, “Love Alone is Believable: Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Apologetics” (IgnatiusInsight.com)


48 Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was an Italian priest who founded the Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation. In the homily at his funeral Mass, then Cardinal Joseph RATZINGER said Luigi Giussani grew up in a house with little bread, but much music. Being touched by beauty, “He was not satisfied with any beauty whatever, a banal beauty. he was looking rather for Beauty itself. infinite Beautv. and thus he found Christ. in Christ true beauty. the path of life, the true ioc.” (online.org, Homily of Cardinal Joseph RATZINGER, Funeral Mass of Fr Giussani).


48 Ibid.

48 Ibid. 5.

48 Ibid.


48 Ibid. 16.

48 Giussani, Origin, 13

48 Ibid. 21.

48 This beautiful vignette, written by Luigi Giussani, illustrating the nature of Christ’s claim seems worth including here at length: “Let us picture the world as an immense plain where numerous groups of human beings, under the direction of engineers and architects, are busy working on disparate projects to build bridges with thousands of arches serving as links between earth and heaven, between the ephemeral place of their existence and the ‘star’ of destiny. With its infinite number of building sites, the plain is a hive of activity. At a certain point a man arrives on the scene, and his gaze embraces the whole frenzied workplace. Suddenly he shouts: ‘Stop!’ The closest to him cease working, and then gradually the others follow until they are all watching him. And he tells them: ‘You are great and noble. You are making a sublime effort, but it is an unhappy one because you will never manage to build a road linking your world with the ultimate mystery. Abandon your projects, lay down your tools. Destiny has taken pity on you. Follow me and I will build the bridge, for I am destiny.’ Now let us try to imagine the reaction of all those people to such a declaration. First the architects, then the work foremen, then the best artisans would find themselves telling their laborers instinctively: ‘Don’t stop working. Keen goine. Can’t you see this man is crazy?’ And they would echo: ‘Of course, he must be crazy.’ Resuming their work on their bosses’ orders, others might say: ‘You can see he’s crazy.’ There would be just a few who would not take their eyes off this man, for they have been profoundly moved. They would not obey their bosses as the masses had done, but would approach and follow him.” Giussani, Origin. 32.

48 All biblical quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

48 Balthasar, Glory, 468

48 Ibid. 467.

48 Ibid. 512.

48 This analogy of being (analogia entis) assumes that while there may be a structural and experiential similarity between God’s glory and the beauty of Being, for every similarity between the world and God, there is an even greater dissimilarity—the chasm between creature and Creator (Fourth Lateran Council).

48 Ciha, “Balthasar’s Apologetics.”

48 This is not to say that religion and art, in themselves, can never be used for malicious or objectively evil purposes.

48 John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Artists” (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, April 4, 1999), Section 6.

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48 John Paul II, “Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Artists” (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, April 4, 1999), Section 6.

48 Pose John Paul II (1920-2005) was a great lover of beauty and of the arts. being himself a poet and an actor. He always enjoyed the beauty of nature, and was even known to sneak out during his Papacy in order to ski.

48 John Paul II, “Letter to Artists,” Section 1. Interestingly, John Paul II ties this notion of man’s “creative dominion” back to Genesis’ account of the creation of man, specifically Genesis 1:27-28: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. 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 air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."
48 Ibid. section 2.
48 Ibid.
48 Lumen Gentium, Chapter 5.
48 Augustine, Confessions II vol. 4. 12f. quoted in Saward, Beauty of Holiness, 75.
48 Balthasar, Glory of the Lord vol. 4. 12f. quoted in Saward, Beauty of Holiness, 76.
48 It is because of this, Saward argues, that an “atheistic art” is really a self-contradiction, since the intrinsic meaning and beauty of the world which the artist expresses can only exist if a Beautiful and Wise God had created it. (If the world were simply the result of random chance, there would be no inherent meaning in it to express.) Beauty of Holiness, 76.
48 Balthasar, Glory, 251.
48 Pope Benedict XVI has written much about the beauty of the Liturgy and of the beauty of Christian life. He, like Balthasar, is a great lover of Mozart and of the magnificence of nature.
48 Ratzinger, Liturgy, 123.
48 In the Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty, Saward argues that the morally good artist, all other things being equal, will be a better artist than an immoral one. This is based on the proposition that the virtuous artist, living a life in harmony with the Love of God, will be better able to express the drama of human experience than an equally talented artist who has willfully distanced his or herself from God, and thus, from an experience of God’s Love. Beauty of Holiness, 81, 82.
48 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger quoted in the beginning of John Saward’s The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty.

Bibliography