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# THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF BEAUTY IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION APPLIED TO THE CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of

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Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by

Mark Spencer Wheeler

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF BEAUTY IN SPIRITUAL
FORMATION APPLIED TO THE CHRISTIAN
HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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That the ineffable beauty of God may be sought, seen, and savored
by high school students in many places so as to
strengthen their proper affections and
draw them closer to God.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| BDAG | Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 |
| BDB | Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew-English Lexicon to the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977. Logos Bible Software |
| *DBLH* | Swanson, James. *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew: Old Testament*. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997. Logos Bible Software |
| *HALOT* | Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000. Logos Bible Software. |
| *LALHB* | Hoogendyk, Isaiah, ed. *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017. Logos Bible Software |
| LSJ | Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. With revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996 |
| LXX | The Septuagint |
| *NIDOTTE* | *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*. Edited by Willem VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997 |
| *TDNT* | *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976 |
| *TDNTA* | *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985 |
| *TDOT* | *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Edited by Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry. Translated by John T. Willis, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, David E. Green, and Douglas W. Stott. 15 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977–2012 |
| *TWOT* | *Theological Wordbook of The Old Testament*. Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999 |
| *WJE* | *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. 26 vols. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957–2008 |

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# PREFACE

By God's grace, the beauty of God has been a recurring theme in my life for many years. I am deeply thankful for the opportunity to think through some aspects of this theme in a more disciplined way. When I first began reviewing the ideas that converged into my thesis, I sincerely thought that the role of beauty in spiritual formation was underdeveloped. I have since realized to my delight that I was wrong. However, the trove of material that theologians have mined on this topic is not widely known. As I survey the scores of books that now fill my shelves on this topic and consider that each book contains hundreds of references to other works that explain this topic, I am grateful for the privilege of seeing and surveying some of this territory.

This experience would not have been possible without the help of many people. I am deeply grateful to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for this program that provided advanced, biblically faithful training without requiring me to relocate. The patient support that Dr. James Parker and Dr. Joseph Harrod gave as I worked through the initial stages of my proposal enhanced both the tone and content of this thesis. I remember clearly the tremendous encouragement Dr. Matthew Haste was when he first talked with me about advising me for this thesis. Dr. Haste has been a gracious source of invaluable guidance. Without his help guiding my thesis, I would not have finished this program on schedule. I am also indebted to the staff of the Professional Doctoral Studies office for helping me navigate many unfamiliar procedures. The expert guidance of Kimber Graves in my initial style review and many others in the Writing Center who endured my questions have made me a better writer.

I am also thanful for my father-in-law, Ben Griffin, whose financial support made possible what my meager resources would have forbidden. I appreciate the

encouragement that my school's principal, Tracy Robinson, offered when I first asked if I could take on a project that would undoubtedly take a toll on my work-related duties. My immediate principal, Mark Maier, has been a supportive sounding board for many ideas in this thesis. I probably would not have started the program if not for the influence of my pastor Scott Frady. As my pastor, a fellow student, and an insightful reader, his influence on me extends far beyond this thesis. This thesis is also a result of my parent's decision to give their lives to the work of the gospel in Nigeria, West Africa. Their sacrifice gave me an early appreciation for the beauty of the gospel and a rich experience of creation's beauty in Africa unmarred by the blinding lights of modernity.

Seven who carried a heavy aspect of this thesis are my immediate family. Leah, my wife, has put more hours of hard work into producing this thesis than I have. She cared for our children while I hid out in libraries and traveled to Louisville. Her labor was done with a love that I can never repay. Daniel, Katie, Emily, Alyssa, Jack, and Sarah have also endured more "not nows" than they should have had to hear. I pray that, by God's grace, I restore to them some of the time this project has taken.

As this time of profound blessing comes to an end, I feel it is only the beginning of a new ministry focus. As I seek to explore more deeply the rich veins of God's beauty to which this thesis points, I pray that God gives me opportunities to share clearly and broadly some of these truths so that the beauty of God might break through the darkness of hardened hearts and nourish the hearts of those who are already pursuing him who is the source of all beauty.

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Hickory, North Carolina

December 2021

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

If they consider beauty, most people agree that experiencing beauty can be life-changing, shaping and forming individuals in a variety of ways, whether it is the rousing notes of a martial orchestra, the calming effect of a splendid sunrise reaching its rosy fingers across the horizon, or the delightful aroma of a spring garden in full bloom. The power of beauty to attract and influence is a shared experience common to humans everywhere. However, this agreement dissolves if the discussion about the effects of beauty moves beyond casual observation into more meaningful questions. Why does beauty change people? Why are the effects of beauty not the same in everyone? Are the changes produced always beneficial? Are the changes biological and neurological, or are they spiritual? While few people agree on the answers to these questions, they remain tremendously significant questions for Christians.

Questions about beauty and its effects are significant to Christians because believers are part of a reclamation project. God is remaking the world through Christ, and God's people are perpetually changing as God sanctifies them into the moral image of Christ. Christians should, therefore, try to understand how beauty can help, or hinder, this work of God. These questions are also critically important in the experience of high school students, who experience torrents of aesthetic material. False and true beauty are all around them. Tragically, most high school students have no training from Scripture that can guide their understanding of beauty. Consequently, students do not fully benefit from the true beauty they experience, and they are defenseless against the dangers of false beauty.

Two thousand years of Christian scholarship has led the church to a deeper understanding of Christian aesthetics, but Christian education has not leveraged this treasure to benefit high school students. A survey of works by recognized educators shows that even at the highest levels of thought about education, contemporary education theory concerning beauty does not reflect the teachings of Scripture.

While it would be easy to choose radical teachers from some point in the past who advocated rejecting a biblically oriented aesthetic, such a radical approach is unnecessary. Decades ago, even conservative educational experts wandered from a biblically objective view of aesthetics. In Mortimer Adler's (1902–2001) highly publicized book *Six Great Ideas*, the standards of beauty are determined by experts, but Adler confesses that he cannot account for the reasons why experts so often disagree on aesthetic concepts.[1] His discussion thus sinks into a soft agnosticism. Going back even further, the famed conservative British philosopher and educator Dorothy Sayers (1893–1957) reproves educators for using aesthetics as a teaching tool. Her writing, in contrast to Scripture, suggests that art should exist without a function.[2] In recent years, the widely celebrated educational theorist Howard Gardner wrote a book that purports to help recover beauty. The kind of beauty he hopes to recover depends on the response of the individual perceiving beauty. Gardner defines beauty as something that is interesting, memorable, and invites repeated encounters.[3] The breadth of this definition, however, threatens to make the term meaningless.

These educational theorists—and hundreds like them—have undercut a biblical view of beauty. Often, high school curricula do not cover aesthetics at all, or the

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[1] Mortimer Jerome Adler, *Six Great Ideas* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 122.

[2] Dorothy Sayers, "Towards a Christian Aesthetic," in *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World*, ed. Roderick Jellema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 69.

[3] Howard Gardner, *Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed: Educating for the Virtues in the Age of Truthiness and Twitter* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 49.

curricula refer to aesthetics in incidental or superficial ways, such as a band elective or a poetry unit. An examination of prominent Christian school curricula confirms that aesthetics is not formally taught or used in spiritual formation. The three largest producers of Christian school curricula—BJU Press, Abeka Books, and Accelerated Christian Learning (A.C.E.)—supply proof of this problem. In two textbooks from BJU Press's high school curriculum, there is a concern for academic depth in the tenth- and eleventh-grade English texts that cover American and British literature, respectively.[4] This depth is evident in the historical commentary, theological perspective, and worldview insight. However, the textbooks primarily focus on content and literary features. There is no teaching on aesthetics.

Abeka, which had about 330,000 students in 1987, similarly overlooks aesthetics.[5] Abeka's detailed curriculum overview reveals a superficial concern for aesthetics. While all of the materials are colorful and adorned with age-appropriate drawings and photographs and the language arts classes repeatedly encourage students to see the beauty of language, students stop taking arts-and-crafts classes and music classes in the sixth grade. Music instruction becomes a minor part of theology class in the seventh grade, where students learn traditional hymns.[6] Abeka offers a single elective on watercolors at the high school level, but there are no other art or music classes.[7] The curriculum stresses a moralistic approach to spiritual formation.[8] The second semester of

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[4] Ronald A. Horton, *British Literature for Christian Schools, Teacher's Edition* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1992); Raymond A. St. John, *American Literature for Christian Schools, Teacher's Edition*, rev. ed. (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1992).

[5] Paul F. Parsons, *Inside America's Christian Schools* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 42.

[6] Abeka, "Homeschool Scope and Sequence Preschool through Grade 12 Abeka Scope and Sequence 2019–2020," accessed June 20, 2019, https://static.abeka.com/Abeka/InteractivePDF/ScopeSequence/SchoolSS/downloads/AbekaAtAGlanceSchoolScopeandSequence.pdf?update=5.

[7] Abeka, "Homeschool Scope and Sequence," 217.

[8] Moralism is a difficult accusation to prove or disprove as it always wears sheep's clothing. But the essence of moralism is an emphasis on improving behavior and religious performance in a way that

eleventh-grade theology focuses on moralistic life management.[9] It covers topics such as work relationships, citizenship, and sexual ethics. However, the absence of any connection between aesthetics and spiritual formation is conspicuous.

On its website, the A.C.E. curriculum claims to be used by over six thousand schools worldwide.[10] Its published scope and sequence indicate a genuine concern for spiritual formation, but no method is given beyond relaying facts and coercing conformity. Some booklets in the curriculum teach "Fine Arts" (art, music, and speech), but the classes focus on technique, with only occasional Scripture references.[11] There is no discussion of theological aesthetics.

In contrast to these older and more popular curricula, Veritas Press has developed its *Omnibus* curriculum, which combines the subjects of history, theology, and English into one class.[12] This publication provides a vibrant and expansive introduction to the Western classics. Each of the six volumes consists of a series of articles written by various experienced classical Christian educators. The articles include in-depth questions and academic assignments. The beautifully illustrated books have a strong aesthetic appeal. However, even when the authors contribute sections on aesthetics (e.g., music, architecture, and dramatic art), there is little discussion about how aesthetics advance

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downplays the gospel and its ongoing work in a believer's life. Abeka's curriculum seems to emphasize a code of conduct in this way. "The Scope and Sequence for the 9th Grade Bible" covers a swath of Israel's history then advertises the main selling point of the curriculum as follows: "Numerous applications are given for nearly every outline to help students understand how these portions of Scripture relate to the temptations and problems they face every day." In the more detailed explanation that follows, parents are told, "Jehoshaphat and Ahab demonstrate the need for Christian separation" and "Nehemiah shows leadership skills in building walls and working with people." Abeka, "Homeschool Scope and Sequence," 151. This emphasis on behavior is consistent throughout the curriculum.

[9] Abeka, "Homeschool Scope and Sequence," 185.

[10] A.C.E, "About A.C.E.," accessed July 4, 2019, https://www.aceministries.com/about-ace.

[11] A.C.E, "A.C.E. Curriculum Scope and Sequence," last modified 2019, https://www.acemi nistries.com/media/pageimg/Home_Educators_Scope_and_Sequence-2019.pdf.

[12] The book in this curriculum that has the most direct discussion on aesthetics is the fifth volume designed for eleventh grade: Gene Edward Veith et al., eds., *Omnibus V: The Medieval World*, 2nd ed. (Lancaster, PA: Veritas Press, 2017).

spiritual formation, and they do not, in practice, use the potential that beauty offers for spiritual formation. The neglect of beauty in these curricula reflects the neglect of beauty that pervades Christian education. Fortunately, many gifted writers and teachers have provided a large body of literature that offers tremendous insight into how this problem can be corrected.

## Familiarity with the Literature

Addressing the usefulness of beauty in the formation of Christian high school students necessarily involves primary and secondary sources that fall into three general categories: (1) theological and philosophical works about beauty, (2) theological works about spiritual formation, and (3) educational texts that address beauty. A complete study of beauty in education, in general, would cover a much broader range of documents, but this selection provides a suitable foundation for this thesis.

### Theological and Philosophical Works about Beauty

Before discussing works about beauty, a definition of beauty is in order. Beauty is difficult to define because it designates such a large sphere of experience, and it is often discussed in terms of a person's experience of beauty and in terms of an entity's possession of beauty. So, when a person says that a painting is beautiful, he or she is making a claim about the painting and revealing something about his or her response to the painting. Therefore, a meaningful definition should address both the qualities that distinguish something as beautiful and the response that those qualities elicit. The responses of individuals will differ, but if beauty is objective and if humans share any commonality, then there should be discernable qualities that are similar, and there should be a way to account for any differences in opinion.[13] The following definition attempts to

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[13] This issue is complicated because some aesthetic forms require training or experience to appreciate. As with morality, where most people know what is right and wrong intuitively, in aesthetics,

account for these elements: Beauty is a quality of an object, idea, or experience that pleases or enchants a person with sound faculties because it—the object, idea, or experience—is appropriate or remarkably fitting.

A recent significant publication on the theology of beauty is Jonathan King's *The Beauty of the Lord*. King asserts, "The core weakness of theological aesthetics throughout the history of its various developments has been the primary neglect of a specifically biblical—and systematic—theological treatment."[14] He then supplies this neglected understanding. Beginning with the nature of God as the supreme beauty, he shows how the Bible describes creation, incarnation, crucifixion, and consummation as manifestations of God's beauty. King artfully weaves into his work discussions of historical theology that evaluate the contributions of theologians such as Augustine, John Calvin, Thomas Aquinas, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. King shows that aesthetic reflection is an integral part of any meaningful treatment of theological themes because God's work is intrinsically "fitting" or strikingly appropriate and therefore beautiful.

Jo Ann Davidson's *Toward a Theology of Beauty* focuses on the aesthetic nature of the Bible. After introductory observations, the author discusses God's aesthetic nature and his work as the architect of material realities. In the rest of the book, Davidson discusses the aesthetic dimensions of Scripture, highlighting its literary beauty. She insists that these literary structures are more than "just ornamental eloquence."[15] The beauty that she highlights in the biblical passages serves the rhetorical and didactic

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most people know what is beautiful intuitively. Just as the fall adversely affected man's moral capacity, it also adversely affected his aesthetic capacity; so, in some cases, a fair degree of repair is necessary so as to correctly align his responses to aesthetic nature of created reality. The analogy to morality is also applicable because in the domain of morality, people can be untaught the morality that they instinctively know. It is also true that people can be taught to think that something ugly is beautiful. This aesthetic unlearning is often the unintended consequences of secular liturgies and unconscious messaging.

[14] Jonathan King, *The Beauty of the Lord: Theology as Aesthetics* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 7.

[15] Jo Ann Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty: A Biblical Perspective* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 37.

purpose of the passage. Chapter 7 is an in-depth treatment of the Greek and Hebrew words used for beauty in the Bible.

In terms of its simplicity and biblical faithfulness, it is hard to find a better book than Francis Schaeffer's (1912–1984) *Art in the Bible*. While nearly half a century old, this classic speaks with verve and insight into the confusion surrounding Christian engagement with the arts. Schaeffer's four standards for evaluating art are still helpful: (1) validity, (2) technical excellence, (3) intellectual content, and (4) the integration of content and vehicle.[16] These standards can help Christians safely navigate the muddy waters of modern aesthetics.

Two other important works are by Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Art in Action* is an older, well-known, and influential work that explores how a Christian aesthetic addresses the functional nature of art. In this work, Wolterstorff is careful to distinguish his topic in this book from theological aesthetics. He aims to reconsider art and proposes a functional approach to it.[17] Wolterstorff helpfully repudiates the perspective on aesthetics that sees art as merely a stimulus for intellectual pleasure, insisting that art has value for its own sake. Wolterstorff's more recent work, *Art Rethought*, argues that works of art should not be understood in terms of what has been called the grand narrative of beauty. He insists that viewing art as objects of disinterested attention, as suggested by the grand narrative, "has always been a distortion of reality."[18] In contrast to the grand narrative view Wolterstorff argues that art must be understood in a more nuanced manner that takes into account the various meanings that arise from how art is used in a culture. The book explores five distinct uses of art in society.

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[16] Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 63.

[17] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), x.

[18] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 67.

While not a broad discussion of aesthetics, Peter Williams's *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy* offers a compelling defense of the objectivity of beauty. Williams refutes arguments against aesthetic objectivity, citing extensive research, and he persuasively argues the connection between beauty and moral goodness.[19] In a second chapter on aesthetics, Williams discusses the enduring line of argument that beauty proves the existence and nature of God. He traces this argument from Augustine to contemporary theologian Patrick Sherry, who expounds this idea in his introduction to theological aesthetics *Spirit and Beauty*. This work is short yet significant. In it, Sherry devotes much of his space to the dynamic between the Holy Spirit and beauty. The author has an apparent affinity for the work of Balthasar (1905–1988), but he criticizes Balthasar for focusing too much on Christ in his explanation of beauty. Sherry argues that Calvin's emphasis on the Holy Spirit in discussing beauty is a more scriptural focus.[20] The writings of Johnathan Edwards and Abraham Kuyper are also prominent in Sherry's work.

In addition to the above Protestant authors, one of the most sophisticated recent publications on Christian aesthetics is David Bentley Hart's *The Beauty of the Infinite*. This book is an elaborate philosophical treatise that argues for the validity of Christianity because it is beautiful. While Hart's focus is not germane to this thesis, his discussion of beauty early in the book is fascinating and thoughtful. It is one of the few academic discussions on the relation between beauty and desire—a common though enigmatic topic in mystical aesthetic studies.[21]

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[19] Peter S. Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy: A Christian Introduction to the Love of Wisdom* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2013).

[20] Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty: An Introduction to Theological Aesthetics* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 11–12.

[21] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 19.

Catholic philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889–1977) has also contributed a significant work entitled *Aesthetics*. While he often does not use Scripture to support his claims, Hildebrand still offers a convincing defense of the value of beauty in all of life. This book is one of the few that touches on the aesthetics of incense during Mass. Hildebrand covers an immense amount of material ranging from the role of the senses in experiencing beauty to the rationale for seeing beauty in the comical. Unfortunately, he does not always seem interested in explaining how he arrives at his conclusions.[22]

John Navone's (1930–2016) *Toward a Theology of Beauty* is short (a mere eighty-five pages), but it addresses many significant details. For example, Navone claims that in the language of Scripture, the process of sanctification is the process of beautification.[23] He also devotes a chapter to the attractional power of beauty, noting the linguistic similarity between the Greek words καλὸν ("beauty") and καλεὼ ("called").[24] The legitimacy of some of his claims may be doubtful, but their relevance is apparent.

All of these works on theological aesthetics are dwarfed, in terms of their influence, by Balthasar's *The Glory of the Lord*. This book is the first of sixteen volumes published in three parts. Each of the three parts discusses one of the three classical transcendentals (beauty, truth, and goodness). In a conscious repudiation of Immanuel Kant and Martin Luther, Balthasar places beauty first as his entry point into his discussion about theology. This favoring of the way of beauty over logic reflects a common feature of Catholic theology. Borrowing from Aquinas, Balthasar asserts that

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[22] An example of this omission is the fact the Hildebrand never explains why some animals have more "poetic" value than others (253). He also says that while the senses of sight and hearing are suited to art, the senses of smell, touch, and taste are not (134). Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics*, ed. John F. Crosby, trans. Brian McNeil (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Project, 2016).

[23] John J. Navone, *Toward a Theology of Beauty* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 16.

[24] Navone, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 24.

beauty is the convergence of three elements: wholeness (*integritas*), harmony (*consonantia*), and radiance (*claritas*). He goes on to say that when a person encounters beauty, a sequence of events unfolds: the person is arrested; he is then claimed by the beautiful; and, finally, he is sent by beauty. Balthasar sees Christ as the quintessential embodiment of all of these aspects of beauty. He is whole in that he has one focus. In him, there is no division of purpose. Christ embodies the harmony of the human and the divine. Christ is also the most radiant in every sense. He is radiant as the most excellent specimen of a human, and he is radiant as the fullness of God is in him. Moreover, it is Christ as this ultimate beauty who arrests his disciples, names them, and sends them. In this way, for Balthasar, beauty leads to God, and when people reject beauty, they lose God because they lose the best means to goodness and truth.[25]

Another—more recent—Catholic author who has written significant material on beauty is Thomas Brendan Sammon. His two relevant works on this topic are *The God Who Is Beauty* and *Called to Attraction*.[26] Both of these works heavily emphasize history and shed light on how Catholic beliefs on the function of beauty have developed. *Called to Attraction* is a primer with discussion questions and a pedagogical tone.

No discussion of aesthetics today would be complete without referencing Roger Scruton. Scruton is an Anglican and a political conservative who refers to the modern secularization of society as the "Endarkenment." His book *Beauty* cuts through the religious sentimentalism that often surrounds discussions about beauty. He rejects what he calls the Neo-Platonic view that beauty is a property of being, and he insists on

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[25] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Kenneth Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 18.

[26] Thomas Brendan Sammon, *The God Who Is Beauty: Beauty as a Divine Name in Thomas Aquinas and Dionysius the Areopagite*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 206 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); Sammon, *Called to Attraction: An Introduction to the Theology of Beauty*, Cascade Companions 38 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017).

discussing beauty in terms of human experience and not abstract theories. He advocates a logical foundation for beauty and concludes that what people find beautiful expresses their deepest values.[27]

While these texts vary immensely in their content, they each offer unique testimony to the enduring importance of beauty. This short sampling moves from the theologically conservative work of Jonathan King to the functionally atheistic work of Roger Scruton, yet each work develops the theme that human flourishing and beauty are inextricably linked.

**Theological Works about Spiritual Formation**

The second kind of literature that is particularly significant to the topic of this thesis consists of writings that explain the foundation, dimensions, and process of spiritual formation. Spirituality has become a veritable cottage industry, with new books and disparate theories emerging all of the time. Only a small portion of material dealing with spirituality rests on the authority of Scripture. D. A. Carson, professor of New Testament studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, insists that "as a term 'spirituality' emerged from French Catholic thought."[28] The terms "spirit" and "spiritual" appear in the New Testament, but as Carson notes, spirituality is a theological construct, and unlike the Trinity and other more generally agreed-upon theological constructs, spirituality is often "person-variable."[29] Carson asserts, "One must always inquire as to what components enter into the particular construct advocated or assumed by a particular writer and what components are being left out. Only rarely are such matters made

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[27] Roger Scruton, *Beauty: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168.

[28] D. A. Carson, "When Is Spirituality Spiritual? Reflections on Some Problems of Definition," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 3 (September 1994): 381.

[29] Carson, "When Is Spirituality Spiritual?," 387.

explicit."[30] Carson delineates five characteristics that should enter any discussion on spiritual formation: (1) Spiritual formation must occur as an outgrowth of the gospel. (2) Spirituality must "work outward from [an articulation of that] center." To assume the center without articulating it is to court spiritual disaster if not for ourselves then at least for our students, disciples, and children. (3) Spiritual formation "should engage the affections" and foster "an active sense of the presence of God." (4) All spiritual formation should emphasize God's primary means of formation—the Bible. (5) Biblical spiritual formation must be characterized by a willingness to adapt to the dimensions of spirituality emphasized in Scripture, such as the necessity of the Holy Spirit's activity (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 2:14–15), the moral and ethical dimensions of spirituality (Gal 5:16), the kerygmatic dimension of spirituality (John 15:28; Acts 4:8), and the eschatological dimensions of spirituality.[31]

Another helpful article by Carson that addresses spiritual formation is entitled "Spiritual Disciplines." In this article, Carson is even more adamant: "Under the terms of the new covenant . . . , the only 'spiritual' person is a person who has the Holy Spirit poured out . . . in regeneration."[32] Carson insists that it is not possible to increase one's spirituality "without possessing the Holy Spirit and submitting to his transforming instruction and power."[33] In two helpful correctives, Carson asserts that "the pursuit of a mediated, mystical knowledge of God is unsanctioned in Scripture and is dangerous" and that "for Christians with any sense of the regulative function of Scripture, nothing, surely, can be deemed a spiritual discipline if it is not so much as mentioned in the New

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[30] Carson, "When Is Spirituality Spiritual?," 387.

[31] Carson, "When Is Spirituality Spiritual?," 394.

[32] D. A. Carson, "Spiritual Disciplines," *Themelios* 36, no. 3 (November 2011): 377.

[33] Carson, "Spiritual Disciplines," 377.

Testament."[34] In these two articles, Carson lays out precise trajectories that characterize a scripturally rooted spiritual formation.

An older work on spiritual formation that offers clarity and biblical faithfulness is the short book *He That Is Spiritual* by Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871−1952). This work, widely circulated for decades among conservative dispensational Christians, begins with the assertion that there are only three kinds of people in the world: the natural man, the spiritual man, and the carnal man.[35] Chafer presents spirituality in stark, simple terms, summarizing his conclusions as follows:

> What, then, is true spirituality? It is the unhindered manifestations of the indwelling Spirit. There are, in all, seven of these manifestations. These blessed realities are all provided for in the presence and power of the Spirit and will be normally produced by the Spirit in the Christian who is not grieving the Spirit, but has confessed every known sin; who is not quenching the Spirit, but is yielded to God; and who is walking in the Spirit by an attitude of dependence upon His power alone. Such an one is spiritual because he is Spirit-filled.[36]

For Chafer, spirituality begins, develops, and ends in the Holy Spirit's work by the Word of God based on the finished work of Christ.

Written almost sixty years later, another highly significant work on spirituality is Francis Schaeffer's *True Spirituality*.[37] Schaeffer wrote this book as a result of a spiritual crisis in his own life. The book contains two sections, and each section emphasizes a central point: spirituality is about (1) God's freeing us from the bonds of sin and (2) our then living in the reality of that freedom.[38] This liberty begins at the cross, but it never moves beyond the cross. Schaeffer writes, "I am to face the cross of Christ in

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[34] Carson, "Spiritual Disciplines," 378.

[35] Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual: A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 15.

[36] Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual*, 133.

[37] Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2011).

[38] The first section of the book is entitled "Freedom Now from the Bonds of Sin," and the second section of the book is entitled "Freedom Now from the Results of the Bonds of Sin."

every part of my life and with my whole man" throughout all of life.[39] Against the culture that paints a romantic picture of spirituality, Schaeffer emphasizes, "While true spirituality does not stop at the negative, without the negative—in comprehension and practice—we are not ready to go on."[40] Schaeffer explains that the demands of true spirituality go far beyond the fulfillment of any external code and thus require something far more substantial than any external activity could generate. In the final four chapters of this book, Schaeffer details the joyful results of embracing this life through death—it brings psychological, personal, relational, and corporate healing to those who follow Christ in joyful obedience.

Eight years after Schaeffer's book was published, Richard Lovelace, professor of church history at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, published what has become a classic text on evangelical spirituality, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*. In the preface, he identifies the book as "a manual of spiritual theology, a discipline combining the history and the theology of the Christian experience."[41] A few lines later, he asserts, "It is time that Protestants realize that they share with Catholics a deep interest and a rich heritage in Christian spirituality." Lovelace further affirms the importance of this heritage, claiming, "Virtually all of the problems in the church, including bad theology, issue from defective spirituality." Lovelace also says that a right understanding of spirituality hinges on a proper understanding of God and a proper understanding of man. In unpacking this claim, Lovelace maintains that while union with Christ through regeneration "is the beachhead

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[39] Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 26.

[40] Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 26.

[41] Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 11.

of sanctification," the distinguishing mark of the spiritual person is not the decision made in the past but a testimony of the ongoing work of the Spirit in a person's life.[42]

In chapter 11 ("The Evangelical Muse"), Lovelace relates how as a young Christian, he "used to wonder why there were no evangelical poets and novelists of major stature. Why did evangelicals have to turn to the Roman Catholic Church to find Graham Greene and Flannery O'Connor, Gerald Manley Hopkins, and Robert Lowell?" In other words, why was evangelical Protestantism "an aesthetic desert?"[43] Lovelace answers that these problems are rooted in the "Puritan and Pietist traditions which had fused the aesthetic piety of the early church fathers with Protestant doctrine." As a result of this fusion, the Puritans and Pietists jettisoned "the sacramental vision of life in the Catholic tradition" in favor of a more Manichaean perspective that feared that "objects of sense and sight could drag us away from what was spiritual."[44] With almost prophetic accuracy, Lovelace predicts, "If we do not set our own art free of moralistic overkill, we will lose our children again and again to the evangelizing force of non-Christian popular art."[45] Lovelace concludes this chapter by suggesting that Christians should exert more energy on the production and support of healthy aesthetic expressions instead of focusing on censuring the culture around them.

Lovelace's criticism of the Puritans seems unfair as the Puritans have contributed enormously to a proper understanding of spirituality and aesthetics. The Puritans valued aesthetics. Anyone who has read the poetry of George Herbert, Edward Taylor, or Anne Bradstreet or the writings of John Milton or John Bunyan knows that the Puritans—and those who sat in their tradition—cared about beauty. Much that is good in

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[42] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 104, 214.

[43] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 344.

[44] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 345.

[45] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 347.

the literature on spiritual formation builds on the Puritans. Three works that address the spirituality of the Puritans in constructive ways are *Worldly Saints* by Leland Ryken, *A Quest for Godliness* by J. I. Packer, and *Puritan Spirituality* by Stephen Yuille. Ryken's *Worldly Saints* is broad in its focus. Ryken aspires to correct the prevailing prejudice against Puritans and recover their biblical wisdom for the benefit of modern Christians.[46] Ryken offers a feast of spiritual wisdom on how the Puritans conducted family life, ordered their lives, observed the Sabbath, and served their communities, among other activities.

Packer's *A Quest for Godliness* is a collection of essays that, according to Packer, are "not just history and historical theology; they are themselves, in aim at least, spirituality, as much as anything else I have written; they focus on ways in which, as I see it, the Puritans are giants . . . , whose help we need if ever we are to grow."[47] Yuille's *Puritan Spirituality* focuses very specifically on the fear of God in the affective theology of the English Puritan George Swinnock (1627–1673). In the early part of the book, Yuille explains Swinnock's view of man. Swinnock believed that the image of God is the faculties of the soul characterized by knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.[48] When man fell, the core faculties of man—his intellect, will, and affections—were retained, but sin stripped knowledge, righteousness, and holiness from them.[49] According to Yuille, "Swinnock defines regeneration as 'a work of God's Spirit whereby he doth . . . renew the whole man after his own image by the ministry of the word.'"[50] For Swinnock, this

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[46] Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), xvii.

[47] J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 16.

[48] J. Stephen Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality: The Fear of God in the Affective Theology of George Swinnock* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 32.

[49] Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality*, 39.

[50] Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality*, 56.

renewal came mainly through the restoration of right affections, particularly, the affection of godly fear. He believed that these affections came from the application or use of means that Scripture specifies.[51] Among these means of grace, "meditation occupies the place of distinction . . . by virtue of the fact that it is practiced in conjunction with all of them and ultimately determines their success."[52] This book thus outlines a vibrant and profitable understanding of Puritan spirituality.

To some degree, what the Puritans called the "means of grace" came to be known in evangelical circles as spiritual disciplines. In *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster outlines what he sees as the keys to spiritual formation. He divides these activities into three groups: (1) inward disciplines (those done in private), (2) outward disciplines (those done for the benefit of others), and (3) corporate disciplines (those done in the fellowship of other believers). Foster affirms that the disciplines themselves do not change people; instead, "the disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us."[53] Foster's Quaker background shows through in statements that flirt with unbiblical mysticism. For example, he says, "Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word."[54] Nevertheless, this book is a helpful and valuable contribution to the recent literature on spiritual formation.

In a similar approach to spirituality, Dallas Willard (1935–2013) has contributed much literature. Most relevant here would be his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. While Foster's book focuses on the *how* of spiritual disciplines, Willard focuses on the *why*. Willard asserts, "The body is our primary area of power, freedom,

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[51] Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality*, 157.

[52] Yuille, *Puritan Spirituality*, 190.

[53] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, special anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 7.

[54] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 17.

and—therefore—responsibility."[55] Spiritual disciplines are "activities of mind and body, purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order."[56] Both Willard and Foster have relatively modest lists of spiritual disciplines—Foster discusses twelve, while Willard speaks of fifteen.

Recent books on spiritual disciplines, such as Adele Calhoun's *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, have scoured the landscape of human experience to burgeon the list of spiritual disciplines. Calhoun's handbook identifies seventy-six distinct disciplines. Her list of disciplines includes items that lack biblical warrant as means of formation, such as reading icons and pilgrimage.[57] The expansiveness of her catalog of disciplines highlights a bigger question: What distinction can be made between a discipline and simple acts of obedience?[58]

The most biblically grounded recent publications on spiritual disciplines are several books by Donald Whitney. His *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* and *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church* deal broadly with spiritual disciplines in an individual's life and the church's corporate life.[59] Three other books—*Praying the Bible*,

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[55] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 53.

[56] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 68.

[57] Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 62, 202.

[58] Carson raises this issue in his article entitled "Spiritual Disciplines." Carson invokes the regulative function of Scripture to say that if an activity is not mentioned in the New Testament, then it cannot be deemed a spiritual discipline. "That," he says, "rather eliminates not only self-flagellation but creation care. Doubtless the latter, at least, is a good thing to do: it is part of our responsibility as stewards of God's creation. But it is difficult to think of a scriptural warrant to view such an activity as a spiritual discipline—that is, as a discipline that increases our spirituality" (378). However, the things we call disciplines seen in the New Testament can take many forms. Listening to an audio recording of Scripture is a form of Scripture intake. Obviously, audio recordings are not mentioned in the New Testament. Yet, I am engaging in a spiritual discipline when I listen to those recordings. If this extrapolation is valid, then is it possible that creation care is a form of stewardship? The identification of spiritual disciplines might require more nuance than Carson's criticisms seem to allow.

[59] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014); Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1996). Jerry Bridges's book *The Disciplines of Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006) is also biblically grounded, but it focuses more on disciplines as attitudes or dispositions, whereas most other writers speak of disciplines as actions. Bridges talks about the disciplines

*Family Worship*, and *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*—each deal with a specific spiritual discipline (i.e., prayer, family worship, and spiritual self-examination, respectively).[60] Whitney offers a helpful definition of spiritual disciplines: "Spiritual Disciplines are those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ."[61] He asserts that the ten disciplines he discusses are "the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times."[62]

Many works on biblical spirituality, however, do not focus on spiritual disciplines. Kenneth Boa's helpful book *Conformed to His Image* develops a metaphor that likens spirituality to a multifaceted jewel. Boa's book outlines twelve facets of spirituality in twelve sections. In the preface, Boa explains that he has received help from focusing on distinct aspects of spirituality at different points in his own spiritual journey. He summarizes, "As important as each of these approaches has been to make, no one of them is sufficient."[63] This perspective seems to correspond with the various descriptions that Scripture gives for the Christian life. Boa describes spiritual formation as a holistic Christ-centered process that involves "an aspiration for single-minded pursuit that centers around Christ in all activities."[64]

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of commitment, watching, convictions, choices, and adversity. His approach, while helpful, is distinct from those being discussed here.

[60] Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2019); Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001); Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

[61] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 4.

[62] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 4.

[63] Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 16.

[64] Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 213.

Any discussion of spiritual formation must acknowledge an inherent link between Christian education and spiritual formation. James Estep, in one of his chapters in *A Theology of Christian Education*, asserts, "Christian education is distinct from other kinds of education in that its aim is the transformation of the whole person into the likeness of Christ (Col 1:28). Christian education is the process of accomplishing this aim."[65] *A Theology of Christian Education* outlines the theological priorities and Scriptural basis for an education that can truly be called Christian. Estep affirms, "What is the core essential for Christian education? It is a theological foundation that can both inform and unite the theory, task, and target dimensions of Christian education's identity."[66] Naturally, then, a theologically grounded Christian education results in "the transformation of the Christian into a Christlike citizen of the kingdom of God."[67] Consequently, there are many books on Christian education that are, consciously and unconsciously, also books on Christian formation.

The book *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, edited by James Estep and Jonathan Kim, provides a sweeping overview of how ideas developed in the social sciences concerning education relate to a theology of Christian formation. While this book's focus is different from the previous book, Estep and Kim maintain that "Christian formation is the central tenet of Christian education."[68] They state that the purposes of the book are to survey biblical and theological perspectives on humanity and explore the major theories on development and learning while offering a comprehensive approach to spiritual formation. Estep and Kim reveal an

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[65] James Riley Estep Jr., "Conclusion: The Christian Educator and Theology," in *A Theology for Christian Education*, by James Riley Estep Jr., Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2008), 301.

[66] Estep, "The Christian Educator and Theology," 301.

[67] Estep, "The Christian Educator and Theology," 301–2.

[68] James Riley Estep Jr. and Jonathan H. Kim, eds., *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 4.

underlying desire that Christian educators and leaders would stop regarding "the theologies of the Church and the theories of the social sciences as independent from one another or even adversaries but [would see them] as interdependent in regard to Christian formation, mutually endeavoring to understand the process and product of growth in Christ."[69] This book offers an in-depth and broad introduction to this eclectic perspective.

Another excellent resource on spiritual formation in Christian education is a compilation of essays edited by Kenneth Gangel and James Wilhoit entitled *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Spiritual Formation*.[70] Containing twenty-four articles that stress the need for the gospel and the practice of spiritual disciplines, an extensive Scripture index, and an annotated bibliography, it lays out biblically sound, practical advice that focuses on the heart and shows the importance of the body in the formation of the spirit. One chapter by Dallas Willard focuses on the importance of the whole person in spiritual formation.[71] Sadly, even in this chapter, Willard does not address a person's aesthetic sensibilities.

James Wilhoit wrote a separate volume that is particularly helpful on spiritual formation—*Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*.[72] The four formative concepts that he develops—receiving, remembering, responding, and relating—are activities that biblical aesthetics can aid. Nevertheless, Wilhoit does not develop that aspect of these formative trajectories.

Rightly forming human spirits requires a proper understanding of the words used in the Bible that refer to the immaterial aspect of human nature. Jeremy Pierre's

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[69] Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation*, 7.

[70] Kenneth O. Gangel and James Wilhoit, eds., *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997).

[71] Dallas Willard, "The Spirit Is Willing: The Body as a Tool for Spiritual Growth," in Gangel and Wilhoit, *Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, 225–233.

[72] James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

book *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life* provides an excellent primer on the functions of cognition, affection, and volition, all of which, Pierre argues, the Bible locates in the heart.[73] Beauty seems to relate to each of these functions of the heart, and teasing out these relationships will further elucidate the role of beauty in shaping spiritual orientation.

Another author who offers insights on spiritual formation that are relevant to the use of beauty in the spiritual formation of Christian high school students is James K. A. Smith. Of particular significance is Smith's three-volume *Cultural Liturgies* series. The series begins with a focus on education. In the first book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith develops the Augustinian notion that people's affections shape them.[74] Consequently, any discussion of formation must look at how affections are formed. Developing this theme, Smith suggests that spiritual formation should not treat people as heads on sticks. He contends that the cultural liturgies in which people engage shape their affections, often unconsciously. The potential benefits for consciously constructing aesthetic experiences that go with the grain of a child's spiritual formation are enormous. Smith's more recent book *You Are What You Love* seems to be a more accessible, distilled, and updated reworking of many ideas from the first two of *Cultural Liturgies* books.[75]

As Bruce Demarest, professor of theology and spiritual formation at Denver Seminary, notes, "A defining characteristic of our restless times, then, is that spirituality is back with a vengeance."[76] The surfeit of literature on the topic portends a healthy

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[73] Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016).

[74] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, *Cultural Liturgies*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

[75] James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

[76] Bruce Demarest, ed., introduction to *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*, Counterpoints: Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 7.

renewal as much of it acknowledges the authority of Scripture, the centrality of Christ, the activity of the Holy Spirit, and the complexity of sanctification. Nevertheless, this literature says little about the importance of beauty and aesthetics in spiritual formation. Only Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* discusses aesthetics significantly.

**Educational Texts That Address Beauty**

In the literature that addresses the role of beauty in the spiritual formation of Christian high school students, a widespread problem exists. Almost all of the literature discusses the power of beauty and its effects on students without citing specific texts and ideas from Scripture. This approach may stem from robust confidence in general revelation. However, by not overtly rooting their ideas in biblical texts, the authors of these texts undermine the sufficiency of Scripture and their personal legitimacy in the eyes of conservative Christians. Nevertheless, these authors have, in their own ways, argued that aesthetics are spiritually formative.

A contemporary example of the problem described above emerges in a recent book by Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain—*The Liberal Arts Tradition*. In this book, the authors assert, "Musical education is soul-craft: carried out properly it tunes the soul and makes one receptive to truth and goodness."[77] Clark and Jain reflect a biblical worldview when they critique many of the classical notions. For example, they criticize "Plato's notion that aesthetic experience alone imparts grace," commenting that "this [grace] is the special work of God the Holy Spirit."[78] However, even with clear instances of biblical critique, their method starts with extra-biblical classical thought. For example, they quote Plato extensively before they make that brief note of censure, then they go back to Plato, saying, "His more general point, however, is compelling, and ought to be taken to heart:

[77] Kevin Clark and Ravi Scott Jain, *The Liberal Arts Tradition: A Philosophy of Christian Classical Education* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2013), 28.

[78] Clark and Jain, *The Liberal Arts Tradition*, 27.

the songs we sing, the stories you read, and art we make and admire, form our souls."[79] They do not offer any support from Scripture that the aesthetic experience of music is formative.

C. S. Lewis's (1898–1963) extensive defense of natural law—*The Abolition of Man*—simultaneously critiques modern education and advocates for the training of the emotions through rightly applied aesthetic experiences. Lewis characterizes the task of the modern educator as "irrigating deserts" rather than "cutting down jungles."[80] Using the famous illustration of the passage from *The Green Book*, Lewis contends that by stripping affective words of objective meaning and over-developing students' critical faculties, modern education has depleted the average student's ability to experience proper sentiments.[81] Lewis laments, "It is not excessive thought but a deficit of fertile, generous emotion that marks them out."[82] Lewis argues that exposure to aesthetic elements cultivates "ordinate affections" and "just sentiments."[83] Unfortunately, Lewis is content to make these claims and let them stand on their own merit. He does not make any attempt to connect these ideas to the teaching of Scripture.

Another author who has written much about aesthetics and education is Stephen Turley. Turley has published four books that address the subject in diverse ways, the most detailed of which is *Awakening Wonder*.[84] In this short volume, Turley argues that the classical transcendentals are the key to irrigating Lewis's deserts of the modern

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[79] Clark and Jain, *The Liberal Arts Tradition*, 27.

[80] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man, or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 14.

[81] Lewis deliberately withholds the identity of this textbook because his purpose goes beyond critiquing specific authors. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 2.

[82] Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 25.

[83] Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 15.

[84] Stephen Richard Turley, *Awakening Wonder: A Classical Guide to Truth, Goodness, and Beauty* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2015).

mind. The book appeals to many classical authorities, but there is little support offered from Scripture. Turley asserts, "By awakening our students to beauty, they encounter that which awakens an *eros*, a desiring wonder, and awe, which provides the momentum, the attraction that draws them into communion with the true and the good, thereby cultivating their intellectual and ethical capacities."[85] As thrilling as this description is, such effulgent language might leave readers wondering whether beauty could replace regeneration.

Turley has also contributed a chapter to the book *Teaching Beauty*.[86] This book contains nine separate essays by experienced classical educators. Most of the chapters are practical opinion pieces that answer questions such as "At what point should a student know how to read music?"[87] However, some insights relate to using beauty in spiritual formation. Ty Fischer observes, "Art, music, philosophy, etc., are not the gospel, but they can be used by God to prepare people to hear the gospel."[88] Turley, in his usual style, observes, "The recovery of classical education has an enormous opportunity, for it alone has the frames of reference for a truly beautiful heart that redeems the senses and prepares us for resurrection."[89] Turley offers no scriptural framework for this function.

As is the case with theological works on beauty, Roman Catholics have authored many books about beauty in education. These books by Catholic authors reflect an understanding of formation and spirituality predictably distinct from Protestant views.

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[85] Turley, *Awakening Wonder*, 104–5.

[86] G. Tyler Fischer and Ned Bustard, eds., *Teaching Beauty: A Vision for Music and Art in Christian Education* (Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2016).

[87] David Erb, "Sing with Understanding, Play Skillfully: Musical Literacy for All the Saints," in Fischer and Bustard, *Teaching Beauty*, 130.

[88] G. Tyler Fischer, "Art as a Guide to the Sacred," in Fischer and Bustard, *Teaching Beauty*, 10.

[89] Stephen Turley, "Redeeming the Senses: The Aesthetics of Classical Education," in Fischer and Bustard, *Teaching Beauty*, 119.

The two most significant works in this category are both by Stratford Caldecott (1953–2014). Caldecott's first work, *Beauty for Truth's Sake*, focuses on commonly neglected aspects of math education—mystery, symbolism, and metaphor. As the title suggests, Caldecott argues that modernity stripped the universe of the sense of wonder that made it interesting to study. Quoting Charles Taylor, he describes modern humans as "buffered selves" in a "disenchanted world."[90] The antidote to modern man's condition is a poetic or aesthetic understanding of the world. Caldecott thus elevates beauty to a place of incredible prominence. His second book, *Beauty in the Word*, focuses on the trivium (logic, dialectic, and rhetoric). Caldecott summarizes, "The central idea of the present book is very simple . . . . [It] is about how we become more human (and therefore more free in the truest sense of that word)."[91] This advance in humanity comes about through the trivium because it enables people to contemplate the good, the true, and the beautiful. This renewal is undoubtedly a type of spiritual formation. Unfortunately, it is a spiritual formation that sidesteps the special grace of God.

David Clayton's book *The Way of Beauty* is an extensive introduction to the centrality of beauty and art in the Catholic view of formation. The book discusses the modern trend of using aesthetics in evangelization, and it explains the importance of icons in Catholic theology. While the book contains many references to Scripture, it is again evident that Scripture is not a necessary authority. For example, in answering the question "Beauty: why bother?" Clayton offers two quotations, one by Bonaventure and

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[90] Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-Enchantment of Education* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2017), 123.

[91] Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education* (Tacoma, WA: Angelico Press, 2013), 11–12.

the other by Pope Benedict XVI, but he does not use any Scripture to answer the question.[92]

Another book worth mentioning here is distinct from the others because there is no religious impulse behind it. It is simply a secular defense of the importance of beauty in the methodology of education. This monograph by Joe Winston is entitled *Beauty and Education*.[93] While Winston's definition of beauty is relativistic, the information he offers about beauty's effect on creativity, math, and science education is fascinating. His closing chapter also gives practical advice on the use of beauty in a secular classroom.

With devotion and, at times, eccentricity, educators have employed beauty in the craft of communicating truth. The works surveyed above show that even secular educators in ancient and modern times acknowledge the value of aesthetics in education.

### Void in the Literature

While the above survey reveals much agreement on the importance of beauty in education and formation, it also reveals that this topic is fraught with difficulties.[94]

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[92] David Clayton, *The Way of Beauty: Liturgy, Education, and Inspiration for Family, School and College* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2015), 117.

[93] Joe Winston, *Beauty and Education*, Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education 24 (New York: Routledge, 2010).

[94] An interesting article by Rafe McGregor, a senior lecturer at Edge Hill University, England, gives a helpful overview of the confusions that have afflicted the idea of an "aesthetic education." Rafe McGregor, "Aesthetic and Moral Education," Medium, last modified September 17, 2018, https://medium.com/colloquium/aesthetic-and-moral-education-8cd482a46cf2. McGregor begins with Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and continues through Anthony Ashley-Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1759–1805), and Friedrich Schiller's (1759–1805) *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*. McGregor contends that the ideas were picked up by the British moralists Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) and John Ruskin (1819–1900). McGregor believes that the mantle of authority in aesthetic education today rests on Martha Nussbaum, professor of law, ethics, and philosophy at the University of Chicago. He also sees Gayatri Spivak, a professor of postcolonial and deconstructionist literary theory at Cornell University, as offering insights that are particularly profitable in aesthetic education. McGregor insists, "Both Nussbaum and Spivak regard aesthetic experience—the experience of paying aesthetic attention to literary works—as an imaginative exercise that develops an ethical sensibility and thus argue for a moral education by aesthetic means." Ironically, after praising them, McGregor then goes on to dismiss the major premises that he advanced from each of these two scholars, saying that their arguments depended on students accepting the truthfulness of the theories before the theories could be effective. McGregor concludes, "There is barely any empirical evidence for the effects of aesthetic experience on ethical sensibility." His conclusion undermines any value he had claimed for aesthetic education. Also, each of the authors he cites in this line

Established religious traditions agree with secularism that beauty is powerful and useful in the formation and enculturation of children. However, it is rare to find a consistent appeal to the Bible as the basis for the formative use of aesthetics. Some writers appeal to empirical evidence, others appeal to classical or ecclesiastical authorities, and some even appeal to intuition. This approach does not model biblical epistemology. If educators do not look to the Bible to validate their educational methods and priorities, then they may unintentionally undermine their students' confidence in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

There is a vast amount of literature on Christian aesthetics and aesthetic theology, and this writing is often faithful to Scripture. It is deeply rooted in careful exegesis and sweeping biblical theology. There is also vast literature that talks about the importance of beauty in Christian education. Some of this literature even makes specific reference to Christian spiritual formation. However, it seems that those who have written on beauty's importance in education have not chosen to tether their writings to the Bible. The teachings of Scripture, implicit and explicit, on beauty have also not been applied with much specificity to spiritual formation in the Christian high school classroom. There is a need for material to help fill this vacancy in the area of spiritual formation by outlining the aesthetic realities which the Bible indicates are most relevant to the formation of modern high school students. Moreover, there is a need to apply those ideas to the classroom through pedagogical priorities and practices.

**Thesis**

Evidence of the power of beauty in human experience is ubiquitous. It can arrest the attention of the dullest mind and the most hardened heart. Beauty is also

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of carefully selected and only loosely associated scholars illustrates the deep complexity of this area of study. I do not believe that any of these authors would agree with even a quarter of the others as to the definition of the terms that specify the discipline they are said to be advancing. Their definitions of "aesthetics," their approaches to "formation," and their understanding of "morality" would all be different. They are thus demonstrating the difficulties that plague the study of beauty in education.

dangerous. It can harm just as it can heal. It can deceive as easily as it can delight. The power of beauty suggests that those interested in the spiritual formation of students would teach about beauty deliberately and liberally. Unfortunately, most Christian high schools do not offer any deliberate, clear teaching on beauty. As the survey of literature above shows, when educators do teach aesthetics, they often come short of demonstrating an understanding of beauty that flows out of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. However, the Bible and faithful Christian scholarship both provide a clear alternative to this unfortunate reality. The Scriptures show that beauty is a powerful tool for student formation, and they offer guidance on how schools and teachers can use this tool effectively. Building upon a biblical and theological foundation, this thesis will offer a conceptual framework for the role of aesthetics in the spiritual formation of Christian high school students.

## Outline of Chapters

For spiritual formation to occur, students must understand some foundational truths. In other words, a biblical worldview exists in a reciprocal relationship with spiritual formation—the more one becomes conformed to the image of Christ, the more one's worldview will reflect the mind of Christ, and vice versa. Consequently, significant deficiencies in a worldview will stunt a person's spiritual growth.[95] Scripture manifests

[95] Significantly, neither of the two most prominent worldview tests available addresses aesthetics or beauty. These two worldview tests are the PEERS (Politics, Economics, Education, Religion, and Social Issues) test, developed by the Nehemiah Institute, and Summit Ministries' WorldView Checkup™. The PEERS test has been used by schools and various institutions for twenty years, and it has been a foundational element in at least nine different dissertations from five different schools. This information is available from PEERS' website. See Nehemiah Institute, "Dissertations with PEERS Testing," accessed November 20, 2019, https://www.nehemiahinstitute.com/peers.php. The Worldview Checkup™ test is also widely used and was the basis of a study conducted by the Barna Group. This study is available on Barna's website. See Barna Group, "Competing Worldviews Influence Today's Christians," accessed November 20, 2019, https://www.barna.com/research/competing-worldviews-influence-todays-christians/. Both tests are accessible for analysis online. The Worldview Checkup™ is accessible on Summit Ministries' website, and the PEERS test is available in full as an appendix to Mark Wood's dissertation. See Mark Kelly Wood, "A Study of the Biblical Worldview of K–12 Christian School Educators" (EdD diss., Liberty University, 2008), https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/113.

that a correct understanding of beauty is a significant component of a biblical worldview. In order to harness the formative power of beauty, students must be taught to understand beauty in biblical terms. Chapters 2–4 delineate what elements of beauty students need to understand before it will rightly support spiritual formation. Chapter 5 synthesizes the preceding chapters' principles and applies them to spiritual formation in high school curricula and classrooms.

Chapter 2 discusses the dangers of aesthetic relativism and offers biblical support for objective aesthetics.[96] This principle is critical. Without it, any discussion about beauty amounts to little more than a whimsical recommendation. The chapter discusses four ways that aesthetic relativism threatens the spiritual formation of high school students. These four principles assert, in turn, that aesthetic relativism will (1) distort a student's understanding of Scripture, (2) flatten a student's worldview, (3) trivialize the attributes of God, and (4) lead to moral compromise. Each of these views is defended from Scripture and illustrated by a range of authors.

Chapter 3 discusses beauty in its ontological relation to God. The central claim is that God is the source of beauty, the final measure of beauty, and the end or *telos* of beauty.[97] Students must recognize that God is the measure of all true beauty.[98] This

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[96] If beauty has an attractional force that can be leveraged for good in the development of a student, then it makes sense that the more accurate a student's definition of beauty is, the more likely it is that he or she will be drawn to the right things.

[97] I prefer the word *telos* because it suggests purpose and fulfillment in Christian theology better than "end" does. *Telos* is also appropriate because of how beauty in a fallen world approximates the use of the old covenant law in its relation to Christ. Just as the law is prophetic of the moral nature of Christ and finds its fulfillment in Christ, so also every instance of beauty points to the greatest beauty, and when that beauty is manifest, he will eclipse the token as the essence of a thing eclipses its shadow. Mark Seifrid explains this use of *telos* in describing Christ's relation to the law goal (Rom 10:4). The gift of the law was "an anticipation of God's greater gift in Christ. The *nomothesia* through Moses anticipates the *huiothes*ia in Christ (9:4)." Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 9 (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2000), 122.

[98] This is a theme developed extensively by Jonathan Edwards. He asserts, "For as God is infinitely the greatest being, so he is allowed to be infinitely the most beautiful and excellent: and all the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation, is but the reflection of the diffused beams of that Being who hath an infinite fullness of brightness and glory." Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, *WJE*, 8:550–51.

connection between God and beauty is explored through three main sections surveying beauty in (1) the literary forms of Scripture, (2) the themes of Scripture, and (3) the aesthetic vocabulary of Scripture. Examining the vocabulary against the backdrop of the published works by Jo Anne Davidson and Jonathan King, as well as standard academic reference works, provides a detailed overview of aesthetics in the Bible.

Chapter 4 covers two ideas that initially might appear unrelated. The first part of the chapter shows the significance of beauty in common grace, affirming that both the presence of beauty and man's ability to appreciate and produce beauty are part of common grace.[99] The second part of the chapter addresses the moral implications of this beauty. In this way, the chapter functions like a liturgical reading as first it articulates what God has done and then invites the proper response of obedience. Just as in Eden, God's lavish provision of trees for food and delight demanded a response of contented obedience from Adam and Eve, so also today, even in a fallen world, God's goodness demands a response. There is a moral dimension to every manifestation of beauty. This chapter thus surveys modern perversions of beauty, affirming that a person's definition of beauty and what a person is attracted to reflects his or her spiritual health. The chapter then traces the implications that these realities suggest for the Christian high school classroom.

Chapter 5 weaves together the ideas from the previous chapters and explores the ways beauty can enhance the effectiveness of practices and pedagogy aimed at spiritual formation. This chapter focuses on biblical examples and principles for using

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[99] Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) develops this idea at length, offering two poignant insights. First, he observes, "Common grace has tempered the curse and in this way left us with genuine poetry within nature. One and the same stem holds both the unfurled rosebud and the wounding thorn" (135). Second, he avers, "Within the sinful human being common grace has preserved from complete loss the sense of this beauty in nature" (135). Interestingly, Kuyper argues that the variegation of degrees of beauty in nature are helpful in producing a sense of gratitude now and a deeper longing for the glory that is to come (133). Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press 2011).

aesthetics to enhance personal and corporate spiritual disciplines. It also examines how aesthetics manifest in and affect the open and hidden curricula.[100]

Each chapter highlights the formative power of beauty as too powerful of a tool to leave to chance. Caution and diligence in understanding and applying Scripture's teaching on beauty will strengthen the discipleship of high school students.

[100] The term "hidden curriculum" borders on cliché in education literature. The term has been applied extensively since Philip Jackson coined it in 1968 in his article "Life in Classrooms." When Jackson used the term, he was referring to the disconnect between what is overtly taught in educational institutions and what pupils actually learn—what he called the unpublicized aspects of school life. Debby Cotton, Jennie Winter, and Ian Bailey, "Researching the Hidden Curriculum: Intentional and Unintended Messages," *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 37, no. 2 (May 2013): 192.

## CHAPTER 2

## THE OBJECTIVITY OF BEAUTY

Ideas, noetic structures, cognitive reflexes, and affections—conscious and unconscious—are the building material of a person's worldview.[1] These elements of a worldview shape both how a person thinks and what a person thinks about. Consequently, a person's worldview is foundational to his or her spiritual formation (Prov 2:37).[2] The maxim "ideas have consequences" rings particularly true in the arena of spiritual formation because improper ideas will lead to improper spiritual formation. Four specific worldview-level ideas about beauty threaten the spiritual formation of Christian high school students.[3] These beliefs are interrelated, but they also exist independently of each other. The first false idea is the most obvious one. Christian high school students are

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[1] James Sire helpfully defines a Christian worldview as "a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being." James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 122.

[2] The term "spiritual formation" poses some difficulties because of the nebulous nature of the word "spiritual" and the fact that spiritual formation is often spoken of outside of the context of Christian truth. I intend to speak only about what Mark Maddix defines as Christian formation: "The progressive transformation of the human person into the likeness of Jesus Christ." Mark A. Maddix, "Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation," in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James Riley Estep Jr. and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 240. However, the term "Christian formation" feels too external and seems to take the focus away from the priority of the internal. Spiritual formation is much more than performing spiritual actions or conforming to external norms of behavior. In this context, spiritual formation is the process through which God applies the salvation he has provided in Christ, removes the effects of sin, and conforms the individual to the image of Christ using the means that the Bible teaches. It is a process that is completely dependent on what noted educator Robert Pazmiño describes as "an essential reservoir of Christian truth, knowledge, and wisdom that can be educationally named as information." Robert W. Pazmiño, "Christian Education Is More Than Formation," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (September 2010): 358.

[3] These observations are not based on a formal research; instead, they are simply observations from my fourteen years of teaching hundreds of high school students. However, even with that foundation, I do not offer these observations as authoritative or evidentiary. Their purpose here is to provide context and background that illuminates the usefulness of the main ideas I will discuss in this chapter.

susceptible to relativism in many areas, but they seem to gravitate towards aesthetic relativism with particular haste. Akin to this first problem is the second problem—the idea that God is indifferent to aesthetics. This assumption of God's indifference is fueled alternately by pragmatic, egalitarian, and democratic impulses. The basic idea is that beauty is a trivial matter of taste that does not concern God. A third problem with how high school students think about beauty emerges from a different direction. Some students feel the wonder of beauty deeply, but they are forced into confusion because great art is often removed from and even hostile towards God. These students are challenged by the reality that people who reject God are often the producers and gatekeepers of most recognized aesthetic material. In many students' minds, the following question resonates: "If the devil has all the good music, art, and literature, then how can beauty be from God?" While there are errors in the observations on which this question rests, the question can, and should, be answered biblically. A fourth concern is that even students who see beauty as an objective reality that expresses the nature of God still often fail to understand that beauty has a moral—and, thus, a spiritual—dimension.

These four erroneous perspectives on beauty undermine beauty's effectiveness in the spiritual development of Christian students. Four propositions can correct or mitigate these errors and establish a foundation on which beauty can affect spiritual formation: (1) beauty is objective; (2) God is the essence and end of beauty; (3) beauty is received and experienced as God's common grace; and (4) beauty has a moral or ethical dimension. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the first of these propositions.

## Beauty and the Issue of Subjectivity

The idea that beauty is subjective is not new. Even in ancient Greece, the Sophists argued for the relativity of beauty.[4] Nevertheless, aesthetic relativism did not gain momentum until after the Enlightenment.[5] Emboldened by the ascendancy of relativism, English philosopher David Hume (1711–1776) asserts, "Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty . . . , and every individual ought to acquiesce in his own sentiment, without pretending to regulate those of others."[6] German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), writing only a few years later, brazenly asserts, "The judgment of taste is therefore not a judgment of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical, by which we understand that whose determining ground can be no other than subjective."[7] This relativistic view of beauty has continued to the present, intensifying with the rise of materialism and scientism. English theologian Colin E. Gunton (1941–2003) summarizes how some who hold to scientism and materialism see beauty: "If only science tells us the truth, what remains to art? A doctrine of the meaninglessness of material particulars combines with scientism to deprive the artistic

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[4] Crispin Sartwell, "Beauty," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive, Winter 2017 ed., last modified October 5, 2016, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/beauty/.

[5] Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, "The Great Theory of Beauty and Its Decline," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31, no. 2 (1972): 165–80. In this article, the well-known Polish historian of philosophy and aesthetician of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw defends the claim that "the Great Theory [of objective beauty] was the dominant conception of beauty for 2000 years" (173–74).

[6] David Hume, "Of the Standard of Taste," in *Essays Moral and Political* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1894), 136.

[7] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 27.

object of its inherent meaning and substantiality."[8] Objective beauty is losing ground among professional philosophers.[9] John Hodges laments the direness of this situation:

> The evangelical church has been influenced by the relativism of our age as well. While the church has fought against relativism in the area of morals, we have neglected the same fight in the area of aesthetics: we have come to accept the modernist position that beauty is purely a matter of personal preference. The result is a failure to fully understand what it means to be human, and a poverty in our souls. Without recourse to past thinkers and old books, we might forget that there ever was a time that Christians held to objective standards of beauty.[10]

This pervasive aesthetic relativism threatens the spiritual development of Christian high school students in four distinct ways: (1) it distorts Scripture; (2) it flattens the Christian worldview; (3) it trivializes some attributes of God; and (4) it validates some moral failures.

## Clarifications

Before proceeding further, I want to outline some clarifications. Aesthetics is a complicated topic, but some of this complexity is artificial.[11] The Greek word that "aesthetics" comes from means "to feel, sense, or perceive."[12] Aesthetics in this thesis will primarily refer to the study of beauty as the cause of those feelings.[13] The study of

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[8] Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 67.

[9] British philosopher Peter Williams cites a 2009 survey of 3,226 philosophy faculty and graduate students that revealed "that 41% of contemporary philosophers 'accept or lean towards' the objectivity of beauty, while only 34% 'accept or lean toward' thinking beauty is subjective." Peter S. Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy: A Christian Introduction to the Love of Wisdom* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2013), 289.

[10] John Mason Hodges, "Beauty Revisited," *Reformation and Revival* 4, no. 4 (1995): 64.

[11] The term is fairly new to the lexica of philosophical terms. Philosophy professor David Naugle dates its origin around 1735 when "Alexander Baumgarten first used 'aesthetics' for the modern discipline in his dissertation 'Philosophical Reflections on Some Matters Pertaining to Poetry.'" David K. Naugle, *Philosophy: A Student's Guide*, ed. David S. Dockery, Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 87n2.

[12] Naugle, *Philosophy: A Student's Guide*, 87.

[13] I am not alone in wanting a simple definition of aesthetics. James Spiegel, professor of philosophy at Taylor University, offers a similarly simple definition: "Aesthetics, generally speaking, is the

aesthetics here is the study of beauty. This thesis will not discuss aesthetic inquiry that focuses only on the feelings apart from an object or reality that causes those feelings.[14]

It is also important to distinguish between the objective reality of beauty and a person's appreciation of beauty—his or her taste in beauty. A person's taste for an aesthetic form depends on many factors. For example, I struggled to appreciate the aesthetics of dance for two separate reasons: (1) I have not encountered or sought training to inform my appreciation, and (2) I have a negative association with dance that has nothing to do with aesthetics. However, my ignorance and aversions do not negate the objective aesthetic of the medium. Joseph Wooddell, in his helpful book on apologetics, summarizes this point:

> The alleged subjectivity of beauty can be accounted for and overcome in at least two ways: (1) When two or more persons disagree as to whether something is beautiful, and they have the same things in mind when considering the object or idea, one person (or none) is right and all the others are wrong; or (2) it may be the case that two or more persons are thinking of two or more different but equally objective criteria when calling something beautiful or ugly. In such a case, both persons are correct but only with the understanding that it is not [the object being considered] which is beautiful *per se* but rather that which [the object] represents.[15]

Beauty, like logic and morality, is objective. The beauty of something does not depend on whether people appreciate it as beautiful. It is helpful to keep the idea of personal taste separate from this discussion.

Another point of clarification relates to cultural differences. This thesis will argue that the presence of aesthetic elements in Scripture proves some claims about

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inquiry into the nature of beauty." James S. Spiegel, "Aesthetics and Worship," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2, no. 4 (1998): 40.

[14] Mortimer J. Adler, *The Syntopicon: An Index to the Great Ideas*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., Great Books of the Western World (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990), 91. Adler states, "The meaning of the word 'aesthetic' has progressively narrowed, until now it refers almost exclusively to the appreciation of works of fine art, where before it connoted any experience of the beautiful, in the things of nature as well as in the works of man." Of course, the meaning has continued to migrate after Adler composed this to where it now can represent the analysis of the feelings alone regardless of what existential stimuli produced them or what value the feelings have.

[15] Joseph D. Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith: Using Aesthetics for Christian Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 69.

beauty. This assertion introduces a question as different cultures have different aesthetic conventions: How do we know which aesthetic elements are universal? Fortunately, it is not hard to recognize aesthetic elements. Even if we do not appreciate the aesthetics of a particular kind of expression, we know whether that expression is aesthetic. For example, I might need training to enjoy a haiku poem, but I realize that a haiku is an aesthetic expression even before I appreciate it. Because of the cultural connection between the Western world and its biblical roots, most of the Bible's conventions are accessible. I will speak of these conventions as beautiful because most native English readers can appreciate their beauty. It would be helpful to explore how other cultures understand the conventions used in the Bible. A different in-depth study of these issues could distinguish between objective aspects of beauty and the forms of language and culture that express those aspects, but these matters are not necessary to show the importance of beauty in spiritual formation.[16]

### Aesthetic Relativism Distorts Scripture

The way people think—that is, their presuppositions and thought processes—can easily distort their exegesis and theology. Richard Lints, writing about theological method, asserts, "My theological convictions are both an influence on and a function of my 'way to think about the world.'"[17] It is not possible to think about the Bible, theology, or anything else in a mental vacuum, and the ideas that a person holds when interpreting Scripture will affect the outcome of one's reading. The degree to which a person's

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[16] This raises the question of whether the perspicuity of Scripture extend beyond the meaning of Scripture to the effect of Scripture? In other words, Scripture is intended to have a certain effect on readers. It brings about faith, it enlightens the mind, and it produces the fear of God. Are these effects accessible to everyone regardless of culture just as the meaning of Scripture is accessible without special knowledge? Perspicuity does not say that all things are equally accessible to all people but that the important things are accessible to most people. If the beauty of God is important, then the features that highlight God's beauty would also be accessible and open to the appreciation of most people regardless of culture.

[17] Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 17.

assumptions will affect one’s interpretation is dependent on how fundamentally significant the assumptions are within a biblical worldview. Because beauty is a foundational concept in any understanding of the world, any false views about beauty will profoundly affect how one interprets many Scripture passages.

Additionally, faithful interpreters should seek to understand the author’s intended meaning for each of the words that the author uses. There will always be gaps between the author’s understanding and the reader’s understanding, but responsible study strives to close those gaps. This closing is done by striving to have the same assumptions and definitions as the biblical authors. A survey of Bible passages with aesthetic references demonstrates that when biblical writers refer to beauty, they presuppose and intend an objective view of beauty, and if a reader does not share this presumed and intended objectivity, he or she will distort these passages.

One passage that demonstrates a presupposed and intentionally objective understanding of beauty is Genesis 2:9: “And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant [חָמֵד, *ḥāmēd*] to the sight and good for food.”[18] The word translated as “pleasant” is based on “the verbal root which means ‘be pleasant,’ but also ‘covet,’ and ‘lust after.’”[19] The exact form of the word used here in Genesis 2:9 (נֶחְמָד, a participle based on the Niphal form) occurs four times in the Bible. In each use, it (נֶחְמָד, *neḥmād*) refers to a desire in response to an aesthetic appeal (Gen 3:6 [“desired”];

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[18] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the *English Standard Version*. There is another Hebrew word that evokes the idea of beauty in this passage: טוֹב (*ṭôḇ*). This word, translated “good,” appears in this verse (i.e., Gen 2:9) as well as in Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31. Altogether, the idea of beauty becomes a dominant idea in this passage. While some scholars have resisted translating the Hebrew word *ṭôḇ* as “beauty” (see, e.g., William A. Dyrness, “Aesthetics in the Old Testament: Beauty in Context,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 4 [1985]: 422–33), that view is by no means unanimous. J. I. Packer states that this word signifies “primarily that which gratifies the senses and derivatively that which he gives aesthetic or moral satisfaction.” Packer also points out that this translation is further supported because “the LXX renders *ṭôḇ* by *agathos* the regular Greek word for good as a physical or moral quality, and sometimes by *kalos* (lit. ‘beautiful’; hence, in classical as well as biblical Greek, ‘noble’, ‘honourable’, ‘admirable’, ‘worthy’).” J. I. Packer, “Good,” in *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 424.

[19] J. Barton Payne, “673 חָמַד,” in *TWOT*, 294.

Ps 19:11 [“desired”]; Prov 21:20 [“precious”]).[20] While the object desired in Genesis 3:6 (i.e., the forbidden fruit) is not a good thing, in each case where the word occurs, the author affirms the desirability or appeal of the object. The writer of Genesis describes an aesthetic reality from his perspective, just as he describes Eden as being in the east (2:8)—a patently perspectival description. However, “perspective” does not mean that the aesthetic description is not universally true. Catholic theologian Brendan Sammon stresses the beauty of this description: “Here, in the earliest Hebraic text we find the first and most important attributes of beauty: order, proportion, harmony, or what could also be called fittingness.”[21] The description of Eden as attractive seems to accomplish three distinct purposes in the text.

First, the aesthetic description of Eden establishes the goodness of God, who provides this environment for man. Just as God prepared realms of operation on days one through three of creation and then filled those realms on days four through six, God is graciously preparing a pleasant habitation for Adam. Allen Ross concurs: “The trees (2:9), the river (2:10), and the pure gold and precious gems (2:11–12) emphasize what God had invested in this garden sanctuary.”[22]

Second, the beauty of the description lays the foundation for the future themes of salvation and glorification, which both use the language of beauty and gardening to illustrate God’s work. As Ross writes, “These elements [i.e., the trees, the rivers, and the gems] would also be present in the heavenly sanctuary in the new creation (Rev 21:10–11, 21; 22:1–2), thus indicating that paradise will be restored on the new earth.”[23]

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[20] “חמד” in *HALOT*, 325.

[21] Brendan Sammon, *Called to Attraction: An Introduction to the Theology of Beauty*, Cascade Companions 38 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 12.

[22] Allen Ross, *Genesis*, in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis, Exodus*, ed. Phillip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 45.

[23] Ross, *Genesis*, 45.

Transparently, these ideas are also present in imagery of the promised land, the tabernacle, the temple, the worship of Israel recorded in the Psalms, and the imagery of the Old Testament prophets. If beauty here in Genesis is merely a subjective preference, then these themes and imagery are emptied of any lasting significance.

The third significance of the aesthetic aspect of this description is forensic or apologetic. The ideal nature of the setting in which God places man defends God against the accusation that man rebelled out of a sense of need. The more ideal Eden is, the less possibility there is for the rebels to blame God for their moral failure. Kenneth Mathews develops this idea when he observes, "Eden is characterized by trees yielding fruits that are pleasant in appearance and delightful to the taste: 'all kinds,' 'pleasing,' and 'good' evidence the extravagance the garden offered. Any charge that God is stingy is unfounded."[24] Because Eden was an objectively beautiful and good setting, man's responsibility in his sinful rebellion is highlighted, and any grounds for accusing God are diminished.

If readers approach these verses in Genesis with a relativistic view of beauty, then they will significantly diminish all three of these implications from this text. Readers and interpreters of Scripture cannot hold to a relativistic view of beauty and not thereby miss some nuances of the text. The biblical writer, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, assumes that his audience will be attracted to the same phenomena that he finds attractive. Often, the meaning and intensity of the passage are diminished when the shared appeal of the aesthetic element is lost. This distorting effect of aesthetic relativism is not just true in the narrative passages; it is arguably even more pronounced in the wisdom books of the Old Testament.

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[24] K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 201.

One example from the wisdom books is Psalm 45. An understanding of this psalm necessitates that the reader understands beauty in the same terms as the ancient author. This psalm is distinct in the Psalter because it focuses on the marriage of a man and a woman. While even New Testament believers recognized the psalm's messianic application, the physicality and sensuality of the psalm feel much more like the narratives of Song of Solomon than the prayers of the Psalter. Significantly, the psalm employs aesthetic descriptions that appeal to a variety of senses and develops those descriptions through words and structures that are strikingly elaborate.

The aesthetic description begins with the author's introduction, which reads, "My heart overflows with a pleasing theme" (Ps 45:1). The word translated "pleasing" is the adjective טוֹב (*tov*). This word can mean "good" or "happy" in a generic sense, or it can mean "fitting," which is significant given that fittingness suggests beauty.[25] However, the word can also denote "[a]esthetic or sensual goodness." At times, in Scripture, the word describes "beauty" or "desirability," such as with the attractiveness of the "daughters of men" (Gen 6:2), Rebekah (Gen 24:16), and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2). It is also used to "describe the 'sweetness' of cane (Jer 6:20), and . . . that the waters of Damascus were 'better' than the muddy waters of the Jordan (2 Kgs 5:12)."[26] Understanding טוֹב as "beautiful" or "fitting" aligns with the details of Psalm 45 that focus on sensuous realities in the scene. The king is described as "handsome," with "grace" emanating from his lips. Also, the girding of his sword (v. 3) portrays visible "splendor and majesty." The pleasant anointing of oil, the robes fragrant with "myrrh and aloes and cassia," the sound of gladdening instruments, and the gleam of the queen in exotic gold and "many-colored robes" emphasize that the psalmist envisions exquisite scenes bursting with physical beauty (vv. 7–9). The psalm continues to extol the beauty of the

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[25] Andrew Bowling, "793 טוֹב," in *TWOT*, 345.

[26] Bowling, "793 טוֹב," 346.

bride ("The king will desire your beauty"; v. 11), and the psalmist affirms that the bride is "glorious" in her chamber (v. 13). This description is not about the glory of executive or physical power but about the glory of beauty and fittingness.

The descriptions appeal to a range of senses. There is an auditory appeal with the grace-filled lips and the stringed instruments (vv. 3, 8), and there is an olfactory appeal with the fragrance of "myrrh and aloes and cassia" (v. 8). The visual imagery of a handsome man, a beautiful woman, the brilliant gold, and the radiant colors are significant. These physically appealing descriptions are augmented with the concrete images of a pen in ready hands (v. 1), a sword on the rightful thigh (v. 3), sharp arrows (v. 5), a throne everlasting and a scepter of righteousness (v. 6), oil of gladness (v. 7), palaces of ivory (v. 8), gift-bearing visitors (v. 12), joyful virgins (vv. 14–15), and harmonious family generations (vv. 16–17). The beauty and fitting nature of these descriptions are evident if each adjective is replaced with its respective opposite or unfit form—a pen in a *lazy* hand, a sword on the *wrongful* thigh, *blunted* arrows, and so forth.

The beautiful artistry God inspired in this psalm is even more evident in the structure of the psalm. The overall structure of the psalm is a chiasm with parallel elements mirroring and emphasizing thematically significant elements:

A. Introduction (v. 1)
    B. Address to the King (vv. 2–5)
        C. The [Beauty of the] Bridegroom (vv. 6–9)
    B′. Address to the Bride (vv. 10–12)
        C′. The [Beauty of the] Bride (vv. 13–15)
A′. Conclusion (vv. 16–17)[27]

[27] Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 343. This is the source of the structure as reproduced here, with the exception that the word "beauty" has been used to replace the word "glory." This is in keeping with a similar outline offered in J. A. Motyer, *The Psalms*, in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. G. J. Wenham et al., 21st cent. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 515.

This structure shows a remarkable balance and clear purpose in the high-level organization of the psalm. John Goldingay indicates that the dominant rhythm is 4-4, but that is only the start of the intricate design of this psalm.[28] Goldingay also observes that in the first verse of the psalm, there is a "sonorous asyndetic 4-4-4 tricolon with intricate patterns of parallelism that befit the intricate patterning the poem will soon refer to."[29] This initial tricolon includes the words (in the ESV) "my heart," "I," and "my tongue," while the words "overflow," "address," and "pen" form the second tricolon. There is then a double pairing of "theme" with "verses" and "king" with "ready scribe":[30]

> My heart overflows with a pleasing theme;
> I address my verses to the king;
> my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe (Ps 45:1)

The second verse also begins with a "sonorous asyndetic tricolon."[31] This careful patterning and structuring continues through with psalm, unevenly at times but always there. The last lines of the poem show just as elaborate a structure as the first:

> I will cause your name to be remembered in all generations;
> therefore nations will praise you forever and ever. (Ps 45:17)

The parallel correspondence between "I" and "nations," "will cause" and "will praise," "your name" and "you," and "all generations" and "forever and ever" are striking. Goldingay elaborates, "The final line pairs with the first in expressing the poet's homage to the king's name. Here the significance of this homage is that it will lead to the further homage of the peoples. Thus the first halves of each colon stand parallel, as then do the time references in each second half."[32]

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[28] John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 2, *Psalms 42–89*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 56.

[29] Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 56.

[30] Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 56.

[31] Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 56.

[32] Goldingay, *Psalms 42–89*, 62.

Thus, this psalm, in all its ornate complexity and vibrant images, develops themes such as the importance of marriage, the representative nature of human government,[33] and the virtues of a godly king and a godly wife—but, most importantly, it points to Christ.[34] It is a song about a beautiful king and his beautiful bride who have an eternal fruitful line of those who share in their beauty. The poem evokes numerous aesthetic images, and it uses beautifully artistic language as the singing poet paints pictures with his carefully structured lines. If the interpreter of this psalm embraces aesthetic relativity, he or she will miss so much of the grand artistry that the psalmist weaves into these lines. That interpreter will miss the connection between the structure of the poem and the meaning of the psalm. The structure of this psalm assumes that certain patterns, imagery, and concepts will resonate as fitting and pleasing and will thus intensify the effect of this psalm and drive its message deeper into the reader's consciousness. Without a shared understanding of beauty, this effect is severely blunted.

The exegetical importance of an objective view of beauty is not only true in the Old Testament; its relevance emerges in many New Testament texts as well. One particularly clear example occurs in Luke 12:27–28. This passage is part of a larger call to "avoid anxiety" (Luke 12:24–34; cf. Matt 6:25–33).[35] Christ references three elements

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[33] This is seen in v. 6, which is easily the hardest verse to understand in this psalm. The explanation offered by Tremper Longman III, and the scholars to which he refers (Goldingay [2007] and VanGemeren [2008]), seems to be the most plausible explanation. Longman suggests, "The theology of Israel has no room for the concept of a divine king. On the other hand, the king was certainly seen as God, the king's, human representative on earth (Ps. 2), who wages war on his [God's] behalf . . . . We understand the reference as elliptical, thus yielding a translation like: 'your throne is a throne of; or 'your throne, God's, is yours forever and ever.'" Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 15–16 (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 202.

[34] Longman demonstrates that several New Testament references help establish this prophetic interpretation: "The Davidic kingship reflects God's cosmic kingship. It also anticipates Jesus the Messiah . . . . Jesus is the groom and his church is the bride (Eph. 5:25–32). For this reason, the author of Hebrews (1:8–9, citing the Septuagint, rather than the MT [i.e., the Masoretic Text]), taking the vocative in verse 6 (your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever), cites verses 6–7 in reference to Christ, who is greater than the angels." Longman, *Psalms*, 203–4.

[35] Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 974.

from nature to illustrate his point: birds (v. 24), lilies (v. 27), and grass (v. 28). The lilies and grass are probably meant to be part of the same illustration. Verse 27 begins with the command to notice—or observe carefully (κατανοέω)—the lilies. Most likely, no particular kind of flower is in mind here as the generic word "grass" is substituted for "lily" in verse 28.[36] Christ argues that the short-lived field flowers possess a beauty that outstrips Solomon's beauty. Solomon's beauty and glory were legendary; he made "silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and . . . cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah" (2 Chr 9:27; see also 9:13–28 // 1 Kgs 10:4–23). The conditional clause in Luke 12:28 is a first-class condition. Darrell Bock clarifies that this "stresses that God does clothe the grass."[37] Alfred Plummer stresses the phrase "'If in the field,' where such care might seem to be superfluous."[38] Furthermore, the description of the flowers as grass forms a common metaphor for the brevity of life (Job 14:2; Pss 37:2; 102:11; 103:15–16; Isa 40:6–8). Each of these points highlights the extravagance of God's endowment of beauty upon the flowers.

Two key points undergird the freight of this illustration. First, the flowers are compared favorably to Solomon's glorious array. Solomon's glory and garb were admirable in some way. This statement assumes an aesthetic standard. The second point is even more significant—the flowers of the field are more glorious, or more beautiful, than was Solomon's array. Scripture does not, in either passage that makes this comparison (Luke 12:24–34 // Matt 6:25–33), explain this surpassing excellence, but the

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[36] Leon Morris supports this view:

> The lilies are probably not lilies in our sense of the term. . . . In the Old Testament it [the word "lily"] is used of the colour of the lips (Song 5:13), which leads some to favour the scarlet anemone. But clearly there is great uncertainty and there is much to be said for the view that the term is not specific. Jesus then would be referring in a general way to "flowers." . . . Yet the flowers, now spoken of as grass (which supports the view that no particular plant is in mind), are very temporary. (Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 3 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988], 232–33)

[37] Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, 975.

[38] Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, 5th ed., International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 327.

text assumes it is true. Some readers may simply overlook this question because a romantic impulse preconditions them to favor natural beauty over skilled human ornamentation, but the Bible does not share that impulse. While there is no stated reason why the ornament of the flower is more excellent than that of Solomon, Christ assumes an aesthetic standard that his readers need to accept for the message of this passage to resonate fully with them.

A survey of expositional comments from church history helps illustrate the significance of this passage to the discussion of an objective understanding of beauty. These comments demonstrate that while this standard of beauty is never expounded overtly, the authors and presumably their immediate audience accepted it. Eusebius of Caesarea (260–339) comments on these verses as follows:

> But if a man wishes to be adorned with precious raiment, let him observe closely how even down to the flowers which spring from the earth God extends His manifold wisdom, adorning them with divers colours, so adapting to the delicate membranes of the flowers dyes far superior to gold and purple, that under no luxurious king, not even Solomon himself, who was renowned among the ancients for his riches as for his wisdom and pleasures, has so exquisite a work been devised; and hence it follows, But I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.[39]

Eusebius accepts the aesthetic assumption behind these verses and elaborates, arguing that coloring and design are part of the superiority. Writing about a century later, Chrysostom (347–407), in his homily on Matthew, comments,

> He does not here employ the example of the birds, making mention of a swan or a peacock, but the lilies, for he wishes to give force to the argument on both sides, that is to say, both from the meanness of the things which have obtained such honour, and from the excellence of the honour conferred upon them; and hence a little after He does not call them lilies, but grass.[40]

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[39] Eusebius of Caesarea, quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels, Collected out of the Works of the Fathers: St. Luke*, vol. 3, ed. John Henry Newman (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843), 449–50, Logos Bible Software. Unfortunately, Aquinas does not always reveal where he found the quotations that he provides in his *Catena Aurea*.

[40] Chrysostom, *Homily 22 on Matthew*, quoted in Aquinas, *Catena Aurea*, 450.

Chrysostom sees that the commonness of the flower possessed excellence of honor that surpassed Solomon. John Calvin (1509–1564) comments, “The kindness of God, which is gloriously displayed in herbs and flowers, exceeds all that men can accomplish by their wealth or power.”[41] Again, there is no explanation of how the glory of the flower excels, but there is an acceptance that it does. Matthew Henry (1662–1714) also emphasizes the beauty of these flowers: “Trust God for clothing, for he clothes the lilies (v. 27, 28); they make no preparation for their own clothing, they toil not, they spin not, the root in the ground is a naked thing, and without ornament, and yet, as the flower grows up, it appears wonderfully beautified.”[42] Henry sees a contrast between the plainness of the root and the beauty of the flower, but he still accepts the basic aesthetic premise that undergirds this passage. There simply is no other way to understand what Christ means. The logic of the passages requires a common aesthetic understanding, and Christians have accepted that throughout the history of the church.

These passages are a sampling of dozens that illustrate why students must be taught an objective view of beauty—if such a view is not held, then much of Scripture will not carry the force that the authors intend for their writings to have. This argument cannot be dismissed as only applying to a select few passages of Scripture. Biblical scholar C. Caverno observes, “That the Bible is an ethical book is evident. Righteousness in all the relations of man as a moral being is the key to its inspiration, the guiding light to correct understanding of its utterance. But it is everywhere inspired and written in an atmosphere of aesthetics.”[43] If a reader misunderstands how the authors of Scripture

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[41] John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, trans. William Pringle, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 2010), 342, Logos Bible Software.

[42] Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1867.

[43] C. Caverno, “Beauty,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr et al. (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915), 420, Logos Bible Software.

viewed aesthetics, then he or she will misunderstand this ubiquitous atmosphere of aesthetics and thus much of the Bible.

As argued above, an objective aesthetic will provide some of the foundation for a proper understanding of Scripture, but an obvious outgrowth of this truth is that Christian educators must go further. To be faithful to the text of Scripture, teachers have to stress what the text stresses. Often, this means that teachers must highlight an aesthetic emphasis. John Piper, in his excellent work *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, insists, "The meaning of a biblical text is what the author intended to communicate by his words . . . . The author's intention may be that we not only understand his emotion, but experience it."[44] When Isaiah says, "Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty" (Isa 33:17), he is not just making a cerebral claim about the future. He intends for the reader to feel the hope that this prophecy will give to the nation of Israel that is about to be deported. What the psalmist longed for (Ps 27:4) will again belong to the people of God when God again becomes their King and undoes the wreckage wrought by the human monarchy. The emotion embedded in aesthetic claims like this one must be faithfully unpacked. Scripture is more likely to have its full effect on the hearer when this sense is stressed.[45]

Covenant College professor J. Dewaal Dryden concurs: "The whole person, in all their faculties, is involved in this dialectic movement towards understanding. The emotions, for example, as expressions of desire, play a hermeneutically productive role in their receptivity to the rhetorical dynamics of the text."[46] Students need to hear teaching that emphasizes the aesthetic meanings that are found throughout Scripture. They need to

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[44] John Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 301.

[45] Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, 301.

[46] J. De Waal Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom: Recovering the Formative Agency of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 21.

understand that the aesthetic freight of the passages has binding force; the right response to them is to enter in to the delight, longing, amazement, or other emotions of the author.

In some cases, teachers will need to find commentaries that will help them recognize the aesthetic elements in the text. An example of such a commentary is Douglas Kelly's work on Revelation. The following paragraph from the foreword illustrates this commentary's helpful tone and its focus on God's beauty:

> "The beauty of the Lord our God" is spoken of by Moses (in Psalm 90:17). The book of Revelation is pervaded by the sheer beauty of God. From the rocky shores of an island concentration camp, through distressed churches; from scenes of famine, war, and blood-shed; from fiery destruction of armies and navies; from painful plagues, and the slaughter of holy witnesses; from demonic attempts to destroy God's people, and on through pestilence, sores, and the downfall of the world's greatest economy and city; from united (and then, divided) political and religious harlotry, through the final destruction of the last desperate outburst of universal evil, the beauty of the Triune God, who sits on the rainbow-circled Throne of universal power and righteousness, casts its serene light over it all. That serene beauty and infinite power, joined to unbounded love and grace, overcomes all the horrendous corruption caused by sin in all aspects of the universe; putting the reprobate eternally away, where they need to be, and transforming everything else in the beauteous light that comes from the face of Jesus Christ: "making all things new."[47]

A quick word search confirms that Kelly uses the word "beauty" almost 350 times throughout the commentary. While some may argue that this focus becomes a distraction from the main thrust of the text, reading a work like this commentary may be a helpful corrective for many who have failed to appreciate the beauty of God's revelation.

Scripture's claims to beauty are objective. They carry an imperatival force that is tied deeply to the real meaning of the text of Scripture. Much is lost if students are not taught this objective reality. The next section argues against another danger of aesthetic relativism—the danger of a distorted or flattened worldview.

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[47] Douglas F. Kelly, *Revelation*, Mentor Expository Commentary (Ross-shire, UK: Mentor, 2012), 9.

## Relativism Flattens a Christian's Worldview

The Christian worldview recognizes that the degrees of variation in the physical world train and prepare the human consciousness for more abstract variations and degrees. One mountain is taller than another; one cell is more complicated than another; one light is brighter than another (Gen 1:16); the glory of the lily is greater than the glory of Solomon's clothing (Matt 6:29). This variation that is woven into the fabric of reality trains or catechizes humans to think in terms of lesser and greater things. Biblical authors often compare one thing to another good thing to show the superiority of one of the items. This practice is particularly true when comparing new revelation to old revelation. Examples of this can be seen throughout the book of Hebrews and intermittently in Matthew 5. Puritan Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) follows this thinking when engaging 2 Corinthians 3. While discussing Paul's comments concerning the superiority of Christ's glory over the glory of the first covenant, Sibbes says, "And because the excellency of anything is best commended by comparing and setting by it something else that excels in itself, and yet is exceeded by it."[48] It is only when the mind has been trained to think this way that it is prepared to think of eternal realities that are far better than present earthly realities. How are Christians to know or understand what they have not "seen," "heard of," or "imagined" (1 Cor 2:9)? Paul answers this question in Romans 1:20: "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." This revelatory method has always been God's way to make visible the invisible by drawing attention to visible things that are lesser, or at least more approachable, manifestations of the unseen. The supreme example of this is Christ, "the [visible] image of the invisible God" (Col 1:9). But the effectiveness of the method

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[48] Richard Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: James Nisbet, 1863), 203, Logos Bible Software.

hinges on an acceptance of degrees. Conversely, relativism and philosophical pluralism flatten out these degrees and differentiation.

Famously, this argument emerges in the opening chapter of C. S. Lewis's book *The Abolition of Man*. Lewis relates a passage from the second chapter of a school textbook that he calls *The Green Book*.[49] In this passage, the authors of *The Green Book* relate a well-known story in which Coleridge overhears two tourists describing a waterfall. One of the tourists describes the waterfall as "sublime," while the other describes it as "pretty." "Coleridge mentally endorsed the first judgment and rejected the other with disgust," the authors state. They then observe,

> When the man said "this is sublime," he appeared to be making a remark about the waterfall . . . . Actually, . . . he was not making a remark about the waterfall, but a remark about his own feelings. What he was saying was really "I have feelings associated in my mind with the word sublime" or shortly, "I have sublime feelings."[50]

In this brief passage, Lewis demonstrates one of the great dangers of aesthetic relativism. If the approach advocated by *The Green Book* were true, then every propositional statement—including every aesthetics statement—is simply a reflection of the speaker's feelings. There is no objective external difference between a clouded sunset and one of dazzling beauty except that the speaker has clouded or dazzling feelings. The result is a flattened world with no variegation that can be spoken of meaningfully. Stephen Turley summarizes, "For Lewis, these two perspectives represent nothing less than two fundamentally different human projects constituting two fundamentally different ages or civilizations that we might call the moral age versus the modern age, or the sapient age versus the scientific age."[51] For Turley, "relegating Truth, Goodness, and Beauty into

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[49] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man, or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 1.

[50] Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 2.

[51] Stephen R. Turley, *Awakening Wonder: A Classical Guide to Truth, Goodness and Beauty* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2015), 2.

subjective processes and private preferences is inextricably linked to the collapse of meaning in the modern age."[52] The effects of privatization and relativism are magnified by the fluidity and constant movement of modern culture. The old stable model of the universe has been usurped by what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls "liquid modernity."[53] In this version of modernity, the world is flat, and the conceptual scaffolding that would support a sense of God's majestic beauty has been washed into the broiling sea of relativity.

The result of this flattened worldview is tragic. The beauty of God can only be rightly understood if it is understood through a series of progressively greater degrees.[54] Similar to how God has revealed holiness through a series of progressively more significant degrees of purity seen throughout the Bible, Christians cannot rightly apprehend the beauty of God without recognizing that some things are objectively more beautiful than others and understanding that, ultimately, God is the most beautiful of all. Abraham Kuyper sees in this variegation a critical object lesson. He observes that all around are examples of the sublime, the ordinary, and the repulsive. Each of these represents different degrees of the effect of sin on creation:

> The curse is observable everywhere but was restrained in its operation, and thanks to that preserving operation of common grace this world can still display so much beauty to us. Nevertheless, beauty no longer adorns the whole earth. On the contrary, we discover alongside each other the beautiful, the ordinary, and the ugly. A lion is beautiful; a calf is ordinary; a rat is ugly. The same holds for the plant kingdom. The cedar enthralls us with beauty, the willow strikes us as ordinary, and

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[52] Turley, *Awakening Wonder*, 2.

[53] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 27.

[54] One of the aspects of progressive revelation and its manifestation in biblical theology is its didactic merits. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum describe progressive revelation beautifully as "unfold[ing] in a progressive manner by unique twists and turns in separate but related epochs, largely demarcated by the biblical covenants, which ultimately find their terminus in the person and work of Christ." Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 30. However, as God's revelation unfolds, movement is occurring on two plains: the degree and clarity of the truth revealed is becoming greater, and those who are hearing the truth are finding their capacity and receptivity for the truth growing as well. This double effect of progressive revelation is meaningful in every major theme of the Bible, including beauty and holiness.

> the thistle repels. . . . Some mountain ranges inspire worship. Then there are very ordinary humpbacked mountains that you scarcely notice as you walk past them. There are wild rock crevasses so barren and awful that they arouse an involuntary shudder; these are real specimens of the "formless and void" that once existed. . . . This is true of the atmosphere as well. Some days you enjoy the kind of sky and weather that make you smile and lift your spirit to the heights, followed by other days that are rather ordinary, when it does not rain and the sun and moon make their appearance. Then you face the days when the stormy winds splash the rain against you and the walkway underfoot becomes impassable.[55]

Calling students to see this variation as a manifestation of God's grace and a revelation of the evil of sin can be a helpful pedagogical tool. A worldview flattened by relativism would eviscerate this object lesson, rob man of his ability to wonder, and strip God's revelation of its glory. The following two negative results of aesthetic relativism are dependent on ideas that are developed more fully in subsequent sections of this thesis.

### Aesthetic Relativism Denigrates The Attributes of God

Understanding the effect that aesthetic relativism has on the attributes of God begins with a proper understanding of God's attributes or perfections. From a believer's epistemological perspective, God's attributes are analogous to a multifaceted gemstone. Each facet of the gem allows in and reflects light, thus being brilliant in itself as well as increasing the brilliance of the surrounding facets. Similarly, none of the attributes of God stands in isolation. Theologian Wayne Grudem stresses, "Each description of one of God's attributes must be understood in the light of everything else that Scripture tells us about God."[56] Theologian John Frame makes the same point, emphatically affirming that God's attributes are not parts of him; instead, they are "perspectives on his whole

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[55] Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press 2011), 133.

[56] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 159.

being."[57] Frame also points out that each attribute is inseparable from the other, as each attribute contains or encapsulates all of the attributes of God.[58]

Whether beauty is an attribute of God is not a settled matter.[59] Part of this debate stems from the somewhat problematic term "attribute." Nevertheless, the ubiquity and specificity of beauty in the Bible's descriptions of God suggests that beauty is one of God's attributes. Even if another word is preferred (property, excellency, perfection, characteristic), it is at least true that beauty is, in some way, a meaningful description of God. Edwards scholar Roland Delattre observes that beauty "is the first among the perfections of God."[60] David Vanbrugge summarizes Jonathan Edwards's view affirming that beauty "is consistent with other attributes [of God] in that His beauty can be seen by looking at His eternality, His greatness, His loveliness, His wisdom, His power, or His holiness."[61] Jonathan King also agrees: "The basic position of theological aesthetics, argued by reasonable inference from Scripture, is that beauty corresponds in some way to the attributes of God, and as such is a communicated property or phenomena of the *opera Dei ad extra* [external works of God]."[62] Both of these quotations reemphasize that the attribute of beauty is connected to other divine attributes. King, probing this connection deeper, considers, "Is beauty a divine attribute itself, or a quality of every attribute, or the

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[57] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, Theology of Lordship 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 388.

[58] Frame is unequivocal on this point: "God is 'simple.' He is also complex, but each attribute describes God's entire complexity, not just a part of it. So no attribute is separable from the others. Each attribute has all the attributes: God's love is eternal, just, and wise. His eternity is the eternal existence of a just and wise person." Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 388.

[59] Jonathan King repeatedly points out, "The claim that beauty is an attribute of God's nature . . . lacks consensus in systematic theology offered within a broad evangelical perspective." Jonathan King, *The Beauty of the Lord: Theology as Aesthetics* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 324.

[60] Roland A. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1968), 15.

[61] David Vanbrugge, "The Full Brightness and Diffused Beams of Glory: Jonathan Edwards's Concept of Beauty and Its Relevance for Apologetics," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 1 (2014): 129.

[62] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 5.

sum of them? Should we perhaps say instead that the way all the attributes comport in God—that is, the way they coexist in perfect harmony and sublime agreement—is beautiful and is what we mean by divine beauty?"[63] King does not answer these questions, concluding instead that "Scripture does not exactly parse out these subtleties."[64] Louis Berkoff, however, does offer a conclusion that, while not being tied to texts in Scripture, is more satisfying than King's:

> On the whole, it may be said that Scripture does not exalt one attribute of God at the expense of the others but represents them as existing in perfect harmony in the Divine Being. It may be true that now one, and then another attribute, is stressed, but Scripture clearly intends to give due emphasis to every one of them. The Being of God is characterized by a depth, a fullness, a variety, and a glory far beyond our comprehension, and the Bible represents it as a glorious harmonious whole, without any inherent contradictions.[65]

When applied to beauty, Berkoff's observation is particularly meaningful. Not only does he claim that beauty as a divine attribute would be equal to any other attribute in importance, but he also demonstrates that beauty would be an aspect of every other attribute because the balance or fittingness of those attributes is attractive and glorious in itself. Thus, beauty is a quality possessed by every attribute of God. So, while scholars may debate the meaning of the phrase "the beauty of the Lord" in its various occurrences throughout the Bible, they must acknowledge that the Bible teaches that God's holiness is beautiful, his mercy is beautiful, and his wrath is beautiful. Every attribute of God is beautiful because every attribute is possessed in a gloriously balanced fullness.

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[63] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 41.

[64] Instead, King turns to the doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) to help resolve these issues. DDS would add considerable weight to the argument being presented here—if beauty is viewed in relativistic terms, then other attributes will be undermined. King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 41. King does not defend his view on DDS, which is unfortunate as several conservative theologians, such as John Fienberg, would disagree with an argument that rests on DDS. Fienberg convincingly argues that there "are ample grounds for rejecting the doctrine of divine simplicity." John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 337. However, according to Steven Duby, "Properly articulated the doctrine of divine simplicity emerges from the theological teaching of Scripture." Duby's defense of DDS offers helpful support that is missing from King. Duby avers, "The doctrine [DDS] teaches that God really is the perfection of each of his attributes." Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity* (repr., London: T & T Clark, 2018), 236.

[65] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 42.

Many Scripture passages show that when beauty is attributed to God, it must be an objective concept. One psalm that demonstrates this importance with clarity is Psalm 96. There, the psalmist commands the people of God, the angels of heaven, and the nations of the earth to worship God for his many excellent attributes. The psalm is divided into four sections, each containing three verses. Sections one (vv. 1–3) and three (vv. 7–9) parallel each other, calling for the universal praise of God. Also, sections two (vv. 4–6) and four (vv. 10–12) parallel each other in describing aspects of God's character.[66] Charles Briggs and Emilie Briggs highlight the parallel attributes for which God is to be praised in verses 8–9: "Majesty and glory [parallel] strength and beauty, a heaping up of terms to set forth the admirable attributes of Yahweh."[67] The word translated "beauty" here (תִּפְאֶ֫רֶת; *tip'eret*) is a common word for beauty.[68] While it is not always translated as beauty, this translation is fitting here.[69] Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) is emphatic, stating, "'Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.' In him are combined all that is mighty and lovely, powerful and resplendent. We have seen rugged strength devoid of beauty, we have also seen elegance without strength; the union of the two is greatly to be admired."[70]

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[66] VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 620.

[67] Charles A. Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalm*s, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906–1907), 304.

[68] BDB ("תִּפְאֶרֶת," 8597) record that of fifty-one occurrences, the AV translators use "beauty" ten times and "beautiful" six times.

[69] The word is describing something in the Lord's sanctuary. The subject of the description is not the ornamentation of the sanctuary as the psalm is more focused on the person of God. However, it could refer to either the ideas that the sanctuary represents or the Shekinah presence of God. Derek Kidner suggests that this is probably referring to both the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary (Exod 28:2; Heb 8:5). Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 380. Interestingly the word וְֽתִפְאַרְתּ֥וֹ is used to refer to the Ark of the Covenant (Ps 68:71). Also, A. H. McNeile notes that this psalm is quoted "in 1 Ch 16:23–33 as part of the composite Psalm which is related to have been sung when the ark was brought to Zion," possibly indicating a reference to God's covenantal goodness represented by the ark. A. H. McNeile, *The Psalms*, in *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture: Including the Apocrypha*, ed. Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge, and Alfred Guillaume, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1942), 366.

[70] C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, vol. 4, *Psalms 88–110* (London: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 182, Logos Bible Software.

In how the psalmist uses them here, these attributes do not allow for a relativistic or subjective meaning. If "beauty" were to mean "cuteness" or "authenticity," then the altered meaning would significantly affect the meaning of the other words. It is also relevant that "all the earth," the "nations," and "all the people" are to praise God for these attributes. This command leaves no opportunity for different cultures to define God in other terms or according to a variant understanding of beauty. Splendor, majesty, strength, and beauty cumulatively relate to one another. If beauty in these verses has a relativistic or fluid meaning, then all of the other attributes of majesty, splendor, and strength would also have no objective meaning. While many might view beauty as relative, most will not understand power in relativistic terms. If a student can see that this passage treats beauty and power with the same objectivity, then he or she might be helped. A school's curriculum must include discussions of God's attributes, and these discussions must include references to and defenses of the beauty of God.[71] Without such material, students will possess an incomplete foundation for their relationship with God.

### Aesthetic Relativism Results in Moral Failure

The connection between beauty and morality is a common subject in philosophical and religious discussion dating back to long before Plato articulated his understanding of it in his *Symposium*. However, Plato's description of this connection illustrates the precise problem. A person's view of what is beautiful will necessarily affect that person's actions. For Plato, this is because people are inherently drawn to and shaped by what they think is beautiful:

> Beginning from obvious beauties he [any person] must for the sake of that highest beauty be ever climbing aloft, as on the rungs of a ladder, from one to two, and from

[71] In a survey of systematic theologies, Matthew Capps observes that "Christian systematic theologians seem to neglect the subjects of beauty and aesthetics." He identifies Wayne Grudem as the only major evangelical systematic theology that discusses beauty as an attribute of God. Matthew Capps, "Reimagining Beauty: An Inquiry into the Role of Beauty and Aesthetics for the Spiritual Formation of Congregations" (DMin thesis project, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2017), 3.

> two to all beautiful bodies; from personal beauty, he proceeds to beautiful observances, from observance to beautiful learning, and from learning at last to that particular study which is concerned with the beautiful itself and that alone; so that in the end he comes to know the very essence of beauty.[72]

The many concerns surrounding Plato's understanding of beauty and morality are beyond my present purposes; however, it is significant that Plato understands that one's concept of beauty invariably shapes one's conduct. This truth is at the heart of Hans Urs von Balthasar's observation 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."[73] If beauty is lost, then goodness and virtue will also be lost.

The power of beauty to draw a person to virtue is expressed repeatedly by Christian theologians. Of particular note on this point are the writings of Jonathan Edwards. Michael Haykin says, "Edwards is indispensable for a Christian generation that is largely indifferent to the glory and beauty of God. For Edwards was blessed with a mind keenly aware of God's glory, permeated by the beauty of God, and devoted to the task of imparting that glory and beauty to his fellow men."[74] Edwards believed that it was "through the beauty of God [that] the heart is transformed into the same image and strongly engaged to imitate God."[75] Eric Johnson summarizes Edwards's view on this subject in a way that highlights how vital beauty was to Edwards's understanding of spiritual growth: "The only saving understanding of God [for Edwards] involves both an

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[72] Plato, *Symposium* 211c, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 9, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc =Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext %3DSym.%3Asection%3D211c.

[73] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Kenneth Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 18.

[74] Michael A. G. Haykin, "Jonathan Edwards and His Legacy," *Reformation and Revival* 4, no. 3 (1995): 81.

[75] Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies no. 1127," in *The "Miscellanies," 833–1152*, *WJE*, 20:498.

intellectual and affective appreciation or experience of the beauty of God that draws our hearts out to him in love and adoration."[76] Nevertheless, Edwards is not saying that the attractional power of beauty in spiritual activity is a natural phenomenon. He clarifies, "They who see the beauty there is in true virtue, don't perceive it by argumentation on its connections and consequences, but by the frame of their own minds, or a certain spiritual sense given them of God."[77] Edwards thus hedges against the idea that spiritual growth can occur through the bare agency of beauty without the work of the Holy Spirit.

Edwards's beliefs on the role of beauty flow from Scripture. Throughout Scripture, God uses visions—visible phenomena—of aesthetic quality and glory to arrest people's attention: "smoking fire pot and a flaming torch" (Gen 15:17), the stairs ascending to heaven (Gen 28:12),[78] the burning bush (Exod 3:2), the chariot of fire (2 Kgs 2:11), the cherubim encircling the heavenly throne (Isa 6:1–6), the chariot of God's glorious presence (Ezek 1:4–28), the guiding star (Matt 2:2), the angel and the hosts in the heavens (Luke 2:2), Paul's heart-opening blinding (Acts 9:3), and Christ's appearance on Patmos (Rev 1:10–16). All of these examples testify to the importance of aesthetics in God's work of calling people to himself because the aesthetics affected the original hearers and because they continue to affect modern readers.

Paul is transparent and emphatic on the importance of God's beauty or glory in Christ as a critical element in Christian sanctification (2 Cor 3:16–18). He describes

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[76] Eric L. Johnson, "How God Is Good for the Soul," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 7, no. 4 (2003): 28.

[77] Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, *WJE*, 8:620.

[78] The beauty of this scene intensifies when it is seen against the backdrop of Babel. At Babel, the gathered multitude of nations had sought by their own strength to build a path into the presence of God, but here, the solitary representative of one nation in his weakness and isolation is confronted by God, who gives those whom he chooses what they can never secure for themselves. God goes on to assure Jacob that his success will not depend on his effort. This contrast is apparent in the overlap of the names given to the two places. Derek Kidner points out, "Babel (Babylon) called itself Bab-ili, 'gate of God' (which may have been a flattering reinterpretation of its original meaning) but by a play of words Scripture superimposes the truer label bālal ('he confused')." Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1 (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 119.

believers as people whom the Spirit of God has freed to see the person of Christ. Then, the glory of his person forms the impetus, the catalyst, and the objective for sanctification. Christians are changed by the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:3–6). Colin Kruse explains, "Believers approximate more and more to the likeness of God expressed so perfectly in the life of Jesus Christ."[79] This transformation is not mere imitation; it is miraculous. Mark Seifrid explains, "The glory of the Lord that is thereby imparted to us is not a mere imitative participation in God's faithfulness. It is a reflection of the power of the Creator to call light out of darkness and life out of death."[80] It is important here to recognize that when Paul says "beholding" in 1 Corinthians 3:18, he is using physical sight as a metaphor for spiritual sight. Some might demur that because the physical beauty and glory are metaphors, there is, therefore, no evidence here that beauty is significant. This argument is not sustainable. Paul never suggests that the physical beauty or glory that Moses saw was unimportant. The point is quite different. Paul is arguing from one good thing to another good thing, saying that the second good is infinitely better than the first. His point is never to disparage the radiating glory on Moses's face; it is always to emphasize the glorious reality that radiates from the face of Christ. This glorious revelation was anticipated in the Old Testament, and it will be realized in the eschaton (Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:25–27; 1 John 3:2).[81] Margrett Thrall advances this point, contending that transformation is not just immaterial—physical reality is also involved:

> Is this a purely inward transformation? The only other Pauline occurrence of the verb μεταμορφόω is found in Rom 12:2, where transformation is effected by the renewal of the mind. But Paul's line of argument would be enfeebled if this were

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[79] Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 101–2.

[80] Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 186.

[81] Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 101.

> all. There must be a "visible" element. Moses, the type of the Christian convert, had possessed a visible glory. In the case of the Christian, the thought must be that assimilation to Christ as the image of God produces a visibly Christ-like character, so that the divine image becomes visible in the believer's manner of life.[82]

Paul's argument, rooted deeply in the covenantal promises of God, is that God is bringing his people into a glory that is moral, visible, and proclamatory. This glory must be precisely what God means. The beauty and moral glory of Christ cannot be an opinion. Failing to see objectivity here jeopardizes the process and doctrine of sanctification.

Paul's analogy that is rooted in Moses's experience is similar to other analogies that are helpful in spiritual growth. Vanbrugge observes, "To Edwards, there was an analogy between spiritual excellencies and the beauty of the skies, trees, or fields. He wrote in one of his collected miscellaneous thoughts that 'the beauties of nature are really emanations, or shadows, of the excellencies of the Son of God.'"[83] The Puritan Richard Baxter also argues that aesthetic delights can help Christians appreciate the greater delight that God offers. Baxter contends that the natural senses can be spiritually useful "by comparing of the objects of sense with the objects of faith; and so forcing sense to afford us that medium, from whence we may conclude the transcendent worth of glory."[84] Baxter illustrates this dynamic at length:

> How delightful are pleasing odours to our smell! How delightful is perfect music to the [ear]! How delightful are beauteous sights to the eye; such as curious pictures, sumptuous, adorned, well-contrived buildings; handsome, necessary rooms, walks, prospects; gardens stored with variety of beauteous and odoriferous flowers; or pleasant meadows, which are natural gardens! O, then, think every time thou seest or rememberest these, what a fragrant smell hath the precious ointment which is poured on the head of our glorious Saviour, and which must be poured on the heads of all his saints, which will fill all the room of heaven with its odour and perfume! How delightful is the music of the heavenly host! How pleasing will be those real

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[82] Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of the Corinthians*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 285.

[83] Vanbrugge, "The Brightness and Beams of Glory," 132, quoting Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies no. 108," in *The "Miscellanies," a–500*, *WJE*, 13:279.

[84] Richard Baxter, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest, The Fourth Part Containing A Directory for the Getting and Keeping of the Heart in Heaven*, in *The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter*, vol. 23 (London: James Duncan, 1830), 379.

> beauties above, and how glorious the building not made with hands, and the house that God himself doth dwell in, and the walks and prospects of the city of God, and the beauties and delights in the celestial paradise! Think seriously what these must needs be.[85]

God is the source or cause of both kinds of beauty, and he has carefully designed a relationship between them so that in those whose eyes he has opened, this beauty will facilitate spiritual change. Conversely, the neglect of this beauty—by relegating it to the realm of the subjective—stunts spiritual growth.

There are other less direct ways that a relativistic view of beauty affects the morality of those who come under its sway. One of the more prevalent is that relativism excuses aesthetic sloth. If there is no difference between free-form sentimental drivel and a classic epic, if a signed urinal is an artistic expression on the same level as Michelangelo's *David*, if both of these pairs are just examples of different kinds of beauty, then why would a student invest hours of effort in producing the latter when the former is equally beautiful?[86] This level of crass relativism is thankfully rare. However, the sentiment that objective beauty is too costly pervades educational establishments from preschools to administrative board meetings. While these examples do not expose the full depth of evil to which aesthetic relativism can lead, they do demonstrate how vital an objective view of beauty is in spiritual formation.

### Conclusion

This chapter has stressed that the poison of relativism undermines clear biblical truth about beauty. Poor exegesis, insipid metaphysics, lousy theology, and ethical

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[85] Baxter, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*, 381.

[86] My criticism of Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) here has more to do with how people who do not understand his work have treated it. I do not think Duchamp would have equated these works except in the fact that they are both making statements. The difference is that Michelangelo was making a statement about David and humankind, whereas Duchamp is making a statement about a certain kind of art. Christian artist and theologian Makoto Fujimura affirms that Duchamp and others like him "began to express and artistic via negative—a version of the Christian theological and philosophical tradition that points to truth by emphasizing what truth is not." Makoto Fujimura, *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017), 35.

anemia all flow from aesthetic relativism. Carl Trueman aptly demonstrates this legacy of relativism in Western culture at large, arguing that the path that led to the moral and psychological neuroses of today flowed through aesthetic forms that preached a false gospel of emotive relativism. He demonstrates that the radical ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) triumphed in popular culture through the mediums of Romantic poetry and Surrealistic art.[87] Trueman asserts that highly personalized and plastic notions of reality are ubiquitous, making any recovery of a proper vision challenging. Christians must step out of the theoretical currents and definitions of our culture so we can reorient our understanding of "the connection between aesthetics and [our] core beliefs and practices."[88] To this end, the next chapter focuses closely on examining what Scripture itself says about beauty and God's nature.

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[87] Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 161, 279.

[88] Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 402.

# CHAPTER 3

# THE END AND ESSENCE OF BEAUTY

It is hard to define beauty. Hans Urs von Balthasar observes, “Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good.”[1] Junius Johnson, a research fellow at Yale’s Rivendell Institute, concurs: “Beauty in all its senses has remained famously resistant to definition, so much so that many who have come to the task have either intentionally or unintentionally taken refuge in merely characterizing it.”[2] This chapter begins with the lesser goal of characterizing beauty. Attempting a rigid definition would be to offer more than Scripture provides, and the goal here is to present what the Scriptures offer concerning beauty. This chapter describes beauty’s essential make-up by considering its source and its end. Then the chapter surveys the meaning of the approximately twenty-three lexemes in Scripture that English Bibles translate to express aesthetic ideas. Through this discussion, I trace several themes to highlight the meaning and significance of beauty as a deeply God-centered phenomenon.

## God and Beauty Introduction

In addition to seeing the objectivity of beauty, students need to see that beauty is an intensely God-centered idea in Scripture. In C. S. Lewis’s perceptive novel *Till We Have Faces*, the most astute of the three sisters, Psyche, says of herself what is probably

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[1] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Kenneth Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 1:18.

[2] Junius Johnson, *The Father of Lights: A Theology of Beauty*, Theology for the Life of the World (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 18.

a prevalent human reality: "The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing . . . to find the place where all the beauty came from."[3] Unfortunately, as with love, most people have sought beauty in all of the wrong places. Beauty is an expression of who God is, and it is a common factor in everything that God does. In his book about beauty as an apologetic, Joseph Wooddell asserts that beauty has rightly been a theological and ethical topic throughout the church's history.[4] It may be that much of this history is a result of Augustine's fascination with this topic. Augustine spoke of God's beauty, exclaiming, "Late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new."[5] Bruno Forte, an Italian archbishop and theologian, affirms concerning Augustine, "It might be said that the whole of his thought was dominated by twin themes—which he considered intimately intertwined—of God the Trinity and beauty."[6] These themes are everywhere in Augustine's writings. In the prayer from his *Confessions* quoted above, Augustine goes on to detail his experience with lesser beauties prior to his conversion:

> I threw myself, deformed as I was, upon those well-formed things which Thou hast made. Thou wert with me, yet I was not with Thee. These things held me far from Thee, things which would not have existed had they not been in Thee. Thou didst call and cry out and burst in upon my deafness; Thou didst shine forth and glow and drive away my blindness; Thou didst send forth Thy fragrance, and I drew in my breath, and now I pant for Thee; I have tasted, and now I hunger and thirst; Thou didst touch me, and I was inflamed with desire for Thy peace.[7]

Augustine's use of sensuous language is alarming. He appeals to hearing, sight, smell, taste, touch, hunger, thirst, and passionate desire, describing his movement from lesser

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[3] C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1980), 75.

[4] Joseph D. Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith: Using Aesthetics for Christian Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 52–54, 88–91.

[5] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 10.27.38, trans. Vernon J. Bourke, Fathers of the Church 21 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 297, Logos Bible Software.

[6] Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty: Towards a Theology of Aesthetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1.

[7] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.27.38 (Bourke, 297).

"well-formed" things to the great Shaper who would re-shape him. Forte affirms, "Augustine's whole story thus becomes a journey from beauty to Beauty."[8] Peter Leithart outlines the details of this journey, concluding that beauty "dragged Augustine from a kind of materialism through Platonism and finally to Christianity. . . . *Confessions* may be seen as organized around this theme."[9] Augustine's view of God as beautiful affected his entire worldview. Anything in the world that had beauty received that beauty from God for the purpose of directing the viewer's attention back to God. Again, Forte's comment is emphatic: "When [Augustine] speaks of God, he speaks of Beauty, and when he speaks of what is beautiful in this world, he constantly points to the one who is the source and goal of all that is beautiful."[10] This statement also reveals Augustine's belief that God was the origin of beauty.

Because God's nature is the source of beauty, beauty does not necessarily exist as a norm or standard to which God has to conform in order for God and his work to be considered beautiful. Instead, beauty—as with justice and holiness—exists in the world because it first existed in God. While numerous approaches could lead a person to this conclusion, high school students need to see that this is an idea deeply rooted in the fabric of Scripture. Jonathan King, while talking about a similar topic (theological aesthetics), asserts, "[The fact that] theological aesthetics may or may not conform to our norms and notions of the beautiful or to our conceptualization of fittingness does not drive how we must understand and appreciate it."[11] King also reminds readers that "the canon of Scripture is the authoritative norm in the ultimate sense—norming all other norms—for

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[8] Forte, *The Portal of Beauty*, 2.

[9] Peter J. Leithart, "Aesthetic Apologetics," Patheos, December 28, 2005, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/leithart/2005/12/aesthetic-apologetics/.

[10] Forte, *The Portal of Beauty*, 2.

[11] Jonathan King, *The Beauty of the Lord: Theology as Aesthetics* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 209.

its part in the economies of revelation and redemption."[12] The Bible supports the truth that God is the essence and goal of beauty in many ways. Most of those supports become evident by examining the aesthetic language of the Bible, the thematic nature of the Bible, and the words used in the Bible to refer to beauty.

### God and Beauty in the Literary Features of the Bible

The Bible's literary features give strong evidence that God, who inspired Scripture, is concerned with beauty. Jo Ann Davidson outlines the foundational assumption that "if God's multifaceted being includes an aesthetic aspect, one should find evidence of this artistic design within the structure and expression of the canon. Indeed, numerous voices, within and without theology, have attested widely to this property of Scripture."[13] Many authors have documented many kinds of literary structures that occur hundreds of times and in every Bible book. While these devices are certainly more than just aesthetic ornamentation, they are never less than that. Lewis, in stressing the importance of the Scripture's literary language, comments, "There is a . . . sense in which the Bible, since it is after all literature, cannot properly be read except as literature; and the different parts of it as the different sorts of literature they are."[14] Lewis does not deny the supernatural nature of Scripture; he is simply insisting that the Word of God comes laden with literary devices, narrative forms, and poetic structures that were understood and used by sheepherders and olive farmers of the ancient Middle East.[15] More recently, Steven Dempster cautions, "While it is true that the Bible was never

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[12] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 6.

[13] Jo Ann Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty: A Biblical Perspective* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 37.

[14] C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), 3.

[15] Many works have been written on the academic and popular level that offer detailed treatment of these elements. Davidson's *Toward a Theology of Beauty* offers a survey of this topic. She includes chapters on narrative structure, poetic structures, and Hebrew poetry.

received as sacred Scripture because of its literary merit, ignorance of its literary features impedes understanding."[16] The prevalence of these forms suggests that they are not accidental. For example, about 37 percent of the Old Testament is poetry, and several New Testament books contain poetic sections.[17]

In addition to the literary forms of Scripture, the Bible often uses metaphors and similes to speak of God's ascribing to himself the characteristics of a skilled craftsman or worker. Scripture describes God as a potter forming man out of clay, and it portrays God as distinguishing the functions of individuals as an artisan would design different vessels for different functions (Gen 2:7; Jer 18:8; Rom 9:20–24). He is an architect who lays out and measures the heavens (Job 38:5; Ps 8:1–3; Isa 40:11; Heb 11:10). He is a "master craftsman" (Prov 8:30). He is a musician rejoicing over his people in song (Zeph 3:16–17). As Davidson asserts, "The very being of God is artistic."[18] The variety of these activities suggests, at a minimum, that God is willing to use these expressions to reveal something of his essence. Significantly, this is not a simple appeal to creation—a claim that in nature, God's love for beauty is evident; this is the direct testimony of Scripture.[19] God uses artistic language to describe himself, and he

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[16] Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 24.

[17] J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001), 1.

[18] Davison, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 175.

[19] This argument is not inherently bad, but it does not have the added significance of pointing to Scripture as the ultimate authority, except in the sense that Scripture supports the basic idea that nature can teach some basic truths about God. The interesting thing here is that the argument from nature has been discussed from two different angles. On one hand, there is beauty in nature, and God made nature, so he greatly cares about beauty. More interesting is the conclusion that God delights in beauty because he created beauty that only he can see. Abraham Kuyper says it well:

> God himself must enjoy beauty. Did not beauty shimmer and glisten century after century on mountaintops and in remote places never trod by human feet? Neither the North Pole nor the South Pole have yet been seen by human beings, so who can describe the splendor and majesty in that unexplored glacial world that has shimmered before God's eye already for centuries past and for centuries to come?

also commands others to engage in artistic activity. Almost fifty chapters of the Pentateuch describe God's ornate design for the tabernacle's construction. Nearly another fifty chapters refer to the details and artistry of Solomon's Temple. A third significant portion of Scripture, in Ezekiel, highlights beautiful aspects and functions of a third temple.[20] God's interest in art is prominent, and it is also varied—applying to a wide range of art forms. Gene Veith elaborates on the scope of God's artistic interest:

> [God commissions] representational art depicting both the spiritual realm (cherubim) and the natural realm (lions, oxen, palm trees, the lilies). He demands symbolic art (the Ark of the covenant) and abstract art (the two freestanding pillars in front of the temple that support no weight and have no architectural function). He calls for non-realistic art, demanding for the priest's garments, not just scarlet and purple pomegranates but blue pomegranates.[21]

The range of artistic expressions ascribed to God and prescribed by God is dizzying in its kaleidoscopic grandeur. It is improbable that this material is in the Bible only as a by-product of the revelatory process or that God was accommodating the culture of the people he was addressing. The most straightforward and logical explanation is that these elements of Scripture accurately reflect the nature of God. If that is true, then God is an artist, and both his work and his Word bear witness to his aesthetic excellence.

### God and Beauty in the Themes of the Bible

The language and descriptions of Scripture point to God as beautiful and as the origin of beauty. This language also shows that this beauty results in glory directed

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Kuyper goes on to describe that "dizzying beauty adorns that starry universe!" Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press 2011), 127.

[20] Davison, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 12.

[21] Gene E. Veith, "Art and the Bible," in *Omnibus IV: The Ancient World*, ed. Douglas Wilson, Gene E. Veith, and Ty Fisher (Lancaster, PA: Veritas Press, 2009), 553. The observation of "blue pomegranates" depends on the translation of an imprecise word for a color that could include a broad range. The Hebrew word used for "blue" here (תְּכֵלֶת; *tĕkēlet*) is translated variously "blue" (43x), "purple" (1x), and "violet" (5x). Robert L. Thomas, "תְּכֵלֶת," in *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries*, rev. ed. (Anaheim, CA: Foundation, 1998), Logos Bible Software.

toward the Creator. However, there is much more in Scripture that develops this idea. The careful reader will notice that many themes are developed throughout the storyline of Scripture. These themes have attracted the attention of many scholars, particularly in the past three hundred years, who have wanted to study biblical truth in a way that is more faithful to the developing storyline of Scripture.[22] These scholars, dissatisfied with the atemporal and logic-heavy approach of systematic theology, have approached Scripture in a way that is more native to the form of biblical revelation. This approach, now generally known as biblical theology, seeks to treat each text fairly in the context and genre in which it occurs. Recognizing that there is one ultimate author of Scripture (i.e., God), biblical theology affirms that specific themes or unifying ideas link the stories and texts into one revelatory progression.[23] There are about twenty of these unifying themes which include creation, covenant, land, kingship, law, and sacrifice. The effectiveness of this approach is best seen as it tracks the progress of revelation, treats each text with integrity, accounts for every relevant text on a topic, focuses on Christ, and results in the edification of the church.

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[22] James Hamilton's point that biblical theology is as old as Moses should be acknowledged here. He explains, "Moses presented a biblical-theological interpretation of the traditions he received regarding Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, and his own experience with his kinsmen." James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 41–42. This does not take away from the fact that for many years this practice was almost completely lost, only to be awakened in the last few centuries of the church.

[23] Brian Rosner defines biblical theology this way: "[Biblical theology] proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyze and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus." Interestingly, Rosner admits that there will never be a perfect definition. B. S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 10. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum offer some helpful clarifications: "Biblical theology . . . attempts to exegete texts in their own context and then, in light of the entire Canon, to examine the unfolding nature of God's plan and carefully think through the relationship between before and after in that plan, which culminates in Christ." Biblical theology is the key that helps Christians trace the beautiful unity of the distinct historical covenants in Scripture. Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 23–24.

Significantly, three aspects of biblical theology are germane to the claim that God is the author of beauty and that he is the end or purpose for that beauty: (1) God has authored the themes that unfold in Scripture as inspected by biblical theology. (2) Those themes are beautiful because they are fitting. They cohere and "dwell in unity." Even the unsavory or dreadful themes, such as sin and God's judgment, are still fitting and beautiful because they fit into the larger scheme of God's purposes.[24] (3) Each of the themes that biblical theology can trace terminates in God himself. All that happens will relate to God and ultimately result in his glory. This terminus, as Jonathan Edwards famously said, is the purpose for which God created the world.[25]All events of all time bend to this arc. Scripture follows a basic four-step pattern in the development of its themes. As James Hamilton notes, "In broadest terms, the Bible can be summarized in four words: creation, fall, redemption, restoration. This sequence functions as an umbrella story encompassing the whole canonical narrative . . . [and repeating] countless times on both individual and corporate levels."[26] The last part of this repeated cycle is this upswing of restoration. In restoration, God is always the cause. He is the hero; therefore, he receives the glory. Consequently, every time someone follows a theme of Scripture through the contours of biblical theology, the text of Scripture will highlight the beauty of God.

Similarly, there is another way in which tracing the themes of Scripture through the process of biblical theology creates a sense of fittingness and thus gives

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[24] This is not to say that all the difficulties dissipate in the light of beauty. They do not. Frank Burch Brown wrestles, for example, with the question of whether hell is compatible with God's beauty at length, and he ends up denying the possibility of eternal perdition. Frank Burch Brown, "The Beauty of Hell: Anselm on God's Eternal Design," *Journal of Religion* 73, no. 3 (1993): 329–56. This conclusion is simply to place logical outcomes above revelation. This is one of the places where Martin Luther's theology of the cross must accompany a biblical view of beauty. Human reason must be sacrificed in favor of revelation.

[25] Edwards, in one of his best-known essays asserts, "Therefore it is manifest . . . that the glory of God is an ultimate end in the creation of the world." Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, *WJE*, 8:492.

[26] Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 49.

evidence to the beauty of God. Biblical theology is not atemporal. It always has time in view. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum affirm that the basic function of biblical theology involves two words that have to do with time. These words are

> synchronic and diachronic. Synchronic refers to viewing events occurring at a given time, hence to read texts synchronically means reading them in their immediate context. . . . Our interpretation of Scripture, however, does not end here. The unity of Scripture drives us to say more, which introduces the notion of diachronic. Diachronic refers to viewing events over time. Texts must be read not only in terms of their immediate context but also in terms of the "whole." Scripture is both unified and progressive. Thus biblical theology is concerned to read the "parts" in terms of the "whole" and to trace out how God's plan develops throughout redemptive-history, leading us to Christ.[27]

Studying Scripture with attention to both synchronic and diachronic elements highlights the perspectives and depth of Scripture. It is fitting that an eternal God should have a message that spans ages of human history and maintains poignant relevance in every age. It is fitting that a God who inhabits eternity but steps into time should communicate in a way that reflects both the momentary snapshots of time and the rolling course of history. This interaction with time highlights that the episodic portions of the Bible are part of a grand narrative. The themes are stories in Scripture that develop significance as time passes. The themes tie into specific events along the way; the tension waxes and wanes while building to a climax or crisis before moving on to a final state of fulfillment.

The Bible is full of stories within stories, and consequently, it forms the foundation for most of the literature that has ever been produced. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Marilynne Robinson posits, "The Bible is the model for and subject of more art and thought than those of us who live within its influence, consciously or unconsciously, will ever know."[28] It is fitting that God made story-loving people because he is a

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[27] Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 23.

[28] Marilynne Robinson, "The Book of Books: What Literature Owes the Bible," *New York Times*, December 22, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/books/review/the-book-of-books-what-literature-owes-the-bible.html.

storytelling God.[29] Other major religious books do not tell truth over time in fascinating interwoven stories. Mark Twain's description of the Book of Mormon is telling:

> It is such a pretentious affair, and yet so "slow," so sleepy; such an insipid mess of inspiration. It is chloroform in print. If Joseph Smith composed this book, the act was a miracle—keeping awake while he did it was, at any rate. . . . The book seems to be merely a prosy detail of imaginary history, with the Old Testament for a model; followed by a tedious plagiarism of the New Testament.[30]

Twain is not known for his love of religion, and he is known for witty exaggeration, but in this quotation, he deliberately contrasts the Bible with the Book of Mormon. So, even if this claim is an overstatement in degree, Twain's distinction still stands. Muslim-turned-Christian Nabeel Qureshi offers a similar rebuke of the Quran: "Since Muslims believe the Quran was revealed via dictation to one person, it makes sense that it contains essentially only one genre and one perspective: Allah speaking to Muhammad."[31] In reference to stories specifically, Qureshi comments, "Instead of sharing full stories, Allah usually says, 'Remember the time when…' and begins in the middle of a story. Otherwise, he will start in the beginning and stop in the middle of a story. . . . [T]here are almost no full stories in the Quran."[32] In contrast, even the overarching themes of biblical theology follow a predictable narrative. Those themes weave beautifully in and out of the books of Scripture, attesting to God's creativity and his concern for beauty.

Besides these formal or external ways that biblical theology affirms God's authorship of and purpose for beauty, a brief overview of one theme—or strand—of biblical theology demonstrates this aspect of beauty. The theme—or biblical theology—

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[29] For a fuller treatment of this theme, see Daniel Richard Blackaby, "An Argument from Sublime Literature: How Language, Beauty, and Literature Point toward the Existence of God" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

[30] Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (New York: Signet, 2008), 41.

[31] Nabeel Qureshi, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus? A Former Muslim Investigates the Evidence for Islam and Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 108.

[32] Qureshi, *No God but One*, 109.

of God's dwelling with man repeatedly emphasizes God's role as the origin and telos of beauty. For the Old Testament Israelites, beauty and worship were tightly intertwined. Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971) observes, "Her [Israel's] most intensive encounter with beauty was in the religious sphere, in the contemplation of Jahweh's revelation and action."[33] The tabernacle and the temple are exquisitely designed with all manner of aesthetic detail. God is the architect and the source of this detail. He commands Moses to build the tabernacle "according to the plan" that God showed him (Exod 20:30). God is also intimately involved in the construction as he chooses and equips the craftsmen who oversee the construction. Exodus 35:30–35 is remarkably emphatic:

> Then Moses said to the people of Israel, "See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer."

God's personal involvement in the execution of the tabernacle's design is only made more poignant because this is the first time in Scripture that anyone is said to be filled by the Holy Spirit. God empowers an artist in this particular way before he is said to empower a priest, a king, or a prophet. So far, transparently, God is the source of the beauty in these centers for worship, and the aesthetic elements function in the worship that brings glory back to God. However, aborting further discussion of this theme here would miss the majority of its significance.

The significance of the design in the physical centers of Old Testament worship becomes broader when they are understood to echo the design of the cosmos.

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[33] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 365.

G. K. Beale, in his phenomenal work *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, establishes this connection as his thesis: "The Old Testament tabernacle and temples were symbolically designed to point to the cosmic eschatological reality that God's tabernacle presence formerly limited to the holy of holies was to be extended throughout the whole earth."[34] Beale clarifies that these two buildings, the tabernacle and the temple, with their careful design and elaborate functions, serve as symbols of a future reality. Both of these buildings receive their significance from the presence of God, but their symbolism prefigure their own undoing as that presence of God is destined to spread far beyond them. Their beauty comes from God, and their beauty will terminate in God.

Beale identifies two other points that are critical in his discussion. First, the tabernacle and temple are cosmic eschatological symbols forming a foundation for understanding John's vision in Revelation 21.[35] And second, the garden of Eden is, according to Beale, the "first archetypal temple . . . , the model for all subsequent temples."[36] The scriptural warrant for the temple as a "microcosm of the entire heaven and earth" is found in passages such as Psalm 78:69: "And he has built his sanctuary like the heights, / Like the earth which he has founded forever." Exodus 25:9 contains a reference to this heavenly nature of the tabernacle that is overlooked in some translations. Eugene Carpenter stresses, "The plan reflected the heavenly sanctuary; it was not an optional blueprint, but 'thus you shall make it' (וְכֵן תַּעֲשׂוּ). The heavenly 'blueprint' brings forth strong echoes of the garden of Eden stories, where God's presence dwelt."[37]

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[34] G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 25.

[35] Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 25.

[36] Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 26.

[37] Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 173.

This language of the heavens is not limited to the tabernacle. Concerning the temple, Beale comments,

> Israel's Temple was composed of three main parts, each of which symbolized a major part of the cosmos: (1) the outer court represents the habitable world where humanity dwelt; (2) the holy place was emblematic of the visible heavens and its light sources; (3) the holy of holies symbolized the invisible division of the cosmos, where God in his heavenly host dwelt.[38]

At first, these designations seem arbitrary, but items in each section of the temple correspond to the different sections of the cosmos. There is a large washbasin in the outer court, called the sea, and an alter, called the "bosom of the earth" (1 Kgs 7:23–26). Beale notes, "The altar was also to be an 'altar of the earth' . . . and 'altar of [uncut] stone' (Exod 20: 24–25), thus identifying it even more with the natural earth."[39] Many scholars present evidence that connects the tabernacle back to Eden. Gentry and Wellum, asserting that Eden prefigures a sanctuary, aver that the verb used to describe God's walking back and forth in Eden parallels the verb "employed to describe the divine presence in the later tent sanctuaries (Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:15 [23:14, English versions]; 2 Sam. 7:6–7)."[40] In both places, God's presence of blessing and life is surrounded by a temporary beauty that he orchestrated.

Beale details these similarities even down to the gems on the priestly garments that were to "reflect divine, heavenly glory" or "for glory [כָּבוֹד; *kābôd*] and for beauty [תִּפְאֶרֶת; *tiphʾereth*] (Exodus 28:2)." [41] In his dissertation on the apologetic value of beauty, William Elkins summarizes that these ornaments were to "reflect the glory and

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[38] Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 32–33.

[39] Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 33.

[40] Gentry and Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants*, 88.

[41] Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 41.

the beauty of the heavenly bodies, such as the sun, moon, planets, and stars."[42] The same language is used to describe the heavens in Isaiah 60:19: "The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory [תִּפְאֶרֶת; *tiphʾereth*]." Elkins concludes from this that these ornaments were "symbolic of the glory and beauty of the heavenly bodies, and the heavenly bodies are symbolic of the glory and beauty of God."[43] The implication is that the beauty of Israel's places of worship echoes Eden and creation and foreshadows John's vision in Revelation 21.

Before that consummation, the church period has no prescribed physically aesthetic center for worship. However, there is still a form of beauty prescribed. For example, God commands the church to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3) and to "strive for peace with everyone" (Heb 12:14). Even under the old covenant, peace and unity are good and beautiful (Ps 133:1). This beauty is moral and spiritual. It is even more fitting that those made one in Christ are to be at peace with one another. Kevin Vanhoozer expresses the same sentiment:

> In [Lesslie] Newbigin's words: "This koinonia is indeed the very being of the church as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of what God purposes for the whole human family." The church as a public spire, is the vanguard of the realization of this plan. As such, the church is the public truth of Jesus Christ, and not only truth but also the public goodness in the public beauty of God's plan of redemption.[44]

This example is just one of the many beauties that are required of the church. Edwards understands the beauty of the church in moral terms: "And Christ delights and rejoices in

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[42] William Earl Elkins, "On the Origin of Beauty and the Human Ability to Perceive It" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 56–57.

[43] Elkins, "On the Origin of Beauty," 57.

[44] Kevin Vanhoozer, "Introduction: Pastors, Theologians, and Other Public Figures," in *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision*, by Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 21, quoting Lesslie Newbigin, "Trinity as Public Truth," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 8.

the beauty of the church, the beauty which he hath put upon her: her Christian graces are ‘ornaments of great price in his sight’ (1 Pet. 3:4). Christ is said to ‘greatly desir[e] her beauty’ (Ps. 45:11).”[45] This passage shows beauty in moral terms that transcend Israel’s experience. In the New Testament, it appears that God has set aside the requirement of external aesthetics. Perhaps he did this because the inherent deceptive power of external aesthetics. In the consummate vision of Revelation 21, external beauty and internal reality are united. The beauty created by God in the cosmos—beauty mirrored in the worship of the tabernacle—will find full expression in the splendor of a bride without “spot,” “blemish,” or “wrinkle” (Eph 5:27).

Drawing on biblical theology expands the claim that beauty is important because it finds its source in God and its purpose or end is also found in God, whose purpose is to glorify himself. However, there is another aspect of the Bible’s discussion of beauty that demands attention. The words and word groups that compose the biblical material on beauty cohere to support the perspective that God is the origin and ultimate purpose of beauty.

**God and Beauty in the Words of the Bible**

It behooves anyone who plans to discuss the words in the Bible used for beauty to acknowledge that the scholarship on the subject is not unanimous. William Dyrness summarizes the difficulty of this study, and he cites other scholars who are adamant in their denial of any aesthetic significance to the Bible’s references to beauty:

> So difficult to assess are Biblical statements that some students have simply concluded that there are no descriptions of beauty at all in our sense of the word. Walter Grundmann concludes, for example, that the whole problem of the beautiful is of no concern to the OT: “Beauty (*kalon*) does not occur at all as an aesthetic quality; this is linked with the low estimation of art in Biblical religion.” Perhaps because it plays no role in Israel’s history of tradition Gerhard von Rad claims:

[45] Jonathan Edwards, “The Church’s Marriage to Her Sons, and to Her God,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758*, *WJE*, 25:180.

> "There is no particular significance in many of the statements which ancient Israel made about beauty; and the reason why there is nothing characteristic in them is that they move in the place of the experience of beauty common to all men."[46]

Not one of these three claims seems warranted by Scripture. Dyrness is perceptive in his rebuttal, noting that some difficulties arise because beauty was not a special or distinct concept. Instead, it was merely a way to refer to a thing that was being what God intended it to be. This observation fits well with the recognition that beauty is exemplary of a subject's "fittingness." Dyrness notes that beauty is deeply interconnected: "The truth is simply that beauty can hardly be made the object of separate study at all in the OT without distorting the material."[47] In modern aesthetics, beauty resides in an item's autonomous features and artistic ingenuity. Such a standard is foreign to Scripture. In the Old Testament, beauty resides in a context of attendant realities and particularly in the context of God's essence and program. Dyrness continues, "Beauty is only the splendor of a system of relationships; it is an aspect of the totality of meaning of the created order, which for God's people was immediately evident in the whole and in the art."[48] This observation is sustained in the following survey of the words used for beauty in the Bible. The survey also strengthens the claim that God is the source, essence, and end of beauty.

**Old Testament Words for Beauty**

The Old Testament words translated in major English Bible translations as "beauty"—or a synonym—belong to around fourteen different Hebrew word groups.[49] Davidson identifies these fourteen word groups in her chapter on Scripture's aesthetic

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[46] William A. Dyrness, "Aesthetics in the Old Testament: Beauty in Context," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 4 (1985): 420, quoting Walter Grundmann and Georg Bertram, "Καλός," in *TDNT*, 1:544, and Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper, 1962), 364.

[47] Dyrness, "Aesthetics in the Old Testament," 430.

[48] Dyrness, "Aesthetics in the Old Testament," 422.

[49] Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 154.

vocabulary, and King includes the same list in an appendix to his recent work on theological aesthetics.[50] I examine these words in the order given in these two works. In surveying these words, it is impossible to miss how frequently many of these words are linked to God's essence and work. It is also significant to notice how often the ideas of fittingness and desire are connected with these words.

The first word Davidson and King list is אוה (*ʾwh*). Stripped of the vowel pointing, it is possible that this could be several words. William Williams observes, "The root *ʾwh* is found only in the West Semitic languages."[51] The form of this word that is most relevant here is אָוָה. This word belongs to a family of words that denote strong desire, both the good and the bad (אַוָּה and הַוָּה ["longing"]; מַאֲוַיִּים and תַּאֲוָה ["desire"]).[52] However, אָוָה is typically translated with an aesthetic connotation in three passages (Ps 93:5; Song 1:10; Isa 52:7). In some lexicons, the root of this word is נאה (*nʾh*).[53] If this is correct, then these forms are not a distinct word group but are simply a part of a large group of words that often refer to beauty—discussed below. If the root is אוה (*ʾwh*), then there are only three occurrences.[54] These three are worth considering regardless. The first

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[50] Davidson, "The Aesthetic Nature of Scripture," in *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 151–71; King, "The General Witness of Scripture to the Aesthetic Dimension," in *The Beauty of the Lord*, 337–42.

[51] William Williams, "אָוָה," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:304.

[52] This is a much more common word group and meaning. Günter Mayer notes, "*ʾavah* is synonymous with *chamadh*, 'to desire.'" Günter Mayer, "אָוָה," in *TDOT*, 1:135. It is interesting that the desire described by this word is not a desire that is prompted by the beauty of the thing desired. Williams notes, "The former (חָמַד) denotes the desire as founded upon the perception of beauty, and therefore excited from without; the latter (אָוָה), desire originating at the very outset in the person himself, and arising from his own want or inclination." Williams, "אָוָה (ʾāwâ I)," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:304.

[53] K. M. Beyse explains this variation:

> The majority of scholars are inclined to derive this root from אוה *ʾwh*; they analyze the attested forms as niphal perfect tense and participle. The passive notion "(be) desired" would yield the meaning "(be) beautiful" in the aesthetic sense, as found in the Song of Songs; the meaning "(be) proper, correct" as an ethical and theological term would then represent a secondary abstraction. Wilhelm Gesenius instead sees in the verbal forms a pilel of *nʾh*, similar to the hithpael form of *šḥw* = *šḥh*, with the meanings "be beautiful," "be seemly." (K. M. Beyse, "נאה," in *TDOT*, 9:108)

[54] *HALOT* (20) lists them with the apocryphal reference: "נָאֲוָה , נָאווּ , נאתה: to be beautiful, lovely Is 52:7, Song 1:10, Sir 159; with לְ to be becoming Ps 93:5." Mayer supports this view: "The verb appears in the piel and hithpael. In addition, Palache interprets *naʾavah* and *naʾvu* in Isa. 52:7; Cant. 1:10; Ps. 93:5, as the niphal of *ʾavah*." Mayer, "אָוָה," *TDOT*, 1:134.

use is often translated to mean "fittingness": "Holiness befits your house" (Ps 93:5). However, Derek Kidner prefers a more direct translation of this word. He affirms, "In the second line [NEB] brings out the force of the word 'befits' with its translation, 'holiness is the beauty of thy temple.'"[55] God's unique holiness is the appropriate ornament of his temple. The second occurrence describes the appealing nature of decorated cheeks (Song 1:10). The third use from Isaiah 52:7 suggests the importance of the attendant circumstances again. The messenger's feet are beautiful because the message of God's glorious reign is beautiful.[56] The message is so good that even the lowest part of the messenger is dignified. This word's semantic range, and its use in Scripture, stresses God's relation to beauty as well as beauty's appropriateness and attractiveness.

A second root, הדר (*hdr*), occurs about forty-two times in predominantly three forms (הֶדֶר/הֲדָרָה/הָדָר), "most often describing kingly majesty."[57] The form הֲדָרָה is translated "beauty" four times in the AV. James Swanson, in his lexicon, highlights a tension around these instances. He acknowledges that the word could refer to "ornamental clothing worn in the worship of the LORD (1 Chr 16:29; 2 Chr 20:21; Pss 29:2; 96:9)," but then he contends, "Though this is a possible meaning, the contexts seem focused on the concept of worship rather than the instrumental use of objects."[58] Davidson does not mention this debate, and in her discussion, she uses the AV, commenting, "[The] royal context of the word הָדָר gives regal quality to the Old Testament worship" in the passages that speak of worshiping in the beauty of holiness.[59]

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[55] Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 372.

[56] John Goldingay and David Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55*, vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 264.

[57] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 38.

[58] "2079 הֲדָרָה," in *DBLH*.

[59] Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 156–57.

John Collins, in *NIDOTT*, offers a compelling reason to prefer the “splendor of holiness” translation: “If the expression [which occurs four times] means the same thing every time it is used, the syntax of 2 Chron 20:21 is decisive: מְהַלְלִים לְהַדְרַת קֹדֶשׁ can only mean ‘praising the splendor of holiness,’ since the construction הַלֵּל לְ means to praise (cf. v. 19); hence the implication is the splendor of God’s holiness.”[60] Marilyn Burton agrees that הדר is typically ascribed to animate objects—thus God, not robes—and that the garment connotation is typically metaphorical.[61] While it is infrequent that the word is translated as beauty, there is good evidence to support the traditional reading of the verse.

The third Hebrew word, הוֹד (*hôd*), is typically translated as “splendor, majesty, vigor, glory, and honor.”[62] However, occasionally, הוֹד suggests physical beauty because the word is used to describe a physical phenomenon that is not usually associated with the abstract concepts of splendor or honor: “His shoots shall spread out; his beauty [הוֹד] shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon” (Hos 14:6). In this context, the word could mean “vigor,” but olive trees grow slowly. This word frequently “describes the majesty of God; often joined with הָדָר [*hādār*] (Ps. 21:6; 96:6; 104:1; 111:3; Job 40:10).”[63] Isaiah uses this word to describe God’s holy wrath directed against the enemies of his people: “And the LORD will cause his majestic [הוֹד] voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and a flame of devouring fire, with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones” (Isa 30:30). Alec Motyer helpfully shows that this display of God’s wrath is not random but is in keeping with God’s promise: “The Lord is acting according to his word. The arm is the organ of personal strength in action

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[60] John Colins, “הָדָר” (*hadar*), in *NIDOTTE*, 1:1015.

[61] Marilyn E. Burton, *The Semantics of Glory: A Cognitive, Corpus-Based Approach to Hebrew Word Meaning*, Studia Semitica Neerlandica 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 307.

[62] Victor P. Hamilton, “482 הוד,” in *TWOT*, 209.

[63] Wilhelm Gesenius and Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *Gesenius’ Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2003), 218–19.

and is an Exodus symbol (e.g., Exod. 6:6; Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 7:19). The strange mixture of fire and hail is found in Exodus 9:23. The Lord does not change: the exodus-Passover revelation is a declaration of his Name forever (Exod. 3:15)."[64] God's voice is glorious because it displays his covenant-keeping nature. In the Isaiah passage, beauty has a clear moral connotation as the majestic (הוֹד) voice is the fulfillment of God's obligation and punishment of the wicked. This connection to justice and morality is a prominent theme in the biblical descriptions of beauty.

The fourth word, חמד (*ḥmd*), the assumed root of חָמַד (*ḥāmad*), occurs in Scripture sixty-seven times in seven different forms.[65] This word most frequently has to do with desire—a desirable item that arouses desire, the feeling of desire, and the acquisition of the desired thing resulting in pleasure. Dyrness explains, "The root often refers to what is pleasant to one's sight in such a way that it drives one to take action, to focus one's efforts to obtain the object."[66] The word is used of sinful desire (in the prohibition "do not covet"; Exod 20:17) and of godly delight ("More to be desired are they than gold"; Ps 19:10). Translators rarely render חמד or its forms using the English word "beauty," but repeatedly Scripture uses forms of חמד to describe the attraction the beauty evokes: "When I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak . . . , then I coveted them" (Josh 7:21); "Do not desire her beauty" (Prov 6:25); "No beauty that we should desire him" (Isa 52:3); "She lusted after the Assyrians, all of them desirable young men" (Ezek 23:12). The variety of uses suggests the checkered complexity of human desire. When God is the agent desiring, the object of his desire is the location where his people will worship him—"the mountain that God desired for his abode" (Ps 68:17).

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[64] J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 225.

[65] "חמד," in *LALHB*.

[66] Dyrness, "Aesthetics in the Old Testament," 424.

The fifth Hebrew word, טוֹב (*ṭôḇ*), occurs with its cognates over 740 times, but only a handful of these refer to beauty in an aesthetic sense.[67] Dyrness discounts this word in his discussion of Old Testament aesthetics, suggesting that it only occurs with reference to aesthetic beauty twice (2 Sam 11:2; Esth 2:7).[68] However, this dismissal may be too abrupt. For example, טוֹב may denote attractiveness or beauty in the daughters of men (Gen 6:2), Rebekah (Gen 24:16; 26:7), baby Moses (Exod 2:2), and the encampment of Israel (Num 24:5). As noted previously, God uses this word to describe creation (Gen 1:31). Elkins is probably too free when he says, "God was not only pronouncing his creation morally or functionally good but aesthetically pleasing as well."[69] God is described by טוֹב, and he is the source of טוֹב. Zechariah 9:17 places טוֹב parallel with another word that frequently refers to aesthetic beauty: "For how great is his goodness [טוֹב], and how great his beauty [יָפְיִ]!"[70] This passage is telling. Israel is restored from destitution till her sons and daughters "sparkle like jewels in [God's] land of covenant promise."[71] Israel's restored goodness and beauty find their source and purpose in the goodness, righteousness, and beauty of God.

The sixth root is יפה (*yph*), which occurs about seventy times, most often referring to physical beauty but at times indicating suitability, rightness, or appropriateness.[72] In Genesis 39:6, Joseph is said to be "handsome in form and

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[67] Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 173.

[68] Dyrness, "Aesthetics in the Old Testament," 422.

[69] Elkins, "On the Origin of Beauty," 55.

[70] Several scholars argue compellingly that the antecedent to the suffix on goodness and beauty is the land in the previous verse. See, e.g., John Merlin Powis Smith and Julius August Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1912), 285.

[71] Andrew E. Hill, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 217.

[72] "יפה," in *LALHB*.

appearance." However, even this use of beauty is frequently attributed to God. Ezekiel likens Assyria to a beautiful tree, and God proclaims, "I made it beautiful [יפה] in the mass of its branches, and all the trees of Eden envied it that were in the garden of God" (Ezek 31:9). Further, according to Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He [God] has made everything beautiful [יפה] in its time." Davidson notes that יפה also describes the beauty of God, his chosen city, and his people.[73] Dyrness focuses on the use of the word in the wisdom books and concludes,

> Interesting is the use of this group in the wisdom literature (nineteen times excluding wisdom material in the Psalms). Here it indicates the highest natural perfection that God's ordered creation can reach. He has made everything beautiful in its time (Eccl 3:11). In the same manner enjoyment of this is also lovely. It is lovely to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all one's toil. But taken out of this context, it becomes a snare: "Like a gold ring in a swine's snout is a beautiful woman with no discretion" (Prov 11:22; cf. 31:30).

Psalm 50:2 demonstrates the close connection between the beauty of God's people and God's increasing fame or glory. The psalmist describes Jerusalem as the perfection of beauty [יֹפִי] and then announces that God shines forth from her.[74] Tragically, as the rest of the psalm indicates, this is not the shining forth of revelation but [of] action and judgment.[75] Other passages echo the wording here, lamenting the result of this shining forth (Ps 48:2; Lam 2:15). The beauty indicated does not prevent the judgment.

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[73] Davidson incorrectly cites Ps 48:1–2 as proof of this. Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 162. The word translated "beauty" there is נצם.

[74] There is some debate on the meaning of this psalm. Elkins observes, "From this Psalm, one learns that God is the 'perfection of beauty'; that is, He is the standard of all that is beautiful." Elkins, "On the Origin of Beauty," 76. As convenient as it would be to read this verse in this way, the grammar and the cross references suggest that Elkins's reading does not obtain. The "perfection of beauty" is the city that is about feel the first waves of God's glorious judgment.

[75] The shining forth here is the consequence of covenant breaking:

> God calls all humanity from east to west to witness a most solemn event: the renewal of his covenant relationship with his people. Perhaps humanity is called with a view toward becoming part of the covenant community, as in 47:1, 9. The first thing they witness is the theophanic presence of God, emanating from Zion, the city of the great king (48:2). This presence is not one of blessing, however; it is one of judgment, as the presence is manifest in a hot east-wind storm that could turn the arable land into a desert (e.g., Hos 13:15). (Mark D. Futato, *The Book of Psalms*, in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 7, *The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs*, ed. Philip Comfort [Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009], 181)

The seventh Hebrew root is כָּבוֹד (*kābôd*). King observes that this word represents "a large constellation of meanings includes the sense of weightiness, glory, power, wealth, honor, dignity, majesty and splendor [and] is frequently used in parallelism with synonyms connoting beauty or splendor."[76] Used around four hundred times and often translated in the LXX as δόξα, כָּבוֹד is a complex word. Regarding this word, John Oswalt is particularly helpful: "The basic meaning is 'to be heavy, weighty,' a meaning which is only rarely used literally, the figurative (e.g. 'heavy with sin') being more common."[77] In addition to these meanings, there is a large number of uses that have distinct aesthetic significance. Again, Oswalt offers a helpful summary:

> The accouterments of glory were commonly impressive in their beauty. Thus the garments of the priests were expressly designed to be unusually beautiful in order to convey some of the great dignity and importance of the office (Ex 28:2, 40). The glory of the great kingdoms is commonly compared to the splendors and beauties of the great forest of Lebanon (Isa 8:7; 10:18). It appears that the particular beauty of man is his capacity for rational and moral response (Gen 49:6; Ps 108:1; Jer 2:11).[78]

The word encompasses the physical beauty of the priestly garment, the professed beauty of the Gentile nations, and the potential moral beauty of human beings. Each of these beauties is, to a degree, glorious, so the link between glory and beauty emerges.

While the word at times describes the fading earthly glories (Isa 16:14; 17:4; 21:16), these fading glories stand as a backdrop to highlight the eternal glory of God. Oswalt insists that the most significant meaning of כָּבוֹד is the distinction of God's glory as something separate from—and greater than—man's lesser glory.[79] Oswalt concludes that "its force is so compelling that it remolds the meaning of *doxa* from an opinion of

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[76] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 338.

[77] John N. Oswalt, "943 כָּבֵד," in *TWOT*, 426.

[78] Oswalt, "943 כָּבֵד," 427.

[79] Oswalt, "943 כָּבֵד," 427.

men in the Greek classics to something absolutely objective in the LXX and NT."[80] Bernard Ramm recounts, "The word glory (*kabôd*) serves as a synonym for God himself: 'Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory [i.e., their God] for that which does not profit' (Jer 2:11)."[81] The word "glory" then takes on a unique status in God's total revelation of himself.

King helpfully summarizes, "Glory refers not so much to an attribute of God, unlike [e.g.,] 'omnipotence,' but is the term that when theologically considered encapsulates the eminence of all God's attributes viewed together in the light of the *tota Scriptura*."[82] Beauty, as כָּבוֹד sometimes entails, is a much larger concept. There are many connections that can be traced between glory and beauty. Numerous scholars have written copiously on this topic throughout the history of the church.[83] King summarizes well the essence of this significant point:

> The theological relation between God's glory and beauty translates as follows: the beauty of God manifested economically (*pulchritudo Dei ad extra*) is expressed and perceivable as a quality of the glory of God inherent in his work of creation, redemption, and consummation. The display of God's glory is thus always beautiful, always fitting, always entails an aesthetic dimension to it.[84]

It follows from these observations that while כָּבוֹד has a broad semantic range and diverse uses, its most important use is in reference to God, and that use controls the significance of all other uses.

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[80] Oswalt, "943 כָּבֵד," 427.

[81] Bernard Ramm, *Them He Glorified: A Systematic Study of the Doctrine of Glorification* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 18–19, quoted in King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 47. See also Isa 42:8 and 2 Pet 1:17.

[82] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 48.

[83] For example, King discusses this connection in the writings of Herman Bavinck, Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Jonathan Edwards. King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 44. Kuyper is adamant: "Glory is, in fact, nothing other than a higher degree of beauty. It is beauty in its consummation, but still in a way whereby *present* beauty and *coming* glory are connected to one another, such that both are revelations of one and the same principle." Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder*, 130.

[84] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 51.

In her monumental analysis of this word Marilyn Burton affirms the above observation, and she calls attention to other dimensions. The word is often associated with righteousness. It is frequently taken from the unrighteous. "It is presented as an active power" and is "constituted by and consequent on righteous behavior."[85] The word possesses a "theme of active power . . . present in its strong association with the military, and particularly with armies and with God as a warrior."[86] The glory of God "is also, notably, instrumental in sanctification and purification."[87] The nuances of כָּבוֹד highlight the moral nature of God's appearance and the effects that it has on those who see it.

The eighth term takes two forms—the verb root נאה (*nʾh*) and its adjectival form נָאוֶה (*nāʾwê*). As noted earlier, the stem forms are disputed as they could be Niphal forms of אוה (*ʾwh*).[88] The adjective can mean physical beauty—as in the case of the Shulamite, who says, "I am very dark, but lovely [נָאוָה]" (Song 1:5). But it can also mean suitable or befitting. For example, honor is "not fitting" for a fool (Prov 26:1), but a "song of praise is fitting" (Ps 147:1). There are only ten occurrences of this word in Scripture. Five references appeal to the emotions and the sense of sight, while the other five indicate suitability, rightness, or appropriateness.[89]

The ninth term, נוה (*nwh*; Hiphil), occurs once in the song of Moses: "I will praise [אַנְוֵהוּ] him" (Exod 15:2). Swanson gives a range of meanings but focuses on an interesting distinction: "Formally, adorn, i.e., speak words of laudation and honor, with a

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[85] Burton, *The Semantics of Glory*, 302–3.

[86] Burton, *The Semantics of Glory*, 301.

[87] Burton, *The Semantics of Glory*, 301.

[88] Beyse confirms, "The etymology of the verbal and adjectival forms assigned here to the triliteral root nʾh is disputed. The majority of scholars are inclined to derive this root from → אוה *ʾwh*; they analyze the attested forms as niphal perfect tense and participle. The passive notion '(be) desired' would yield the meaning '(be) beautiful' in the aesthetic sense." Beyse, "נאה," in *TDOT*, 9:108.

[89] "נאה," in *LALHB*.

possible focus on the appropriateness of the words."[90] Unfortunately, Swanson does not offer much evidence for his novel gloss. BDB offers the definition "I will beautify, adorn him" for this word.[91] Alan Cole is more reserved in his comments on this word: "This word does not occur elsewhere in Hebrew. The translation is a guess, from the parallelism and from similar words in other Semitic languages. This is one of the many archaisms of the song."[92] There is just not much to go on here.

The tenth word used for beauty, נעם (*n'm*), seems to focus on the pleasing sensation that the object under consideration evokes. In the verb form, it suggests that something is pleasant, delightful, or lovely. The noun form suggests pleasantness, while the adjectival form suggests loveliness. The verb "appears only in the qal (8 occurrences: 3 in Proverbs and one each in Song of Songs, Ezekiel, Psalms, 2 Samuel, and Genesis)."[93] The root occurs about ninety times.[94] In 2 Samuel 23:1, David is described as "the sweet [נָעִים] psalmist of Israel." In Song of Solomon 1:16, the Shulamite describes her lover, saying, "Behold, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly delightful [נָעִים]!" Three well-known verses in the Psalms use this word in specifically religious contexts. The psalmist exclaims, "Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for it is pleasant!" (Ps 135:3). Kidner emphasizes the impact of this verse, saying, "This is one of three related verses in the Psalter in which we are reminded that the Lord's name (the

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[90] "נָוָה," in *DBLH*.

[91] BDB, "נוה," 627.

[92] R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 130–31.

[93] T. Kronholm, "נָעַם," in *TDOT*, 9:468.

[94] Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 164. I cannot fully account for the differences in numbers between what Davidson says and what my own research using Logos Bible Software revealed. Fifty-seven of the uses were proper names, but the numbers here are not clear.

reputation he deserves) is good . . . and that . . . both his name (here) and the act of worship (147:1) are delightful."[95]

In Psalm 27:4, the psalmist expresses this delight, desiring to "dwell in the house of the LORD . . . to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD." Beauty here is not an visual aesthetic manifestation. Here, beauty refers to God's glory in his revelation. Willem VanGemeren explains, "In the act of gazing on the Lord's beauty, the psalmist submits himself fully to experience the beneficent fellowship with God. God's 'beauty' is an expression of his goodness to his people (cf. 16:11; 90:17)."[96] The last prominent use of this word from the Psalms shows the importance of context in translation. Davidson and many others follow the sentimental reading of the AV in Psalm 90:17: "And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us."[97] However, the psalmist is asking for God's blessing so that the effects of God's wrath, which withers the works of the wicked, would be reversed. There is a sense of fittingness here as the time of blessing is to mirror the "many days [God] has afflicted [the children of Israel]" (v. 15). Kidner is sensitive to this contrast: "The crowning contrast is between what was seen as perishable in verses 3–12 and the abiding glory of what God does. Here is a heritage for our children in a transitory world; here is delight (17a; favour is too colourless a word); here, too, the possibility of labour that is 'not in vain.'"[98] This word often highlights the goodness of things being as they ought to be. A psalmist should be sweet, a beloved should be pleasant, and a good God bound in covenantal love should be beneficent.

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[95] Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 491.

[96] Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 245.

[97] Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 167.

[98] Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 363.

The eleventh word that Davidson lists is פאר (*p'r*). King offers פְּאֵ in place of פאר from Davidson's word, and he indicates, as Davidson does, that תִּפְאֶרֶת/תִּפְאָרָה (*tipʾārâ* /*tipʾeret*) are nominal derivates that are often aesthetic synonyms in parallel formations.[99] Words based on the root occur about sixty times in Scripture. The Piel stem of this word occurs six times. In each of these occurrences, the subject is God, and the object is his people, his sanctuary, or himself (Ps 14:4, Isa 60:7, and Isa 61:3, respectively).[100] In many of these cases, God is glorifying himself by beautifying things associated with him. Hamilton says that the primary meaning of the word is beauty, but since it has an additional meaning, "to boast" (Exod 8:5; Judg 7:2; Isa 10:15), the idea of self-glorification is inherent.[101] The nominal form, תִּפְאָרָה (*tipʾārâ*), is often used of appropriate boasting or rejoicing: "The glory of children is their fathers" (Prov 17:6); "The glory of young men is their strength" (Prov 20:29); "When the righteous triumph, there is great glory" (Prov 28:12). The appropriateness or fittingness of each of these examples in the created order is striking.

The twelfth word for beauty, צְבִי (*tsevi*), occurs nineteen times to mean—approximately—"ornament," "splendor," "glory," or "magnificence."[102] It is also used twelve times in reference to a gazelle. The use of the word seems to concentrate in Isaiah, with almost half the occurrences there. John Collins shows the connection to glory in Isaiah: "[The word] refers to the abstract property of beauty or glory in Isa 24:16 (people sing צְבִי לַצַּדִּיק glory to the Righteous One); 28:1, 4 (צְבִי תִפְאַרְתּוֹ, the beauty of Ephraim's glory), v. 5 (the Lord himself will be לַעֲטֶרֶת צְבִי וְלִצְפִירַת תִּפְאָרָה, for a crown of beauty and a

[99] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 338n11.

[100] Victor P. Hamilton, "1726 פָּאַר," in *TWOT*, 713.

[101] Hamilton, "1726 פָּאַר," 713.

[102] "בִי," in *LALHB*.

wreath of glory, for his remnant)."[103] There is little that distinguishes this word from others broadly used to refer to adornment, beauty, and glory. King notes, however, that the "common usage is the sense of ornamental or decorative beauty. It also appears in conjunction with תִּפְאֶרֶת, conveying a parallel relationship between beauty and glory."[104] In these references, there is often a contrast between authentic ornament or glory and those falsely assumed. John Hartley notes, "Yahweh will destroy all beauty that has its own source (Isa 23:9; 28:1–4). But he will be a crown of beauty to his remnant (Isa 28:5)."[105] False beauty and ornamentation can be borrowed for a time, but part of the final revelation of God's glory will be to set this record straight, revealing what is true.

The thirteenth word is מַרְאֶה (*marah*). This word is based on the Hebrew word for sight רָאָה (*r'h*). The word occurs 103 times, but it is of little use in understanding the biblical idea of beauty because it mostly means "seeing," "appearance," "phenomenon," "luster," or "brilliance."[106] In none of the scriptural uses of this word does the word itself indicate a necessarily good appearance. The appearances are qualified positively or negatively either by modifiers or the context. It is a bit mystifying why Davidson and King include this word in their lists of words that refer to beauty as it is the modifiers of this word that indicate beauty or the lack of beauty. This word can be used for unpleasant sights just as it can for pleasant ones. In the pharaoh's dream of the well-fed and emaciated cattle, the word occurs twice (Gen 12:4). The first occurrence describes the emaciated cattle; מַרְאֶה is modified by the adjective רָעוֹת, meaning bad or evil. The second occurrence of the word מַרְאֶה refers to the well-fed cattle, modified by the adjective יָפֶה,

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[103] John Collins, "צְבִי (*ṣebî*)," in *NIDOTTE*, 3:739.

[104] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 338–39n12.

[105] John E. Hartley, "1869 צבה," in *TWOT*, 751.

[106] "מַרְאֶה," in *LALHB*.

which means “fair” or “beautiful,” as discussed above. This ambiguity seems consistent in most biblical occurrences, and most translations reflect this reality.

One exception appears to be in Isaiah 53:2, where the ESV translates מַרְאֶה as “beautiful.” This choice might have been to maintain a parallelism with the earlier statement “no form or majesty”; however, the result is misleading. If the word מַרְאֶה is translated “appearance” in 53:2, then the connection back to 52:14 becomes clearer. In 52:14, Isaiah describes the same suffering servant using both the word “appearance” and the word “form.” The phrase “his appearance was so marred” is again a combination of מַרְאֶה and another word—this time, a noun (מִשְׁחַת; “disfigurement”) that clarifies the kind of appearance. Significantly, these two uses of “appearance” contrast two later uses of the root רָאָה. When describing the servant from God’s vantage point, Isaiah says, “He shall see [רָאָה] his offspring” (53:10) and “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see [רָאָה] and be satisfied” (53:11). Earlier, Isaiah describes the servant of the Lord as one who “shall not judge by what his eyes see [מַרְאֶה]” (11:3). There seems little doubt that this exception is artificial and misleading. Even in Isaiah 53:2, the word מַרְאֶה should be translated “appearance,” not “beauty.” John Goldingay and David Payne translate the phrase “no appearance so that we should want him.”[107] Alec Motyer affirms, “To such an extent was he but a man among men that the ordinary tests of beauty (‘looks’), majesty (‘impressiveness’), and appearance could be applied—with negative results.”[108] While Motyer uses the word “beauty,” he is not getting it from the word מַרְאֶה.

The fourteenth and final word is שׁפר (*špr*), and its two other forms are שֶׁפֶר and שִׁפְרָה. These words combined occur six times in the Old Testament—four times as a verb, and two times as an adjective.[109] The term suggests the idea of “brightness,”

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[107] Goldingay and Payne, *Isaiah 40–55*, 2:300.

[108] Motyer, *Isaiah*, 377.

[109] Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 174n32.

"pleasantness," or "brilliance." It is related to the word for "polishing" and a Hebrew word for "trumpet," perhaps suggesting the brilliancy of the sound.[110] While three of the uses are Aramaic and suggest the phrase "seems good to me," scholars interpret the Hebrew in a variety of ways.[111] In Genesis 49:21, it describes beautiful fawns. It appears as a personal name and the name of a mountain range. In Job 26:13, God "swept the heaven bare [clean] with his breathing."[112] Hermann Austel notes that in Psalm 16:6, "David is filled with praise to his God, not so much because of what God has done for him as for what God means to him personally. It is God who is his portion and his inheritance, and he is eminently satisfied and pleased with his inheritance, saying that that portion allotted to him is indeed most beautiful."[113] Using an expression of aesthetic good or beauty, the psalmist is again praising God for the good that he has given.

The rich range of words related to beauty demonstrates that God and his revelation are linked inextricably to the ideas of beauty and fittingness. At the very heart of this discussion lies the nature of God as Creator and the fittingness of his creation. In the Old Testament, beauty is not a small sliver of life that is sometimes enjoyed as a recreational accessory to life. Instead, beauty is an integral theme pulsing through all of existence, flowing from God to his creatures, who then become beautiful as they appropriately give glory back to him by fulfilling their assigned role in his divine plan.

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[110] Gesenius and Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 846.

[111] David Talley, "שָׁפַר, (*šapar*)," in *NIDOTTE*, 4:228.

[112] "שׁפר," in *HALOT*, 1635.

[113] Hermann J. Austel, "2449 שָׁפַר," in *TWOT*, 951.

Table 1. Translation of Hebrew words approximating beauty[114]

| Hebrew words or groups of words that suggest beauty or a close English synonym | Occurrences | Beauty | Good looking | Glory /majesty | Dear / precious | Gladness / delightful | Pleasant | Praise / worth / honor | Brightness / shining | Attractiveness | Clean / made clean / | Prosperity / wealth | Fame | Weight / Heaviness | Fittingness | Desire | Adorned | Other Significant Translations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| טוב, טוֹב, טוּב, טוּב | 544 | x | x | | x | x | | | x | x | | x | | | x | | | "Sweet cane," "Good smell," "virtue," "health" |
| כבד, כָּבוֹד, כָּבֵד | 314 | x | x | x | x | | | x | x | x | | x | x | x | | | | Similar to כּוֹכָב or "star" |
| מַרְאֶה | 104 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | "Appearance" |
| יָפֶה , יְפִי, יפה | 75 | x | x | | | | | | | x | x | | | | | | x | |
| מַחְמָד, חמד, חֶמְדָּה, חֶ֫מֶד | 67 | x | | | x | x | x | | | | | | | | | x | | |
| תִּפְאֶ֫רֶת, פּאַר | 66 | x | | x | | x | | x | | | | | | | | | x | "Boast" |
| אַוָּה , תַּאֲןָ, אוה | 59 | x | | | x | | x | | | | | | | | | x | | "Thirst" |

*Table 1 continued*

| Hebrew words or groups of words that suggest beauty or a close English synonym | Occurrences | Beauty | Good looking | Glory /majesty | Dear / precious | Gladness / delightful | Pleasant | Praise / worth / honor | Brightness / shining | Attractiveness | Clean / made clean / clarity | Prosperity / wealth | Fame | Weight / Heaviness | Fittingness | Desire | Adorned | Other Significant Translations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| הֲדָרָה, הדר, הָדָר | 42 | | x | x | | | | x | x | | | | | | | | | "Partiality" |
| נָעִים, נצם, נַעֲמָן, נָעִים | 29 | x | x | | x | | x | | | | | | | | | | | "Sweet singing," |
| הוֹד | 24 | x | | x | | | | | | | | | x | x | | | | "Authority" |
| צְבִי | 19 | x | | x | | | | | | | | | | | | | | "Gazelle," "horde" |
| נָאוֶה, נאה | 13 | x | | | | x | x | | | | | | | | x | | | |
| שֶׁ֫פֶר, שׁפר , שִׁפְרָה | 6 | x | | | | x | x | | | | x | | | | | | | Related to a drinking horn |

[114] The information in this table is gleaned primarily from the word study features in Logos Bible Software, reflecting the translation of the ESV, and data listed in Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

| נוה | 1 | | | | | | | x | | | | | | | | | | *TWOT* “beautify” |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

In many ways, the Jewish understanding of beauty was broader and more complex than the standard English terms that are used to refer to beauty. Table 1 above shows that these fourteen different words frequently share overlapping semantic domains with at least sixteen distinct English terms and concepts. Dyrness expresses a similar sentiment: “All of this [his overview of OT aesthetic vocabulary] is helpful in showing the final source and end of beauty and the unique connection of beauty with worship.”[115] The revelation of God in the Old Testament is richly aesthetic, but the aesthetic seems foreign to positivistic modernity. The deep beauty of the Old Testament is not about the superficial luster of an airbrushed photo; it is about deep connectedness and purpose in God’s created order—every creature playing out the role God gave it to the glory of God.

**New Testament Words for Beauty**

Examining the New Testament vocabulary for beauty is both a simpler and a more complicated task than surveying the Old Testament words. It is simpler because there are fewer words and because the words are more familiar. There are also more resources to help navigate the complexities of the Greek. On the other hand, the difficulties are both historical and theological. Historically, in the Greek language, there is a large body of philosophical writing on aesthetics outside of the New Testament. This material is foreign and, at times, even hostile to a biblical worldview. Care must be taken to avoid reading outside ideas into the biblical text. This study is undergirded by the assumption that God shaped the Greek language to reveal truth through it accurately, but there is still a danger. The pagan background of the language could exert an undue influence on one’s interpretation. Next, the theological complexity arises from the nexus of continuity and discontinuity that exists between the Old and New Testaments. For

[115] Dyrness, “Aesthetics in the Old Testament,” 427.

example, while worship in the New Testament still requires beauty, the Old Testament forms are not continued, and thus beauty, while still from God and still important in worship, manifests in a distinct manner. The physical glory that shone on the face of Moses has been eclipsed by the moral glory manifest in the perfections of Christ. Glory, beholding, and transformation continue, but the physical radiance does not. The distinctions must be weighed and applied carefully.

As I go through the list of Greek words, I note and explain some disagreements between Davidson and King.[116] Combining the lists of both scholars results in nine words used for beauty in the New Testament.

The first word is ἀστεῖος (*asteios*). It is only used twice in the New Testament, and both times, it describes Moses as a "beautiful" child (Acts 7:20; Heb 11:23). The word comes from the distinction between common rural areas and remarkable urban locations. BDAG makes the following comment: "Moses, whose shepherd background would be a mark of ill-breeding to Egyptians, but God considers him a person of refined status, a perspective developed in the narrative that follows."[117] It would not be prudent to lean too heavily on this, but, interestingly, this word calls someone beautiful that is primarily beautiful in the eyes of God, and Moses's beauty is deeply connected to how he would function in God's plan.

The second word used for beauty in the New Testament is δόξα (*doxa*). Here, the dilemma described earlier comes into focus as this word becomes laden with new meaning that it never held before it came into the service of New Testament writers who wanted to communicate the Old Testament idea of glory. Gerhard Kittel agrees that the word "both loses part of its secular sense in biblical Gk. and also takes on an alien and

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[116] Davidson, "The Aesthetic Nature of Scripture," in *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 151–71; King, "The General Witness of Scripture to the Aesthetic Dimension," in *The Beauty of the Lord*, 337–42.

[117] BDAG, "ἀστεῖος," 145.

specifically religious meaning."[118] The sense of the Hebrew כָּבוֹד is carried forward, which suggests weightiness that is valuable and distinctive. While, at times, it can suggest honor, according to *TDNTA*, "Since God is invisible, it necessarily carries a reference to his self-manifestation."[119] The glory of God is at times distant. In Psalm 19, it is far above the earth. When it comes down in the Old Testament, it is conditional and can depart, and at times, it is terrifying, like the devouring fire on Sinai (Exod 24:17).

*TDNTA* then notes, "The NT takes a decisive step by relating *dóxa* to Christ in the same way as to God. *Dóxa* then reflects all the dynamism of the relation of God and Christ."[120] In Christ, the glory of God comes to dwell with man as man. John affirms that the Word "dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14). Believers in Christ are called to contemplate—be beholding—his glory (2 Cor 3:16) and be empowered in accordance with Christ's riches in glory (Eph 3:16) so that they faithfully follow their call to "[God's] eternal glory in Christ" (1 Pet 5:10), which will be realized once they are clothed with a glorious body (1 Cor 15:43–49). All of this feeds back into the glory of God. *TDNTA* summarizes this pattern from John 17: "Along the same lines, Jn. 17 says that the disciples will see the glory of Christ (v. 24), that he is glorified in them (v. 10), and that he gives to them the glory the Father has given to him (v. 22)."[121] Through each step of this progression or drama of redemption, the word δόξα, as God's manifestation, includes the idea of beauty. So as John-Mark Hart summarizes, "Sanctification is . . . transformation into the image of Christ, who is the beautiful radiance of divine glory. [Sanctification is also] the renewal

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[118] Gerhard Kittel, "Δοκέω, Δόξα, Δοξάζω, Συνδοξάζω, Ἔνδοξος, Ἐνδοξάζω, Παράδοξος," in *TDNT*, 2:232.

[119] "*Dokéō*," in *TDNTA*, 178.

[120] "*Dokéō*," in *TDNTA*, 180.

[121] "*Dokéō*," in *TDNTA*, 180–81.

of humanity's original glory . . . within the created order (Gen 1:26–27)."[122] The links between glorification and beautification, the restoration of fittingness, become apparent when viewed from this perspective.

The third word for beauty in the New Testament is εὐπρέπεια (*euprepeia*), used only once for the fading "beauty" of the flower (Jas 1:11). It does occur six times in the LXX, which translates three distinct Hebrew words for beauty. BDAG offers confirmation of this translation in various texts.[123]

The fourth word, καλός (*kalos*), is used extensively in the translation of the LXX "for יָפֶה beautiful, but much oftener for טוֹב good; beautiful."[124] King summarizes the range and significance of the meaning of this word: "The broad semantic range includes both ethical and aesthetic meanings. The noun follows the adjectival sense and means that which is ordered or whole or healthy in the sense of 'the good,' 'virtue,' and 'the beautiful,' 'beauty.'"[125] The word is often used to denote moral behavior, and in these uses, the distinction between the moral and the aesthetic fades as the moral use is also fitting. Joseph Henry Thayer's definitions show the overlap between the aesthetic and the moral. He defines the aesthetic meaning as "beautiful to look at, shapely, magnificent," and the second meaning he offers is "excellent in its nature and characteristics, and therefore well-adapted to its ends: joined to the names of material objects . . . , esp. of things so constituted as to answer the purpose for which that class of things was created."[126] In keeping with this, the good law in Romans 7:16 and 1 Timothy

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[122] John-Mark Hart, "Triune Beauty and the Ugly Cross: Towards a Theological Aesthetic," *Tyndale Bulletin* 66, no. 2 (2015): 299.

[123] BDAG, "εὐπρέπεια," 410.

[124] Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Harper, 1889), 322, Logos Bible Software.

[125] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 339n17.

[126] Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 322.

1:8 “is good in its substance and nature, and fitted to beget good.”[127] Thus, when created elements function as God intended them to, pointing to the goodness of God’s design, they are like the salty salt that is good (καλὸν τὸ ἅλας; Mark 9:50 // Luke 14:34). Such elements are good and beautiful because they fulfill their intended function.

The fifth word, κοσμέω (*kosmeō*), seems familiar as it is the root word for an everyday household product. It is related to the sixth word, κοσμος (*kosmos*), and Davidson does not list either of these words.[128] The word κοσμέω means to arrange or put in order, as in Matthew 25:7. Hermann Sasse notes, “Elsewhere the meaning is ‘to adorn.’”[129] The meaning “adorn,” with the sense of making the object attractive, is used in connection with women (1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:5), a house (Matt 12:44 // Luke 11:25), the temple (Luke 21:5), Christian conduct (that will figuratively “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior”; Titus 2:10), and the new Jerusalem (metaphorically as a bride; Rev 21:2).

The sixth word, κοσμος, is the root form of the previous word (κοσμέω) and only appears once in the New Testament, meaning beautification. This one occurrence designates a form of adornment that is not fitting.[130] In 1 Peter 3:3, κοσμος is translated “adorning” in a prohibition of the kind of embellishment that is not approved. It is critical to recognize that “adorning” is not prohibited. The ban is against a particular sort of adorning when the source of beauty should be elsewhere. Here, Charles Bigg’s commentary is insightful:

> What St. Peter says is “whose must be, not the outward adornment of plaiting hair and putting round of jewels or putting on of robes, but the hidden man of the heart.” Κόσμος is in antithesis to ἄνθρωπος [man], visible ornaments to the invisible soul. It

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[127] Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 322.

[128] Davidson, *Towards a Theology of Beauty*, 153–56.

[129] Hermann Sasse, “Κοσμέω, Κόσμος, Κόσμιος, Κοσμικός,” in *TDNT*, 3:867.

[130] It does occur frequently with the meaning outside of the New Testament. In the LXX, it is used to translate צָבָא in reference to “the arrangement of the stars, ‘the heavenly hosts,’ as the ornament of the heavens, Gen. 2:1; Deut. 4:19; 17:3; Is. 24:21; 40:26; besides occasionally for עֲדִי; twice for תִּפְאֶרֶת, Prov. 20:29; Is. 3:19.” Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 356.

> is possible that there is a play on the two meanings of κόσμος, "ornaments," and the "world," or "multitude of men"; at any rate this supposition would help to explain the antithesis.[131]

This explanation suggests that Peter is using some literary adorning of his own as he makes his point, and he opens the way for insisting that there is a kind of adornment that should be happening. It is an adornment that has relevance beyond the time and sense of this κοσμος. The word κοσμος, however, "is used in classical Greek . . . for all kinds of embellishments."[132] Here, Peter is using it at least in that sense.

The seventh word used in the New Testament for beauty is προσφιλής. This word is only used once in Scripture (Phil 4:8). Both King and Davidson claim that this verse is a "rich" or "significant" aesthetic statement, but they offer no proof for this claim.[133] This word does not seem to lend itself to sensual beauty in a direct way. LSJ notes a related term, προσφῐλοκᾰλέω, and shows that this term has to with the love of beauty, citing an example from Philo (c. 20 BC–c. AD 50): "artists, have a love of beauty."[134] However, that word is not the one used in Philippians 4:8. The example from Philo is significant because it shows that a word with clear aesthetic implications was recently used and so was available. For the word that Paul uses in Philippians, προσφιλής, LSJ and BDAG offer similar definitions, suggesting little to no change between the Classical period and the Koine period. BDAG's definition is broad and includes aesthetic and relational meanings: "Causing pleasure or delight, pleasing, agreeable, lovely, amiable."[135] Many examples come from after the completion of the

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[131] Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark International, 1901), 151–52.

[132] Bigg, *St. Peter and St. Jude*, 152.

[133] King says this is "a rich aesthetic statement." King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 339n18. Davidson notes, "The apostle Paul articulates a significant aesthetic statement." Davidson, *Towards a Theology of Beauty*, 153. She then quotes the verse with no further comment.

[134] LSJ, "προσφῐλοκᾰλέω," 1530.

[135] BDAG, "Προσφιλής," 886.

New Testament. In those examples, God is the one pleased. One example reads, "pleasing to the λόγος."[136]

Most of LSJ's examples for this word deal with interpersonal relationships; many examples come from the salutation of personal letters. The better arguments from commentators suggest that this term is relational. Notably, Marvin R. Vincent offers the definition "'lovely,' 'amiable.' Whatever calls forth love."[137] To support his position, he cites two texts from the LXX that use προσφιλής to refer to the strengthening of human relationships. Mark Keown contributes, "The term προσφιλής uses a presumed compound of πρός, 'to, toward,' and φίλος, 'to love.'"[138] The term προσφιλής, then, pertains to sincere love. Given the historical, linguistic, contextual, and theological arguments, it might be best not to see this text in direct aesthetic terms. Nevertheless, it is fitting for Christians to dwell together in unity, so this passage still addresses the beauty with which Christ seeks to adorn his people.

The eighth word in the New Testament that suggests beauty is φαίνομαι. Davidson cites the occurrence of this word in Matthew 23:27 as an example, observing that this is one of twenty-two times that this verb (φαίνω) occurs in the middle form in the New Testament.[139] However, in Matthew 23:27, the word φαίνομαι is supplying the meaning "to shine" or "appear." The idea of beauty comes from the word ὡραῖος, which means "timely" or "beautiful."[140] No example in the New Testament or any reference in BDAG or LSJ suggests that this word means beauty independent of a modifier.

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[136] BDAG, "Προσφιλής," 886.

[137] Marvin Richardson Vincent, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner & Sons, 1897), 139.

[138] Mark J. Keown, *Philippians*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 362.

[139] Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 172n6.

[140] Even in ὡραῖος, the aesthetic element is possibly not an original emphasis. Allen Willoughby observes, "ὡραῖος might seem to suggest an æsthetic purpose for the whitening. But the original Aramaic may have been a more colourless word. The saying in Lk 11 has a different turn."

The ninth word, ὡραῖος, is the one that in Matthew 23:27 might imply the idea of beauty.[141] This word, in this form, only occurs four times in the New Testament (Matt 23:27; Acts 3:2, 10; Rom 10:15). The first reference, considered above, concerns the whitewashed tombs, the two in Acts are the name of a temple gate, and the fourth is featured in the quotation from Isaiah 52:7, describing the feet of those who preach the good news. BDAG offers two definitions. The first is based on the root of this word, ὥρα, which suggests "an opportune point of time, happening/coming at the right time, timely."[142] The second definition "pertains to being attractive, beautiful, fair, lovely, pleasant of persons and things."[143] There does not appear to be any convincing uses of the first meaning in the New Testament, though some translations offer, as BDAG does, that the reference to Isaiah could be translated, "How timely [ὡραῖος] is the arrival of those who proclaim good news" (Rom 10:15 NET). Such a translation seems to say more than the Hebrew word נָאָה in Isaiah 52:7 suggests. The Hebrew word there could mean "appropriate" or "fitting," but that is still a stretch to become "timely."[144] This passage, on its own, shows again the scriptural use of beauty to convey truth powerfully. In this

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Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1907), 249. There is considerable debate on this passage. However, the practice of white washing was not usually to make the tombs beautiful; instead, it was to make them stand out as abhorrent in order to be avoided. R. T. France suggests that the focus is a contrast between inward defilement and outward attractiveness, but he arrives at this by assuming that the cultural practice lies behind the analogy. R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 332. D. A. Carson sides with Willoughby in averring that "Jesus' mention of whitewashing has nothing to do with the beauty of sepulchers but is a further thrust at the Pharisees based on their distinctive preoccupation with avoiding defilement from corpses." Carson goes on to explain that the actual contrast here is not between outward attractiveness and inward defilement but between "their preoccupation with their law (nomos)" and the actual "anomia" or "wickedness" in which they are steeped. D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 482–83.

[141] See the previous note for a fuller explanation of why this this word—in Matt 23:27—probably is not meant to convey significant aesthetic connotations.

[142] BDAG, "ὡραῖος," 1103.

[143] BDAG, "ὡραῖος," 1103.

[144] The debate over this translation is fairly vigorous, but Thomas Schreiner leaves little room for ambiguity that the correct translation here is "beautiful." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 568–69.

example, the feet are made beautiful by the message they bring, but the beautiful feet are still carrying the message. This reciprocity points back to God's concern for and use of beauty. God sends the messenger. The messenger is made beautiful by the message, and the effect of the delivery is the glory of God.

While the New Testament does not have as much material that refers to beauty the nine words do indicate a message that is consistent with the Old Testament. In general this survey and table 2 indicate that the New Testament words for beauty are less connected to present physical beauty, but this is consistent with the more interior eschatological nature of the New Testament. Much of the language that suggests physical beauty refers to future events. The most common New Testament word that has clear aesthetic significance, as seen in chart 2, is δόξα, the word for glory, and this word is frequently tied to eschatological realities. The next two most common words, κοσμος and φαίνο, do not indicate physical beauty independent of context. Still, the New Testament material does show a broad range of nuance and a pervasive concern for beauty.

Table 2. Translation of Greek words approximating beauty[145]

| Greek words or groups of words that suggest beauty or a close English synonym | Occurrences | Beauty | Brightness /shine | Glory | Honor / honorable | Greatness | Good | Right | Fitting | Pure | Adorned | Ordered | Appear / manifest | Plain | Pleasing / agreeable | Timely | Other Significant Translations |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| δόξα | 361 | x | x | x | x | x | | | | | | | | | | | "laurels" "heaven" |
| κοσμος | 201 | x | | | | | | | x | | x | x | | | | | "earth" "system" "to trim a wick" |

[145] The information in this table is gleaned primarily from the word study features in Logos Bible Software, reflecting the translation of the ESV, and data listed in Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

| φαίνο | 158 | | x | | | | | | | | | | x | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| καλός | 140 | x | | | x | | x | x | x | | | x | | | | | |
| ἀστεῖος | 2 | x | | | | | | | | | | | | | x | | both describe Moses |
| προσφιλής | 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | (x) | | based on the root for friend |
| ὡραῖος | 4 | x | | | | | | | x | | | | | | | x | based on the root for “hour” |
| εὐπρέπεια / πρέπω | 10 | x | | | | | | x | x | | | | | | | x | |

**Implications From The Bible’s Use of Beauty**

The sheer abundance of beauty in Scripture is an argument for the relevance of beauty to spiritual formation. Catholic theologian and professor at Fordham University Richard Viladesau asserts, “The connection of art and theology . . . is not simply a concession to the practical necessities of communication, but it is more profoundly rooted in the aesthetic dimension of revelation itself.”[146] Because God has revealed himself in aesthetic language with many words that establish the nature and importance of beauty, Christian educators cannot relate this message without using the same aesthetic elements. Educators must have fluency in rhetorical conventions, an ability to expose and weave dynamic strands of narrative, and a rich aesthetic vocabulary. Viladesau continues, “Art should not be conceived as something to be added on to a theological message to make it palatable or more easily understood, but as an intrinsic part of theology’s nature and object.”[147] Christian education must not take what God has revealed in sparkling streams of heartwarming truth and serve it to students as chunks of cold liver pudding.

The beauty of literary elements, narrative structure, and rich aesthetic vocabulary can be applied in every classroom. The fact that God uses these elements in Scripture is instructive on two separate levels. On one level, it provides rich content that

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[146] Richard Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts: Encountering God through Music, Art, and Rhetoric* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 228.

[147] Viladesau, *Theology and the Arts*, 228.

should be part of Christian education. Students should be taught to recognize the wide range of literary devices that Scripture employs, as these are truly helpful in understanding the Bible.[148] Students should also be taught biblical theology so that the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament is more than just a few points of typology and fulfilled prophecies. Biblical theology is beautiful and fulfilling as it reveals the unity of Scripture.

To some extent, students should also understand the richness of the language used to describe God's attributes. Jonathan King offers a fascinating analogy using Isaac Newton's discovery concerning light. Just as white light contains all of the spectrum's colors, so also God's glory contains a rich array of his attributes.[149] God's glory is not just one attribute; it is the summation of many attributes, including God's power, holiness, and beauty. Christopher Morgan confirms, "Biblical data suggests that God's intrinsic glory is broader than a single attribute. It corresponds with his very being and sometimes functions as a sort of summation of his attributes."[150] Students should be given this content in forms they can digest early and often.[151]

Christian teachers should not only teach these truths, they should also reflect in their methods the manner employed by Scripture to convey the truths. There is no place

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[148] Leland Ryken's phenomenal work *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992) is an excellent book for teachers who do not have a strong background in literary analysis. I remember how helpful it was to me and many of my classmates when we learned how to read Hebrew poetry. Learning that Hebrew poetry's chiastic structures do not build to the point of emphasis at the end but instead emphasized a central idea was critical. Also helpful was learning the nature of parallelism in Hebrew poetry. Prior to learning about Hebrew parallelism, I had struggled to make sense of the repetition in Hebrew poetry. Sadly, I did not learn these features untill my second year of seminary.

[149] King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 48–49.

[150] Christopher W. Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Glory of God," in *The Glory of God*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 165.

[151] A book that has helped me in communicating these ideas to younger students is Bruce A. Ware, *Big Truths for Young Hearts: Teaching and Learning the Greatness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009).

in Christian education for thinking that one can devise methods of teaching that are better than the ones God has used. The testimony of the saints across the ages affirms that these elements of literary techniques, narrative form, and vocabulary breadth are not only beautiful but also helpful in spiritual development.

These three elements tie into what John Piper calls "poetic effort." Piper defines this effort as "the God dependent intention and exertion to find striking penetrating imaginative and awakening ways of expressing the excellencies [of God]."[152] Piper illustrates the power of this effort with an anecdote. He talks about hearing his daughter singing a song. The experience is meaningful, but he says, "When I make the effort to put into suitable words what I love about her song—in a conversation, in a birthday card, in a poem—I hear more, see more, love more."[153] Similarly, when students are asked to use literary techniques to describe God, the exercise of striving to speak beautifully is powerfully formative. To some extent, this formative effect is a byproduct of the meditation required to produce, for example, a poem about the glory of God. However, the effect is more than just a result of meditation. In this poetic exercise, meditation has been augmented by the attractiveness of God's beauty and the intensity of an academic assignment. Piper says the central point of his book is that "saying beautifully is a way of seeing beauty . . . as you try to find words that seem worthy of the worth of what you have seen, the worth of what you have seen becomes clearer and deeper."[154] What Piper calls poetic effort involves literary devices, narrative form, and a robust, nuanced vocabulary.

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[152] John Piper, *Seeing Beauty and Saying Beautifully: The Power of Poetic Effort in the Work of George Herbert, George Whitefield, and C. S. Lewis*, Swans Are Not Silent 6 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 17.

[153] Piper, *Seeing Beauty and Saying Beautifully*, 17.

[154] Piper, *Seeing Beauty and Saying Beautifully*, 144.

When one looks specifically at each of these elements, even more can be said about their usefulness in the classroom. The English poet George Herbert states that his effort to find the words to describe Christ in poetry brought him closer to the Lord:

> [Poetry] is no office, art, or news,
> nor the exchange, or busie Hall;
> That it is that which while I use
> I am with thee . . . . [155]

In addition to the power of using literary devices, narrative can be leveraged in a wide variety of ways. British educational specialist Joe Winston shows that narrative has many places in the school day. He describes each lesson as a narrative with a plot and a storyline. Lessons are performed narratives with "a pattern through which information unfolds in ways that can make them more or less interesting."[156] More significantly, the entire day should be viewed as a narrative. Winston asks, "How much more pleasurable, more human, might the average school day be, for teachers as well as children, if it were planned as something shapely and complete, with an eye to its patterns and its rhythms?"[157] Winston recounts observing a school where activities at the end of the day brought the day to a close with "a sense of completion rather than mere cessation."[158] One activity that taps into the power of narrative is to ask students to reflect on how God worked in and through them during the day. Encouraging students to think about their day as a narrative wherein God is the protagonist drawing them and their classmates to himself can alter students' perspective for the better. Classes can then close the day, thanking God for these reflections. This idea is not fanciful thinking. It is merely using the power of narrative to uncover often-overlooked realities.

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[155] George Herbert, "The Quidditie," in *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. Hellen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 254.

[156] Joe Winston, *Beauty and Education*, Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education 24 (New York: Routledge, 2010), 136.

[157] Winston, *Beauty and Education*, 136.

[158] Winston, *Beauty and Education*, 136.

Essential to these practices, and yet worthy of particular attention, is the importance of an extensive aesthetic vocabulary. Students, like everyone else, think in words. The Bible offers a wide range of vocabulary that God uses to elucidate the contours of God's beauty. Edwyn Hoskyns, an eminent New Testament critic of a previous generation, understood the necessity of vocabulary to the knowledge of God. He is reputed to have frequently said, "Bury yourself in a lexicon and arise in the presence of God."[159] Teachers must ensure that students have such a vocabulary.

## Conclusion

This survey demonstrates the abundance of aesthetic material in Scripture. These observations have defended the paradigm that God is the author of beauty, that he uses beauty, and that beauty reflects back to him as its telos. The conclusion that beauty is essential in God's revelation of himself is inescapable. Further, God also manifests his concern for beauty outside of Scripture. This manifestation is often the source of confusion because people encountering beauty in other places before encountering it in Scripture do not consciously recognize the divine purpose behind the extrabiblical manifestations of beauty. In this way, extrabiblical beauty may disorient people and numb the God-centered nature of beauty. One antidote for this disorientation is recognizing that all extrabiblical beauty—the beauty seen throughout creation—is a gift of common grace. This perspective is the topic of the next chapter.

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[159] Edwyn Hoskyns, quoted in Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 26n22.

# CHAPTER 4

# THE MORALITY OF BEAUTY

This chapter hinges on the understanding that sees all of creation as an antiphonal celebration of God's glory, including God's moral excellence. Antiphonal expressions are frequent in Scripture; in the reading of the law, in the temple's dedication, in the singing of the psalms, in the praise of the seraphim, in the worship of the early church, and in the visions of Revelation.[1] The antiphony of the ages is creation's speaking about God and people's responding and acting out the truth that creation affirms. Paul says that the entire created order affirms God's "invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived" (Rom 1:21). The point Paul is making is that the intended response to God's revelation has never fully occurred. Leon Morris says, "Paul's main point is that seeing, people do not see; perceiving, they do not perceive. They see creation (cf. Job 40:15–41; Ps. 8; 19; 104; Isa. 40:21–26, etc.). However, because they reject the knowledge of God, they have thrown away the key to it all."[2] The call of creation includes the beauty of God. An apocryphal passage that sounds similar to Romans reveals an earlier recognition of this truth. Wisdom 13:5 says, "For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator" (NRSV).[3] It is fitting that humankind respond

[1] Some may question the use in the early church, and that is fine as this is not a major point, but this is a fairly vigorous debate with some indications on either side. Scriptural indication would include Ernest Best's observation that the use of both the first and second person pronouns in Ephesians 2:4–7 "represents the antiphonal response of the leader of worship to the hymn of the people." Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark International, 1998), 217.

[2] Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 82.

[3] Significantly, in the context, these verses are not in agreement with what Paul is claiming in

to the "call" of nature as each day "pours out speech" and each night "reveals knowledge" (Ps 19:2). There is an ongoing moral obligation for humankind to respond. The response ought to reflect the creativity, order, beauty, and holiness that nature retains from its unfallen form.

The first part of this chapter addresses the call of beauty as seen in common grace and general revelation. The second part addresses the response that humanity should offer in reflecting the beauty of holiness. These different but related ideas are the third and fourth components of a biblical view of beauty that make beauty helpful in a high school student's spiritual development.

## Beauty and Common Grace

Common grace is, unfortunately, commonly misunderstood. This problem is not new. Augustine faced a problem raised by common grace in the fourth century when he debated his Pelagian adversaries. The Pelagians pointed to the virtuous or good acts accomplished by many pagans as evidence of man's moral freedom and virtue. This objection challenged Augustine's biblical understanding of human nature. His response was to claim that pagans have no restraint in their sin, but some sins overpower other sins.[4] It was not until much later in church history that this question was answered more satisfactorily by a clear biblical understanding of common grace.[5] For Christian high

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Romans. Morris clarifies, "He is referring to man's search after God ('as they live among his works they keep searching', v. 7), Paul to God's revelation of himself. In Wisdom if man does not come to know God that is simply a mistake, in Paul it is the rejection of what God has made known." Morris, *Romans*, 82n224.

[4] Augustine of Hippo, "On Marriage and Concupiscence," in *Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, trans. Peter Holmes, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, series 1, vol. 5 (New York: Christian Literature, 1887), 265, Logos Bible Software.

[5] Even in this century, Reformed theologian Greg Bartholomew felt it right to affirm that "the Reformed paradigm has suffered no damage greater than its deficient development of the doctrine of common grace." Greg Bartholomew, "Volume Introduction," in *Common Grace: God's Gifts for a Fallen World*, vol. 1, *The Historical Section*, by Abraham Kuyper, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman and Ed M. van der Maas, Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), xxxiv.

school students who are receiving substantive aesthetic education, analogous to Augustine's confusion is the question "Why do pagans produce so much beauty if God is the author of beauty and pagans are estranged from God?" It will not do to say that in the aesthetics of paganism, one bad art form is triumphing over another. The only helpful response, and the only biblical response, is a robust understanding of God's common grace.

**Defining Common Grace**

Wayne Grudem offers a helpful definition: "Common grace is the grace of God by which he gives people innumerable blessings that are not part of salvation. The word common here means something common to all people and is not restricted to believers or the elect only."[6] It is thus distinct from the specific—or special—grace mediated through Christ in the salvation, regeneration, and ultimate glorification of the elect. Eugene Osterhaven helpfully summarizes some of the scriptural instruction on this subject:

> Common grace is the natural blessings that God showers on all men (Ps. 145:9; Matt. 5:44f.; Luke 6:35f.; Acts 14–1 6f.; Rom. 2:4; 1 Tim. 4:10). Every good gift is from the Father above (Jas. 1:17) and is an evident token of his constant faithfulness and goodness toward all creatures. Not only believers but all men receive and benefit from these gifts from day to day. God means them as blessings which men should recognize as such so that the goodness of God will lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4).[7]

Several key elements of common grace are significant for this chapter. Common grace is available to everyone, and it can offer an avenue that might lead to repentance. Common grace is of no use in regeneration, but God uses it to spread the gospel and prepare some hearts. For common grace to be useful, there seems to be two factors that must be in

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[6] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 657.

[7] M. Eugene Osterhaven, "Common Grace," in *Basics of the Faith: An Evangelical Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 224–25.

place: (1) those who would benefit must recognize that what they are experiencing is a gift from God; (2) these gifts are "evident tokens" bearing witness to special revelation. It is helpful to consider beauty in relation to these two factors.

**Beauty as a Gift of Common Grace**

God's common grace is bountifully seen in the gifts of rain, sunshine, fruitful seasons, food, gladness, moral restraint, and protection from evil forces. These specific gifts are named in Scripture. However, in the descriptions of Scripture, several phrases are open-ended, suggesting that not every gift is listed (e.g., "every good gift" [Jas 1:17]; "his mercy is over all that he has made" [Ps 145:9]; "you satisfy the desire of every living thing" [Ps 145:16)]; "satisfies your [unbelievers'] hearts with gladness" [Acts 14:17]). These phrases suggest that there are many gifts not enumerated in the Bible. Among these good gifts are the faculties of creativity, artistic skill, and aesthetic sensibility. Grudem identifies six areas affected by common grace: (1) the physical realm, (2) the intellectual realm, (3) the moral realm, (4) the creative realm, (5) the societal realm, and (6) the religious realm.[8] Concerning the creative realm, Grudem says, "God has allowed significant measures of skill in artistic and musical areas, as well as in other [creative] spheres."[9] Messianic Jewish scholar Arnold Fruchtenbaum agrees: "Common grace gives man some sense of the truth, the good, the moral, and the beautiful. Even the unsaved man can appreciate the beautiful things of this world, the truth, and the good because of

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[8] Grudem is helpfully clear: "Unbelievers often receive more common grace than believers—they may be more skillful, harder working, more intelligent, more creative, or have more of the material benefits of this life to enjoy. This in no way indicates that they are more favored by God in an absolute sense or that they will gain any share in eternal salvation." Grudem continues, "Common grace is different from saving grace. Common grace does not change the human heart or bring people to genuine repentance and faith—it cannot and does not save." Interestingly, Grudem does assert that common grace "restrain[s] sin." Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 663. The implications for this thesis are significant, and the restraint of sin is helpful in spiritual formation.

[9] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 661.

common grace."[10] This understanding provides a foundation for saying, with Philip Schaff and David Schaff, that "whatever elements of truth, goodness, and beauty may be found shining like stars and meteors in the darkness of heathendom, must be traced to the Logos, the universal Life-giver and Illuminator."[11]

Abraham Kuyper wrote extensively about common grace. In framing his argument for the importance of beauty in common grace, Kuyper insists that any Christian thought that does not consciously account for the prominence of beauty in human experience is sub-Christian. He asserts that "Scripture ascribes to the devil no creative capacity. The world of beauty that does in fact exist can have originated nowhere else than in the creation of God."[12] He sees three important assertions underlying a Christian understanding of aesthetics: "It becomes clear that God not only creates the artist by giving talent and gifts, but also implanted in the masses a sense and inclination, a receptivity and susceptibility, [1] for valuing art, [2] for experiencing its expression, and [3] for esteeming and enjoying it."[13] The divine gift of being able to appreciate beauty is often treated too lightly. In *The Evidential Power of Beauty*, Thomas Dubay uses Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory of beauty to highlight the significance of this gift:

> Darwin himself noted that no mere animal can admire the night sky, a splendid rural scene, or elegant music. Only an intellect rooted in spirit can perceive and be thrilled by astronomy, microbiology, mathematics. Which, of course . . . conversely indicates that only intellectual design and purpose can make the beautiful. Art

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[10] Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "The Grace of God," in vol. 98 of *The Messianic Bible Study Collection* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1983), 13.

[11] Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 555.

[12] Abraham Kuyper, *Wisdom and Wonder: Common Grace in Science and Art*, ed. Jordan J. Ballor and Stephen J. Grabill, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press 2011), 126.

[13] Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege: Living under Christ's Kingship*, vol. 3, *The Kingship of Christ in Its Operation*, ed. John Kok and Nelson D. Kloosterman, trans. Albert Gootjes, Abraham Kuyper Collected Works in Public Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 387.

> demands an artist. Random chance has never explained a waltz or a symphony, a physical equation, or an epic poem. It cannot.[14]

Critics sometimes downplay the significance of this aesthetic distinction between man and animals. They may, for example, bring up the beautiful display of a peacock attempting to attract a mate. However, to do this is to miss a critical distinction that Daniel Blackaby observes in his defense of humankind's unique aesthetic sense:

> A female bowerbird is wooed by the male bowerbird's nest, and a peahen is attracted by the bright colors of a peacock's feathers. However, a female bowerbird is unlikely to demonstrate any interest in a peacock's feathers, nor is a peahen likely to be wooed by the nest of a bowerbird. The human perception of beauty does not share these species-specific limitations.[15]

What God has given humans is a gift far beyond that which animals possess.

When we rightly understand beauty as a gift from God, we see that it is no longer a threat to Christian thinking. When we see beauty as something vital in itself, there is a temptation for us to overemphasize it. When beauty has no external justification, people cannot enjoy it because they feel they must either earn or justify such an enjoyment. Dutch Christian thinker H. R. Rookmaaker (1922–1977) astutely comments that when beauty is understood as a gift, "neither art nor beauty needs to be justified or put on a pedestal. They are to be enjoyed and appreciated and practiced, in love and freedom, as a joy forever, accepted as a great gift of God."[16] Freed in this way, Christians can understand that every work of beauty in the world is another example of God's goodness in giving man creative ability and aesthetic sensitivity. These impulses are inexplicable according to a naturalistic worldview. As Kuyper insists, man cannot explain why beautiful things are beautiful: "Regardless of what we may assemble as

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[14] Thomas Dubay, *The Evidential Power of Beauty: Science and Theology Meet* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 65.

[15] Daniel B. Blackaby, "An Argument from Sublime Literature: How Language, Beauty, and Literature Point toward the Existence of God" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 195n2.

[16] H. R. Rookmaacher, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 231.

marks of the beautiful, the beautiful itself remains something impenetrable and unknowable for us. It is a mystery from God's perfection, which we honor and enjoy, and causes us to be productive, yet without anyone ever being able to say what the beautiful itself really is."[17] This mystery of the beautiful again points to the importance of seeing beauty as a gift of common grace. In its prevalence and mystery, beauty is another way God reveals his goodness and glory to his creatures. This truth should help Christians ask a different question. They should no longer ask why pagans can produce beautiful things; instead, they should wonder how God can be so good to those who reject him.

This perspective also provides a consistent basis for Christians to value and enjoy works produced by pagans. The well-worn axiom "all truth is God's truth" is analogous to the claim that "all beauty is God's beauty." Frank Gaebelein famously laid the former axiom as the foundation for all Christian education, and while establishing that claim, he assumed the latter axiom:

> Now Christian education, if it is faithful to its deepest commitment, must renounce once and for all the false separation between secular and sacred truth. It must see that truth in science, and history, in mathematics, art, literature, and music belongs just as much to God as truth in religion. While it recognizes the primacy of the spiritual truth revealed in the Bible and incarnate in Christ, it acknowledges that all truth, wherever it is found, is of God. For Christian education there can be no discontinuity in truth, but every aspect of truth must find its unity in the God of all truth.[18]

It is not right to affirm that all truth is God's truth and not also claim that all true beauty is God's beauty.[19] When beauty is properly understood as a gift of common grace, Christians are free to discern and appreciate real beauty wherever it occurs. In his

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[17] Kuyper, *Pro Rege*, 3:415.

[18] Frank E. Gaebelein, "Towards a Christian Philosophy of Education – Part 2," *Grace Journal* 3 (Fall 1962): 13.

[19] This claim is hard for some to accept because there is so much that is called beautiful that is profane. But truth can also be profaned. In a fallen world, beauty is knife that can cut out cancer or cut throats. To use a classical motif, beauty can be the nine muses who called people to produce the best of human artistic ability, or beauty can be the sirens who lured hapless sailors to their deaths.

book *Surprised by Joy*, as well as in other personal writings, C. S. Lewis often speaks about how beauty awakened in him an intense desire—what he called *Sehnsucht* (i.e., a desire, longing, or yearning-like homesickness)—for a home he never had.[20] This yearning has a distinct apologetic value in Lewis's writing, and in his conversion and growth, this desire for the glory of God was pivotal.[21] However, even though Lewis connected the longing with a spiritual impulse, for four of the most definitive instances when he experienced this longing, the catalyst was not Scripture or nature but human-made art: (1) George Macdonald's *Phantatastes*, (2) Richard Wagner's opera, (3) four lines from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Saga of Olaf*, and (4) the toy garden Lewis's brother, Warnie, made in a biscuit tin.[22] These accounts should serve as at least a suggestion that human-made beauty in echoing God's creation can have similar effects. However, there is another aspect of beauty in common grace that deserves attention.

### Beauty as an Aspect of General Revelation

While beauty is prominently and beneficently part of common grace, it is also present in an aspect of common grace often called general revelation. The study of God's revelation of himself in creation, called general or natural revelation, has suffered many wounds in the house of its friends.[23] However, a commonly agreed-upon definition that is

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[20] For a more detailed explanation of this topic and it effects on Lewis, see Matthew David Crawford, "C. S. Lewis's Concept of *Sehnsucht*: Philosophical Foundations, Aesthetic Analysis, and Implications for Evangelism and Apologetics" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

[21] In his allegorical novel *A Pilgrim's Regress*, Lewis describes this desire and some of the things that evoked it: "That unnamable something, desire for which pierces us like a rapier at the smell of a bonfire, the sound of wild ducks flying overhead, the title of *The Well at the World's End*, the opening lines of *Kubla Khan*, the morning cobwebs in late summer, or the noise of falling waves." C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 237.

[22] Most of these accounts can be found in Lewis's spiritual autobiography *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017).

[23] The term "natural theology" is more complicated; I prefer to avoid the term because of the clouded history that surrounds it. Stephen Spencer's article outlines objections to this term that illustrates its clouded nature. See Stephen R. Spencer, "Is Natural Theology Biblical?," *Grace Theological Journal* 9, no. 1 (1988): 59–72. R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley correctly argue that natural theology

biblically faithful could posit that general revelation is the process of organizing an understanding of what God has revealed in nature. Beauty is evident in common grace because God has given people the ability to create and enjoy beauty, and beauty is evident in general revelation because God has displayed profound beauty in creation. This display of beauty is part of what functions as a testimony to the existence and character of God. It is essential to recognize that neither the content nor the effect of general revelation is of any salvific use apart from special revelation.[24]

Many passages in Scripture provide a justification for general revelation and the framework through which we are to understand it. God reveals himself through creation at large and through man's nature. In some passages, God's revelation is evident in creation at large:

> The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them, he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. 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. (Ps 19:1–6)

In this psalm, the book of nature is held open, and beautiful artistic descriptions blossom forth, extolling the communicative power of nature by use of rich images and metaphors. Language itself seems strained as the psalmist seeks to impress upon his readers the universality and power of God's message in his creation. In other places, general revelation is described in more measured language: "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts,

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does not contradict divine revelation when it is defined precisely. They write, "Simply stated, natural theology refers to knowledge of God acquired through nature. Classically, natural theology does not stand in contradiction to divine revelation nor does it exclude such revelation. In fact, natural theology is dependent upon divine revelation for its content." R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 25.

[24] Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 3.

while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them" (Rom 2:14–15). Here, the apostle Paul speaks of God's law written in the inner nature of man—his heart. In many places and in many ways, God has woven his witnesses into reality around us (Pss 8:3–6; 19:1–4; 139:14; Acts 14:15–18; 17:22–31; Rom 1:8–21; 2:14–16). A Christian theology of nature allows believers to look into their heart and into creation to see biblical truth mirrored and confirmed there. In this way, general revelation confirms what Scripture teaches. It is clear that God is concerned with beauty in the text of the Bible, but the text of creation gives a technicolor display of how deep this concern goes. As a part of general revelation, beauty confirms at least two things: (1) that God, who loves beauty, made man in his own image and (2) that God created nature to awaken worship in his creatures.

That God loves beauty is an axiomatic truth that flows out of God's love for his own glory. The psalmist expresses this when he says, "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works" (Ps 193:31). God's love for beauty is also evident in that he made so much of it. As Francis Schaeffer affirms, "Come with me to the Alps and look at the snow-covered mountains. There can be no question. God is interested in beauty. God made people to be beautiful. And beauty has a place in the worship of God. Here in the temple Solomon built under God's leadership, beauty was given an important place."[25] God's love for beauty extends from the farthest reaches of the ever-expanding universe to the intricate details of the microscopic world that

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[25] Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 26. The statement "God made people to be beautiful" may be a difficult claim to accept for some people as it seems to suggest too much in emphasis on physical attractiveness. It is helpful to remember that the fall affects human display and perception of beauty. Even Martin Luther, who is not particularly well known for writing about aesthetics, observes that through the fall, humans have lost "a most beautiful enlightenment of reason and the will in agreement with the word and will of God, we have also lost the glory of our bodies, so that now it is a matter of the utmost disgrace to be seen naked, whereas at that time it was something most beautiful and the unique prerogative of the human race over all the other animals." Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, *Luther's Works*, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Hemult T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1958) 141, quoted in Mark C. Mattes, *Martin Luther's Theology of Beauty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 107.

surrounds us, and it seems to grow more complex with every advancement made in science's ability to observe it. Oxford professor and mathematician John Lennox writes, "In recent years science has been taking us on a journey, full not only of surprises but also of mystery. Cosmology on an unimaginably large scale, and elementary particle physics on the incredibly small scale, have gradually laid bare to us this spectacularly beautiful structure of the universe in which we live."[26] The presence of beauty in creation is ubiquitous.

The question emerges "Is there in man a desire for beauty that answers to or reflects God's desires?" Scripture answers this question affirmatively: "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple" (Ps 27:4; cf. 26:8; 84:1–2). The psalmist expresses the desire of millions who have wanted to see God's beauty and glory, but a cursory survey of the Psalms shows that this desire manifests not only in the temple but also in the full breadth of creation. Old Testament wisdom literature teems with references to nature. One may think of the natural images of the three best-known psalms (Pss 1; 8; 23): images of trees, rivers, and stars reflect a mind occupied with these features of nature.

Outside of Scripture, few have articulated this desire for the glory of God as clearly as C. S. Lewis, who writes,

> Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. . . . If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. . . . Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other,

[26] John C. Lennox, *God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* (Oxford: Lion, 2011), 59.

> never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage.[27]

Lewis describes this feeling often in his writing; he even gives it a name—as mentioned above. Many of his fictional characters express this feeling with great intensity. Perhaps none feels it as acutely as Professor Ransom, who while sitting quietly with Merlin smells a fragrance that reminds him (i.e., Ransom) of the unfallen planet Perelandra:

> Through the bare branches . . . a summer breeze was blowing into the room, but the breeze of such a summer as England never has. . . . Tears ran down Ransom's cheeks. He alone knew from what seas and what islands that breeze blew. Merlin did not; but in him also the inconsolable wound with which man is born waked and ached at this touching.[28]

Ransom's ache is a powerful depiction of the human desire for more than nature can offer. In what is perhaps his greatest essay, Lewis states in clear terms what the antidote to this ache is: "I find to my great surprise, looking back, that the connection is perfectly clear. Glory, as Christianity teaches me to hope for it, turns out to satisfy my original desire."[29] Lewis is one example of someone who wants to be reconciled to the beauty or glory for which we were made.[30] God's love for his glory is echoed in the internal experience of his fallen image-bearers, and that desire is a powerful tool that can aid the Christian teacher who learns how to awaken it often.

The second effect of beauty in general revelation is that it draws those who know God to worship God. This effect of general revelation is also seen in Psalm 8 and many other psalms. It seems to be somewhat like a spiritual reflex. Reflexes work well if the body is healthy and they have been conditioned to function optimally. So it is with

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[27] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 136–37.

[28] C. S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (New York: Scribner, 1945), 320.

[29] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2001), 39.

[30] Lewis alludes to this hope when he says, "We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in." Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 43.

hearts that respond in worship to God at the impulse of nature's beauty. John Calvin concurs:

> Yet, in the first place, wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness.[31]

Calvin is making some assumptions about the receptivity of his audience, but his sentiment is transparent. Only a sick soul will not be led by the beauty of general revelation to worship God.

Jonathan Edwards often speaks of how the beauty of God in Scripture overwhelms him and draws him to God.[32] However, Edwards is also frequently moved by nature to worship God. He sees worship as basic to the beauty of nature: "All the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation is but the reflection of the diffused beams of the Being who hath an infinite fullness of brightness and glory."[33] Even more robustly, he asserts,

> When we are delighted with flowery meadows and gentle breezes of wind, we may consider that we only see the emanations of the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ; when we behold the fragrant rose and lily, we see his love and purity. So the green trees and fields, and singing of birds, are the emanations of his infinite joy and benignity; the easiness and naturalness of trees and vines [are] shadows of his infinite beauty and loveliness; the crystal rivers and murmuring streams have the footsteps of his sweet grace and bounty. . . . That beauteous light with which the

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[31] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. and ed. John Owen, Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 70.

[32] Edwards records one notable example of this response in his memoirs:

> Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a being that was; and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapt up to God in Heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in Him . . . . I had an inward, sweet sense of these things, that at times came into my heart; and my soul was lead away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged, to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ; and the beauty and excellence of His person, and the lovely way of salvation, by free grace in Him. . . . The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden kindle up, as it were, a sweet burning in my heart; and ardour of soul, that I know not how to express. (Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, *WJE*, 16:793).

[33] Jonathan Edwards, "True Virtue," in *Ethical Writings*, *WJE*, 8:550–51.

> world is filled in a clear day is a lively shadow of his spotless holiness and happiness, and delight in communicating himself.[34]

Edwards's fixation on the theme of God's beauty and man's response of worship is a fitting way to close this section. God has given beauty as a gift of common grace, not for his children to squander it, making mud pies to throw at themselves. Instead, we are called to look at nature with believing eyes and then to help one another recognize nature as a gift filled with memetic and proleptic symbols that call us back to the story of redemption while filling our hearts with wonder.

Christian intellectual and apologist Alister McGrath offers the following thoughts on a poem by Gerald Manley Hopkins:

> [The] first two bold sentences of "God's Grandeur," are enough to demonstrate Hopkins' conviction that, in some way, God's glory is radiated through the natural order.
>
> The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
> It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.
>
> Even though nature is fallen, humanity can still discover God within it. Humanity may have brutalized nature . . . . but divine grandeur still radiates from its wreckage . . . . Hopkins can be said to re-enact the immanence of divine presence within nature through forging ways of "seeing" that nature in such a way that its divine significance may be appreciated. Nature may be "seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil," wearing "man's smudge." Yet, it has not lost its capacity to disclose the transcendent reality of God.[35]

This passage describes the task of the Christian high school teacher. A teacher must "forge ways of seeing." These ways of seeing will not—cannot—happen until students understand beauty as a gift that has a purpose. Beauty as an aspect of God's grandeur is not static in the Christian worldview; it is missional.

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[34] Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies no. 108," in *The "Miscellanies," a–500*, *WJE*, 13:279.

[35] McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 110. McGrath is reflecting on Gerard Manley Hopkins. McGrath does not cite the poem, but he does reference two other works: Terry Eagleton, "Nature and the Fall in Hopkins: A Reading of 'God's Grandeur'," *Essays in Criticism* 23 (1973): 68–75; Michael Lackey, "'God's Grandeur': Gerard Manley Hopkins' Reply to the Speculative Atheist," *Victorian Poetry* 39 (2001): 83–90.

Helping students understand this missional aspect of beauty is critical. Helping them know that when they hear, see, taste, feel, participate in beauty, they are experiencing a form of God's grace that is calling to them. The proper response does not stop simply with expressing gratitude—though students should express gratitude. Instead, the proper response involves pursuing God, who created that beauty. Here, Lewis's essay *The Weight of Glory* is again instructive. Students must be taught that the things in which they experience beauty are not the source of beauty. Lewis says, "The books and the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them and what came through them was longing."[36] These phenomena—music, food, companionship, scenery, art—are good images of what we desire, "but if they are mistaken as the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols."[37] Lewis describes that this longing or desire is powerful in both destructive and constructive ways. Its destructive power is necessary to break what Lewis calls "the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us." This enchantment is a result of secular education: "Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing the shy, persistent, inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth."[38] Rightly understanding beauty can help break this enchantment. Once it is broken, the human heart will feel each experience of beauty as a calling or reminder of something greater.

Students can be helped in their spiritual walk on an even more practical level if teachers equip them with a clear understanding of how beauty in common grace forms multiple strands in Christian apologetics. There are at least three distinct aspects of beauty's contribution to Christian apologetics: (1) the rational strand, (2) the affective

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[36] Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 30.

[37] Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 31.

[38] Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 31.

strand, and (3) the moral strand. The most immediate strand is the rational conclusion that the existence of beauty demands a source.[39] Plato ironically outlines this argument. Even though he fails to understand the true source of beauty, he understands the need for a source. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates rhetorically enquires. "He, then, who believes in beautiful things, but neither believes in Beauty itself nor is able to follow when someone tries to guide him to the knowledge of it—do you think that his life is a dream or a waking?"[40] Socrates anticipates the response that the person is dreaming or out of touch with reality. Augustine frequently uses this argument.[41] However, medieval theologian Peter Lombard (1096–1160) develops this argument in what Christian philosopher Peter Williams calls Lombard's cosmological aesthetic argument.[42] Lombard says the following of "the most exalted philosophers":

> Once they perceive the various degrees of beauty in mind and body, they realized there was something which produced these beautiful things, something in which beauty was ultimate [unsurpassed] and immutable, and therefore beyond compare. And they believed, with every right, that this was the source of all things, that source which itself was never made but is that by which all else was made.[43]

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[39] This argument has to do with beauty itself as an ontological reality. There is a separate line of argument that deals with beautiful artifacts such as painting and music. Francis Schaeffer deals with this argument in his book *Escape from Reason: A Penetrating Analysis of Trends in Modern Thought*, IVP Classics (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006). Schaeffer explains that naturalism lacks the intellectual capital to justify aesthetic claims. He demonstrates the connection between beautiful art and the Christian worldview while also demonstrating the dissonance and ugliness that results when a biblical worldview is jettisoned. Schaeffer is not alone in these claims. Contemporary Catholic theologian Hans Küng has also argued, "Art has now become the expression of man's estrangement, his isolation in the world, of the ultimate futility of human life and the history of humanity." Hans Küng, *Art and the Problem of Meaning* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 29.

[40] Plato, *The Republic* 476c, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 5, trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

[41] See, e.g., Augustine's reference to artists who use God's standard of beauty to evaluate aesthetic material even though they do not understand the true purpose of such material. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 10.34.53, trans. Vernon J. Bourke, Fathers of the Church 21 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 310, Logos Bible Software.

[42] Peter S. Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy: A Christian Introduction to the Love of Wisdom* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2013), 309.

[43] Peter Lombard, *The Sentences* 1.3.1, quoted in Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy*, 309.

Williams summarizes, "Arguments for God from beauty (aesthetic arguments) contribute a broad swath of natural theology that overlaps with several other types of theistic argument, especially design arguments and arguments from experience."[44] It is also important to present the negative side of this argument—that evolution and other naturalistic arguments cannot offer any satisfactory explanation for beauty.[45] These arguments take many forms and are advanced often, but I have never encountered a high school text that advances them.

The affective aspect of aesthetic apologetics finds its power in the beauty of the gospel. McGrath sees this strand of apologetics as distinct from a rational argument: "Beauty is something we appreciate immediately. When we see a beautiful scene, person, or work of art, we instantly know something is special about it. We do not need to be persuaded that something or someone is beautiful; something deep within us seems to tell us."[46] He explains further,

> Beauty bypasses rational analysis, appealing to something far deeper within us. . . . Sometimes the important thing is to allow the gospel to persuade people by itself. The merchant in the parable who recognized the beauty and value of the "pearl of great price" did not need to be persuaded of its true worth (Matt. 13:45–46). The pearl persuaded him by itself. We may help people to grasp the gospel's beauty, just as a jeweler might hold a diamond up to the light so its facets scintillate and its beauty can be appreciated. But the beauty is already there; the jeweler is simply showing it off to its best advantage.[47]

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[44] Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy*, 307.

[45] This is the major premise of William Elkins's doctoral thesis, where he concludes with the following:

> Through the cumulative case of each chapter in this dissertation, the presence of beauty can be understood as an important signature of God on his creation that points back to himself and his glory. The existence of beauty brings so much joy and richness to every area of life that the best and most intellectually satisfying explanation is that beauty is a gracious gift to humanity by a glorious and loving creator. In other words, God is the best explanation for the origin of beauty and the human ability to perceive it. (William Earl Elkins, "On the Origin of Beauty and the Human Ability to Perceive It" [PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017], 210)

[46] Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 113–14.

[47] McGrath, *Mere Apologetics*, 115.

This application of the parable is fanciful as the worth of the pearl is never said to be aesthetic, but the reality that the Christian message has a powerful aesthetic appeal is legitimate.

The third aspect of the apologetic force of a biblical understanding of beauty emerges from the beauty of morality. This is an aspect of beauty discussed at length by Edwards, who asserts, "I suppose, I shall not depart from the common opinion when I say that virtue is the beauty of the qualities and exercises of the heart, or those actions which proceed from them."[48] Edwards goes on to develop at length that the beauty of virtue appeals to people and gives them a sense of delight: "By this it appears that just affections and acts have a beauty in them distinct from, and superior to, the uniformity and equality there is in them: for which, he that has a truly virtuous temper, relishes and delights in them."[49] Edwards carefully identifies a distinction between the spiritual beauty that is sensible to those who are regenerate and the lesser beauties that are sensible to all people. He also argues intently that true and spiritual beauty is understood only by God's unique work in the redeemed heart, but he concedes,

> Therefore, if this be all that is meant by them who affirm, virtue is founded in sentiment and not in reason, that they who see the beauty there is in true virtue, don't perceive it by argumentation on its connections and consequences, but by the frame of their own minds, or a certain spiritual sense given them of God, whereby they immediately perceive pleasure in the presence of the idea of true virtue in their minds, or are directly gratified in the view or contemplation of this object, this is certainly true.[50]

Edwards thus lays a foundation for the beauty of virtue or morality to serve as a catalyst for an unregenerate person to see the truthfulness of the Christian message in the beauty of Christian morality.

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[48] Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, *WJE*, 8:539.

[49] Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, *WJE*, 8:572.

[50] Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, *WJE*, 8:619–20.

This morality is primarily visible when Christian communities are living it out in unison. Edwards speaks of the beauty of morality as resembling the beauty of pillars that can be seen in a single pillar but magnified by the aesthetic placement of multiple pillars in relation to one another.[51] Joseph Wooddell, in his book on beauty and apologetics, helpfully summarizes Edwards's observations:

> [In] Edwards's understanding of true virtue as spiritual beauty, the unbeliever, might be drawn by God via beauty to a place where he is positioned to receive and accept the gospel—a place often understood as arrived at primarily through logic, reason, argumentation, evidence, and the like. The crucial element, of course, for this method is that the believer or the believing community is, in fact, living a beautiful life—an element, unfortunately, which all too often is either absent, so minimal as to be unhelpful, or so outweighed by ugly counter elements as to be unnoticeable.[52]

This application weaves the conscience as a voice in general revelation into a biblical understanding of beauty. The conscience's sensing and being drawn to the beauty of virtue as described in the Bible and demonstrated in Christian community can be a powerful ally in Christian formation. Scripture is clear that God draws people to himself and that God keeps those he has drawn by sanctifying and strengthening them. But just as God uses reason, facts, and experiences to accomplish those ends, so also can he use beauty. This discussion of the apologetic nature of beauty has led into some of the territory that the next section discusses—the antiphonal response to creation's proclamation of the moral dimension of beauty.

## Beauty's Moral Dimensions

A fourth aspect of beauty that is often missing in modern high school students' worldview is beauty's relationship to morality. This absence is the outgrowth of a more

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[51] Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, *WJE*, 8:569.

[52] Joseph D. Wooddell, *The Beauty of the Faith: Using Aesthetics for Christian Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 86.

widespread cultural malady. Aesthetics scholar Frank Brown explains that taste has long been perceived as irrelevant and unconnected to religion and morality:

> Whereas Christians are more or less accustomed to debating issues of morality and theology, and are often unapologetic about doing so, they usually find it embarrassing to be seriously worried—as many are—about such "trivial" things as taste and aesthetics. The Bible does not say much about these matters; and the people who care most about taste, and who therefore may be outspoken in their views, often strike others as aesthetes and elitists—as uncharitable in spirit and far removed from the poor and socially marginal folk beloved by Jesus.[53]

While Brown's observations are almost twenty years old, I fear the situation has only become worse. He explains that some people resent discussing the relationship between taste and morality because they think taste is always connected to elitism, and therefore if taste is linked to morality, then morality is also being determined by an elitist class.[54] Some people reject the moral aspect of aesthetics because they see it as an elitist view that threatens personal moral autonomy. However, the connection between aesthetics and morality is complicated and varied. Even as some reject the connection between beauty and morality, four contradictory trends in Western culture demonstrate the connection between aesthetics and morality: (1) the degree of transcendence that art is often given, (2) the way aesthetics often serves materialism, (3) the self-absorbed impulses that lie behind so much modern aesthetic theory and practice today, and (4) the vengeance with which modern aesthetics has assaulted human embodiment.

**Aesthetics and Transcendence**

It seems odd to claim that a secular age is erecting idols, but this aesthetic idolatry is subtle. Its devotees do not realize the religious nature of their commitment. Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his book *Art in Action*, describes Western culture's commitment to transcendence as art:

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[53] Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

[54] Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste*, 9.

> Thus works of art became surrogate gods, taking the place of God the creator; aesthetic contemplation takes the place of religious adoration; an artist becomes one who, in agony of creation brings forth objects in absorbed contemplation of which we experience what is of ultimate significance in human life. The artist becomes the maker of the gods, we their worshippers. When the secular religions of political revolution and of technological aggrandizement fail their devotees, when they threaten to devour them, then over and over the cultural elite among modern secular Western men turn to the religion of aestheticism.[55]

This devotion is not new, and its persistence highlights the potent connection between aesthetic taste and morality. These are at least three ways that the relationship between aesthetics and morality manifests. First, idolatry is immoral, so any aesthetic element that is treated as a god has moral significance. Second, people often treat aesthetic artifacts with religious significance, showing that people inherently draw connections between aesthetic and religious expressions. Third, aesthetics often lends a patina of credibility to immoral ideas and actions such as idolatry. This aesthetic application does not make aesthetic a moral issue but clarifies that a person's ability to discern between legitimate and illegitimate uses of aesthetics may help him or her avoid various forms of immorality. These observations entwine aesthetic sensibilities into moral considerations. Art does not make a good god, though, especially in a pragmatic culture. Today, art is more often used as a means to prop up another idol—materialism.

**Aesthetics and Materialism**

The most commonly seen aesthetic expression in an advanced modern culture is an advertisement. This art form fills the coffers and temples of the gods of money and power while reshaping a culture's vision of a good life. All advertising is not bad, and the fact that aesthetics is used to advance financial gain does not prove a moral component to aesthetics, but this connection does prove that careful attention to modern aesthetics has moral implications and can shape moral priorities. The need for this careful attention was more transparent when the centers of aesthetic engagement had concrete religious and

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[55] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 50.

moral significance. At an earlier time, the most advance aesthetic centers were churches or temples; now, they are commerce and entertainment centers. Wolterstorff describes this switch in the West from the church to the mercantile:

> The marketplace has replaced the church as artistic unifier. The advertising art, the background art, the display part of our commercial billboards, presented to us on radio, on television, in the newspapers, on billboards, through loudspeakers, is what today constitutes the art of our tribe as a whole. Where once the spire of a cathedral or the steeple of the church gave the first glimpse of a city or village, today it is the Sears and Hancock buildings.[56]

This displacement of the church and enthronement of the marketplace has not ended well for the arts or the high schooler's understanding of beauty. This new view is necessarily limiting because only a limited selection of artistic forms can satisfy the market's demands. The order of the day is for more and bigger ersatz explosions and airbrushed appendages.

Amid this expensive noise, it becomes difficult for Christians of any age to hear and value the forms of communication and the quieter beauty through which God normally speaks. In Baptist theologian and C. S. Lewis scholar Louis Markos's updated version of Screwtape's Toast, the archdemon Screwtape explains to his fellow tempters with hellish joy how effective the invention of the secular music video has been: "Wait till you see what happens when the music is wedded to a kaleidoscope of violent and sexual images that flash on the retina at dizzying speed! Let the Enemy try his best; I defy him to work his redemptive magic on these wonderful products of the infernal imagination."[57] Markos understands the spell that this highly commercialized and strident form of aesthetics can cast on the soul. Jean Fleming observes, "We live in a noisy, busy world. Silence and solitude are not twentieth-century words . . . . [O]ur age [is one] of

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[56] Wolterstorff, *Art in Action*, 32.

[57] Louis Markos, *Restoring Beauty: The Good, the True, and the Beautiful in the Writings of C. S. Lewis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 190–91.

television, video arcades, and joggers wired with earphones. We have become a people with an aversion to quiet and an uneasiness with being alone."[58] This noise includes the noise of modern aesthetics. Few people appreciate quieter aesthetic forms. Also, it is these noisier forms that sell. So, in a market-driven aesthetic climate, the noise is dominant.

The most common aesthetic experience for present-day teenagers is music that they often experience in mind-numbing forms. Voicing a corrective to this reality, spirituality professor Don Whitney observes, "One of the costs of technological advancement is a greater temptation to avoid quietness. While we have broadened our intake of news and information of all kinds, these advantages may come at the expense of our spiritual depth if we do not practice silence and solitude."[59] While news and information are certainly distractors, it is more likely the commercialized aesthetic of music and film that will keep Christian high school students from deep engagement in the presence of God. A more comprehensive range of art and a more varied sense of beauty has endured among rarified connoisseurs and eccentric art departments, but these reservations are far removed from the masses they claim to represent. However, these sequestered groups holding to art and beauty as valuable apart from pragmatism have often accepted a narcissistic view of art for its own sake.

### Aesthetics and Narcissism

The ancient gods of pagan Greece damned Narcissus for admiring his own image. Even the pagans recognized that admiring one's own expression and slighting the beauty in the surrounding world reflected a grave moral failure. However, forms of self-obsession have infiltrated and distorted modern aesthetics. Art has become so intently

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[58] Jean Fleming, *Finding Focus in a Whirlwind World* (Dallas: Roper Press, 1991), 73.

[59] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 194.

personal that it is treated as if it were above criticism. Authenticity has become the most important feature of art. Brown summarizes that art is now determined "by norms of self-expression" or "daring formal innovation."[60] This approach to art makes it hard for people to accept that private and personal beauty could have broad moral implications.[61] However, the artist producing aesthetic works by reaching into himself suggests a narcissistic view of aesthetics with clear moral implications. On this point, Christian education must be adamant—beauty, aesthetics, and art are not primarily about self-expression. Students should take joy in creating beautiful works, but the focus of the joy should be on the artist's place as a sub-creator and the work as an offering for the good of others and the glory of God, not the artist's self-expression.

**Aesthetics and Human Embodiment**

The narcissistic view of beauty that only thinks of beauty as self-expression is particularly dangerous when combined with a low view of the human body. In this combination of errors, the body becomes a canvas wherein a person expresses his or her individualism. This mania for self-expression manifests in the cosmetic industry and the vast array of body-altering activities, from tattoos and piercings to sex-change surgeries. People go to immense lengths to alter their bodies, striving to assert a uniqueness or alteration that stamps them with an identity that they have chosen for themselves. In embracing permanent changes to their physical appearance, people reject various parts of the physical identity God gave them as male or female members of a particular family or people group. In some cases, they are rejecting their identification with the human race.

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[60] Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste*, 23.

[61] In the interest of clarity, I should acknowledge that Wolterstorff would not agree that art has this connection to beauty. Wolterstorff did not think that art has much to do with beauty. For him, beauty was too difficult, too vague. Russell Maatman, in a review of *Art in Action*, comments, "Modern aesthetics has for some time now done its work without reference to that notoriously unstable element." Russell Maatman, "*Rainbows for the Fallen World* and *Art in Action* (Book Review)," *Pro Rege* 11, no. 2 (1982): 26.

This low view of the human body is a pervasive problem in modern society.[62] Unfortunately, evangelical Christians have not offered a consistent corrective to this trend.[63] One of the tragic consequences of the low view of the body is a superficial view of human physical beauty. A biblical view of human physical beauty is wholistic as it sees the human body located in a larger context of circumstance and purpose. A biblical understanding of beauty can recognize beauty in all kinds of human experience because it sees life through the lenses of man's fallen nature and the promise of redemption. Secular views of human beauty are only able to see beauty in some stages of life. This narrow view of human beauty is what Beth Felker Jones describes as a cult around the young human body:

> It is common to think of our culture as one that worships bodies, and, to some extent, this is probably a right characterization. Yet at a deeper level, we live in a profoundly anti-body culture. The cult around the young body, the veneration of the airbrushed, media-produced body, conceals a thinly veiled hatred of real bodies-bodies that leak and bleed, wrinkle, smell, grow old, and, finally, die. Cultural practice expresses aversion to the body or denies the body's mortality. The beauty industry commands billions of dollars meant to keep the body looking young. People submit to the surgeon's knife, buying liposuction or silicone breasts. Teenagers self-mutilate. Punishing exercise coexists with patterns of eating that poison the body.[64]

In sharp contrast, a biblical view of beauty sees beauty in every person at every stage of life, particularly if the person is being made whole in Christ. It is an already-not-yet kind of beauty as it can be seen in part but is not fully seen: beauty *already* because God's design was not completely wiped out by the fall, and beauty *not yet full* because

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[62] Christian scholar an apologist Nancy Pearcey writes about this disregard for the body, saying, "We tend to think sexual hedonism places too much value on the purely physical dimension. But in reality, it places a meager value on the body, draining it of moral and personal significance." Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 28.

[63] In his article on human embodiment, theology professor Gregg Allison writes, "It is my contention that evangelicals at best express an ambivalence toward the human body, and at worst manifest a disregard or contempt for it." Gregg R. Allison, "Toward a Theology of Human Embodiment," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 4.

[64] Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4–5.

redemption is not complete. Consequently, there is beauty in the wrinkled praying hands of Albrecht Dürer's famous drawing because those hands are doing what hands should do. It is a whole-person beauty and an any-person beauty because it considers the entire picture of the human experience.

The moral value of the biblical view of human physical beauty is striking in the physical descriptions of beauty in Song of Solomon, which depicts beauty such that the whole person and the context are in view. In his thesis on human embodiment, Craig Marshall explains, "Scripture presents beauty to us in a holistic way. Biblical beauty is expansive. It is whole-bodied. One of the most striking aspects of the Song of Songs is that for all the loving and sexual delight of the lovers, their appreciation for each other is a whole-bodied appreciation."[65] Beauty is located in bigger purpose, and it is not tied to a narrow expectation. Modern depictions of physical beauty are often limited and narrow. One of the most strident examples of how a low view of the human body has distorted beauty in an immoral fashion is the fractured, limited, and diminishing nature of pornography. Marshall describes this view of the body:

> [In this unbiblical perspective] someone is beautiful when their appearance conforms to a limited, time-bound, culturally shaped standard of what is considered desirable. We could call this "snapshot beauty." Pornography works within this limited beauty and reduces it even further. While promising an expansive exposure to beauty through a proliferation of images, it actually reduces what is attractive even further. It reduces our concept of physical beauty to sexualized appearance.[66]

This reduction is devastating. Nancy Pearcey comments, "Pornography tears apart what is meant to be integrated, treating the body as an object or instrument for one's own purposes."[67] This narrow, commodified, and corrupt view of human beauty is a form of depravity that must be resisted by a better understanding of beauty.

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[65] Craig A. Marshall, "Seeing and Seeking Embodied Beauty" (DMin thesis, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2020), 270.

[66] Marshall, "Seeing and Seeking Embodied Beauty," 264.

[67] Pearcey, *Love Thy Body*, 125.

When beauty is seen in the bigger picture of redemption, everyday scenes of ordinary people echo the beauty of creation and foreshadow the beauty of future glory. As Marshal again clarifies,

> When we open our eyes to the fittingness of how our bodies function within God's creation, bodily beauty is found even in the most common activities. We can delight in the sight of sweat from hard work or exercise, the sight of a face creased in joyful laughter, or the sweetness of a child trustingly sitting in a grandmother's lap. This is part of what the Teacher is describing in Ecclesiastes 5:18, when he says that what is "good and fitting (beautiful) is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot."[68]

The beauty of the Bible is a robust beauty that seeks to confer beauty upon others.[69] This beauty that recognizes the beauty of human bodies as part of God's design in every era and dimension of life needs to be taught to high school students who are constantly being told a different narrative about human beauty.

**Beauty and Moral Formation**

These understandings of beauty show how modern approaches to aesthetics highlight the moral implications of beauty. High school students see and hear various forms of these approaches on a routine basis. They see beauty arbitrarily held up as valuable, subjugated in crass advertising, and confused with the individual preferences of an artist. These approaches to beauty undermine the biblical description of beauty. The manifestations of aesthetic taste around people shape them. Those elements, especially those that individuals choose to be influenced by, make up the daily liturgy of life and form a silent catechesis that shapes people even when they are oblivious to this formative influence.[70] John De Gruchy, a South African theologian who writes about the

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[68] Marshall, "Seeing and Seeking Embodied Beauty," 274.

[69] In contrast to modern views of beauty that primarily exclude people from an ever-narrowing pool of those who are considered beautiful, God seeks to make the ugly beautiful (Isa 61:2–3).

[70] James Smith defends the notion that everyday actions and environments need careful attention in the area of spiritual formation. See James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship,*

transformative power of art, observes, "The fact is, artists do not simply mirror reality: they construct reality, and they do so from a particular point of view."[71] There is no ambiguity here; both artistic taste and artistic expression involve morality—they can be holy, and they can be sinful.

### Biblical and Historical Support

This concept is not novel. David Vanbrugge develops the truth that "through periods of church history, beauty was primarily a theological and ethical concept."[72] Those periods were more sensitive to Scripture on this topic than the current one is. The moral dimension of beauty is also well established in Scripture. Merely recognizing that beauty culminates in the glory of God implies that there is a connection between the moral perfection of God and beauty. This implication is strengthened because when things turn away from God and his glory, they become ugly.[73] In the view of many through church history the devil was originally beautiful.[74] This view was bolstered by a controversial reading of Isaiah 14:12–17 and Ezekiel 28:13–19.[75] In this view Ezekiel

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*Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, *Cultural Liturgies*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016).

[71] John W. De Gruchy, *Christianity, Art, and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 237.

[72] David Vanbrugge, "The Full Brightness and Diffused Beams of Glory: Jonathan Edwards's Concept of Beauty and Its Relevance for Apologetics," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 6, no. 1 (2014): 124.

[73] Duane Lindsey authored two essays on the topic of the beauty of God and the ugliness of Satan. See F. Duane Lindsey, "Essays toward a Theology of Beauty Part I: God Is Beautiful," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (1974): 120–36; Lindsey, "Essays toward a Theology of Beauty Part II: Satan Is Ugly," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 131 (1974): 209–27.

[74] While the view is by no means unanimous, Lamar Eugene Cooper confirms that many of the church fathers viewed this passage as "an account of the fall of Satan not given in Scripture but alluded to elsewhere, especially in Isa 14:12–17. Ezekiel would have been relying on his listeners/readers' familiarity with such an account, and they would have understood the comparison between the fall of Satan and the fall of the king of Tyre." Even in the light of modern analysis, Cooper says that this view is the most compelling interpretation. Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, New American Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 265.

[75] The controversy is not one that will be easily solved. Ralph Ellison speaking of the Ezekiel passage observes "This is one of the more difficult passages in the Book of Ezekiel—if not in the whole Bible! The reason for the difficulty lies mainly in the lack of sufficient data to reach precise conclusions. Ralph H. Ellison, "Ezekiel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations,*

describes Satan's appearance in his unfallen state as "perfect in beauty" (Ezek 28:13–19). Once he fell, he lost this beauty. He can only seem to be an "angel of light" when he disguises himself (2 Cor 11:14). When humans sinned, they also fell from the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Paul says that as Christians are progressively sanctified, they are changing from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). While these verses do not refer to physical beauty, the glory here is not less than physical beauty—it is more.

Much of the imagery of Scripture also supports the assertion that beauty has a moral component. Throughout Scripture, light, beauty, and purity are associated with one another, while darkness and impurity are associated.[76] There are exceptions in a fallen world, such as the clouds on Mount Sinai (Deut 4:11; 5:12), but the connections between beauty, light, and purity are extensive. Some examples can be seen in the descriptions of the tabernacle (Exod 26:1–14), the temple (1 Kgs 6:1–9:9; Ps 96:6), the chariot of fire (2 Kgs 2:11–12), God's throne room (Isa 6:1–6), God's throne chariot (Ezek 1:4–28), the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:2), the road to Damascus (Acts 9:2–4), the glorious raiment of the redeemed (Rev 7:14; 19:14), and the new Jerusalem (Rev 22:5). The light of glory represents both aesthetic excellence and moral purity. The bride in Song of Solomon is praised for her beauty (Song 1:5, 8, 15), but underneath her physical beauty shines the more splendid beauty of her moral purity (4:12; 6:3; 7:10; 8:12). The objection may be raised that these images are culturally construed or that it is overly fiduciary to

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*Ezekiel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 882.

[76] Judith A. Odor outlines the presence of this dualism throughout Scripture: "Light and darkness together describe the opposite ends of a good-evil dualism that pervades biblical symbolic language." Judith A. Odor, "Light and Darkness," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Bible Software. The contrast is seen particularly clearly in the four New Testament books written by John. Roy Zuck observes, "One of the primary contrasts in the Johannine literature is between light and darkness. This imagery is found extensively in the Gospel of John and is repeated in 1 John . . . . John's thought is biblical and eschatological; in the Old Testament a parallel can be found to every Johannine use of 'light' (*phōs*)." Roy B. Zuck, *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 203.

claim that biblical imagery is normative; however, such imagery is the product of divine inspiration, and faith is fundamental to proper interpretation.[77]

Augustine of Hippo expresses another proof of the connection between morality and beauty. In short, Augustine believes that everything he does grows out of his affections. For this reason, he has to be sure that his affections are "ordered"—that his love for each object is properly proportionate to that thing's position in God's value system. This issue of fittingness is transparently involved here. A love that is out of order—an inordinate affection—is both ugly and sinful. The connection between beauty and morality is solidified even further in Augustine's thought because he also believes that the love that lay at the source of every action is awakened by beauty: "Do we love anything but the beautiful? What, then, is the beautiful? And what is beauty? What is it that attracts us and draws us to things which we love? For, unless grace and beauty of form were in them, they certainly would not draw us to themselves."[78] If love is the root of all actions, and beauty is the root of all love, then a person's taste in beauty will determine if that person is moral or immoral. To the extent that Augustine is correct, the connection between aesthetic taste and virtue is lockstep:

> He lives in justice and sanctity who is an unprejudiced assessor of the intrinsic value of things. He is a man who has an ordinate love: he neither loves what should not be loved nor fails to love what should be of; he neither loves more what should be loved less loves equally what should be loved less or more, nor loves less or more what should be loved equally.[79]

Augustine cannot be more explicit: a person with disordered tastes or loves—aesthetic or otherwise—lacks beauty and virtue.

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[77] James Hamilton makes this argument in *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 45–46n51, where he refers to the following: Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford, 2000); Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 167.

[78] Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.13.20 (Bourke, 90–91).

[79] Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.27, ed. D. W Robertson (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 22.

The moral implications of a person's understanding of aesthetics are most apparent when considering what a person finds beautiful. Christians easily fall into the sin of finding ugly things beautiful or the sin of finding beautiful things plain. The former sin occurs when a Christian is too easily pleased.[80] The latter sin occurs when a person does not find God and his service pleasing. These disordered loves are tragic. Don Whitney elaborates concerning Nehemiah 2:2, "You don't mope or sulk when you serve a king. Not only does it give the appearance that you don't want to serve the king, but it is a statement of dissatisfaction with the way he's running things."[81] Such sadness could have cost Nehemiah his life and will cost the Christian his or her testimony.[82] Christian high school students need to be taught to understand that some emotional responses to aesthetic material should be avoided. It is critical for their discipleship that they understand that there are both correct and incorrect emotional responses to aesthetic material. Recently, a young lady in one of my classes observed, "I just don't think we are complete if we do not explore all our emotions." Students need to hear that some emotions are morally wrong and that Christian sanctification involves emotional conformity to Christ. Biblical aesthetics provide a robust platform for correction on this front.

Another intersection of beauty and morality occurs in the more relativistic area of aesthetic preferences. In this area of preference, aesthetic choices are not objective, and consequently, if a person lived in total isolation, he or she would have almost limitless freedom in this area. If a person is alone on an island, the volume at which he or

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[80] Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, 26. Lewis captures well this disease of the heart. "It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

[81] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 119.

[82] Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, New American Commentary, vol. 10 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 175.

she played music and his or her preferred flavor of ice cream would probably have no moral implication. However, because we are rarely ever alone, aesthetic preferences take on a moral significance—whether the question is what flavor of ice cream we buy for supper, what color cushions we buy for the pews, or what kind of movie we watch. Even if all other aspects of these decisions are morally acceptable, they become moral questions because they involve other people. The Christian must train his or her aesthetic tastes so that those tastes and the rigidity with which those tastes are held to conform with Christian virtue. Christian love for other people demands that a person surrenders his or her preferences and conforms to the preferences of others. For example, if a man is going to love his wife well, then he might need to learn to share her aesthetic preferences. Merely tolerating her preferences is not the outermost reach of self-sacrificial love.[83] This scenario illustrates the significant effect that different preferences have on relational intimacy, and, hopefully, such an example can help students understand the far more severe effect that rejecting God's view of beauty will have on a believer's intimacy with God.[84]

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[83] Peter's command that husbands live consciously with their wives suggests the moral importance of this deference. The following phrase ("showing honor to the woman) demands that husbands are to highly esteem their wives' preferences or else risk their relationship with God ("so that your prayers may not be hindered"; 1 Pet 3:7). Grudem notes that this command "affirms a theme found frequently in the New Testament, namely, that God is often pleased to give honour to those who are weaker or less honoured in the eyes of the world (cf. Matt. 5:3–12; 1 Cor. 1:26–30; 12:22–25; Jas 2:5; 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5)." Grudem also confirms, "In this case such honour ought to include . . . high priority in choices regarding the use of one's time and money." Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 151.

[84] Hans Urs von Balthasar dogmatically asserts the inseparable link between beauty and the two other classical transcendentals that are more often associated with spirituality or godliness—truth and goodness. Balthasar writes that those who reject beauty will suffer the loss of her "two sisters Goodness and Truth." He continues, "We can be sure that whoever sneers at her name [Beauty] as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past—whether he admits it or not—can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love." Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Kenneth Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 18.

Hans Urs von Balthasar is powerfully correct in his observation that the defense of beauty requires courage.[85] Classical philosophers understood a link between that which is morally good, propositionally true, and aesthetically pleasing. These philosophers often excessively elevated these "transcendentals," and they did not understand either the nature of these elements or the reason they related so well to one another.[86] These writers were correct that there is a relationship between these three and that one cannot be abandoned, shackled, or deformed without a ripple effect pathology emerging in the others. This connectedness is important to the issues of aesthetic taste. McGrath observes that the reverse is also true; when beauty is given its proper place, truth and goodness can thrive: "When we behold the beautiful, we learn to be attentive to the world; and when we are attentive to the world, we notice injustice. . . . This leads to the recognition of a link between beauty and justice—and thus naturally leads us to consider the place of goodness in a natural theology."[87] Truth, beauty, and goodness are inviolably connected. Balthasar is eloquent on this point: "In a world without beauty . . . , the good also loses its attractiveness . . . . In a world that no longer has enough confidence in itself to affirm the beautiful, the proofs of the truth have lost their cogency."[88] Balthasar's words express the purpose of this chapter. Beauty is not a thing to be valued for its own sake (that would be idolatry); instead, beauty is important

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[85] Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 18.

[86] Stephen Garrett helpfully summarizes some of these errors that Balthasar corrects:

> Christ, for Balthasar, is the one who integrates and unveils the true, the good, and the beautiful so that he can communicate to us God's life of love found within the eternal processions of the Godhead. God's giving of himself, then, becomes the focal point of the divine being since his self-showing and self-saying culminate in his self-giving. On this basis, Balthasar asserts, "Being itself here unveils its final countenance, which for us receives the name of trinitarian love; only with this final mystery does light fall at last on that other mystery: Why there is Being at all and why it enters our horizon as light and truth and goodness and beauty." (Stephen M. Garrett, "The Dazzling Darkness of God's Triune Love: Introducing Evangelicals to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar," *Themelios* 35, no. 3 [2010]: 423)

[87] McGrath, *The Open Secret*, 300.

[88] Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 19.

because it is an aspect of the glory of God that points and steers the hearts of God's people back to God.

## Conclusion

In the early stages of the Battle of the Bulge (1944), a high-ranking German commando, Otto Skorzeny, was sent on a special covert mission to hinder the Allied forces' advance by taking control of a series of critical bridges. The German high command determined to enhance the effectiveness of this mission by employing a series of deceptive measures. With a small detachment of English-speaking soldiers disguised in American uniforms, Skorzeny switched road signs across the Belgium countryside as part of "Operation Greif." The tactic of relabeling the roads had tragic effects on Allied soldiers, who were directed unsuspectingly into minefields and other hazards.[89] Some lost hours and wasted supplies as they hopelessly wandered the mislabeled road. Christian high school students today face a similarly deceptive campaign. The enemy of their souls has taken a gift that God designed as a powerful tool to point believers to the goodness of God and has repurposed God's matériel and relabeled pathways in order to serve his (i.e., Satan's) own diabolical ends.

This chapter has covered four significant changes: (1) Where God has revealed beauty as an objective reality, the enemy has placed the label "weak, malleable, preferences." (2) Over the God-centered purpose of beauty, Christian young people see the placard "something you might like, but God does not care about." (3) Where God has left the deep imprint of his being and a solid witness to his existence, the enemy has painted in the dullest color he could find "product of evolutionary processes." (4) Over beauty's powerful tribute to holiness and wholeness, the devil has scrawled "do as you like; nothing matters." When these lies are exposed and the paths are correctly relabeled,

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[89] Stuart Smith, *Otto Skorzeny: The Devil's Disciple* (Oxford: Osprey, 2018), 169.

Christian high school students can see beauty for all that God has made it to be; many helpful pathways to spiritual formation are opened for use—labeled clearly—so that students can safely walk in them.

# CHAPTER 5

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH BEAUTY IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

Every high school course should focus on beauty as much as it focuses on truth and goodness because beauty is a God-given means of attracting the students to all that is true and good. This claim flows from a theological understanding of beauty, human nature, and the purpose of education. While students are fallen creatures, beauty is an objective reality that finds its origin in God and manifests through both special and general revelation in a manner that significantly advances the true purpose of Christian education—conformity to Christ.[1] It is not hyperbole when Michael Haykin says, "Christianity is Christ, and being a Christian is first and foremost being ravished by His beauty and living for His glory."[2] Every classroom, in order to accomplish this purpose, should center on the nature of God in his supreme beauty. This chapter offers practical trajectories which cultivate a focus on beauty that advances spiritual formation as the true goal of Christian education.[3]

### Leveling Expectations

For this focus on beauty to be profitable, it must rest on the foundation of proper expectations. Recognizing the challenges that impede beauty and tempering what

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[1] George R. Knight, *Philosophy & Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 213.

[2] Michael Haykin, endorsement of *The Beauty and Glory of Christ*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), https://www.logos.com/product/48961/the-beauty-and-glory-of-christ.

[3] It is critical to remember that "there does not exist anything approaching a 'technology of spiritual formation.' Formation remains a messy and imprecise business, where character, wisdom, and faith play a far greater role than theories and techniques." James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 17.

we expect beauty to accomplish are part of implementing beauty properly in a classroom. This section surveys four areas where expectations must be restrained.

### Expect Resistance

The most evident obstacle that many teachers will encounter when they introduce a lesson on the beauty of God is the yawn of student indifference. Many students' aesthetic tastes have atrophied. For many reasons, students are often indifferent or suspicious of beauty. They do not expect any substance or value from beauty. C. S. Lewis observed several decades ago that many students "need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity."[4] This indifference is, in part, a result of a critical attitude that Christians adopted in previous generations.[5] In 1976, Richard Lovelace warned, "This [censoriousness towards unfamiliar aesthetic forms] is the most serious factor limiting artistic creativity among Evangelicals today. The moral discriminator of the Evangelical community is so ill-tuned that it reacts against . . . nearly any creative expression which depicts life as freely as the Bible does."[6] Present-day teachers will not quickly overcome this indifference or the critical approaches that caused it.

### Renounce Perfectionism

A second challenge to properly using beauty in a classroom is the danger of perfectionism. Perfect beauty, like what Platonism idealizes, is not a Christian objective in a fallen world. Sin has banished the perfection of Eden, and Christian teachers must

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[4] C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man, or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 14.

[5] Art historian and professor Karen L. Mulder accuses both Francis Schaeffer and Hans Rookmaaker of this kind of criticism. Karen L. Mulder, "Balancing Binaries: Teaching Appreciation in the Visual Arts," in *Teaching Beauty: A Vision for Music and Art in Christian Education*, ed. G. Tyler Fischer and Ned Bustard (Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2016), 105.

[6] Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 346.

accept beauty in a fallen world as a work in progress.[7] It is impossible to have what Albert M. Wolters calls "repristination" of the world; instead, "we must choose restoration."[8] Teachers should be open to using imperfect examples and sources of beauty to teach about beauty. John Walford explains, "A broken beauty is not only true to the human condition, but it can embody the essence of the gospel of redemption, or, at very least, manifest its fruits . . . . a broken beauty can be a redemptive beauty, which acknowledges suffering while preserving hope."[9] Teachers must accept beauty in broken forms as a means by which God works.[10]

**Maintain Humility**

Another reality that teachers and students must avoid is an overly strident approach to beauty. Human artists are not creators in the sense that God is Creator. Hebrew scholar Karl-Heinz Bernhardt is helpful on this point, "As a special theological

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[7] Jeremy Begbie, theologian and artist at Duke University, helpfully writes on this point, "The most fruitful model of beauty for the artist will be found not by attempting to distill some formal principle from the contingent processes of the created world, but by directing our attention first of all to the redeeming economy of God which culminates in Jesus Christ." Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 225.

[8] Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 77.

[9] E. John Walford, "The Case for a Broken Beauty: An Art Historical Viewpoint," in *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts*, ed. Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 109.

[10] This recognition will have a number of effects. First, it will make room for amateur artistic expression. Making art a professional enterprise has robbed the world of much great art and has robbed many people of a depth that they could gain from even brief and halting attempts at artistic expression. This is a theme that runs through the writings of philosopher and aesthetics scholar Calvin Seervield. He insists on the value of amateur artistic endeavors. Seervield offers many practical reasons for endorsing amateur efforts, but the most important is that it recognizes the human condition. If Christian education insists on perfection, it will end up killing the artistic enterprise in most students. Second, recognizing the effects of sin will dissolve the illusion of artistic inspiration. Most good art is not the result of a moment of inspiration, and when teachers encourage students to aspire to such inspiration, they denigrate the virtue of consistent artistic effort. Seervield laments the damage wrought by false ideas about how beauty is produced, saying, "I spell creativity 'd-i-s-c-i-p-l-i-n-e,' discipline. I believe 'inspiration' is a hoax, and artists who accept the Western Romantic tradition of needing to be 'inspired' and 'creative' have bought into a bankrupt bank and really handicapped themselves in the performance of their task because it inflates and isolates yourself as artist." Calvin Seervield, "Creativity," AllofLifeRedeemed, accessed May 1, 2021, https://www.allofliferedeemed.co.uk/Creativity.pdf. A humble realization of out human condition is necessary.

term, *bara* [the Hebrew word for "create" in Genesis and many other places] is used to express clearly the incomparability of the creative work of God in contrast to all secondary products and likenesses made from already existing material by man."[11] All human creation is sub-creation. In addition, a school's resources are limited, and any attempt to pursue beauty at the expense of more important things would be perverse.

A final observation on this point is that teachers and administrators must not see themselves as experts in beauty who mediate God's beauty to their students. Instead, they are fellow admirers of beauty who seek to share with students the beauty that has captured their hearts. Teachers and students should face the same direction in mutual admiration.

### Embrace the Tangential

It may be a natural impulse to address the error in a student's understanding of beauty by hammering home key principles about beauty in a formal series of lessons or some similar method. Such an approach would be a mistake for several reasons. When formation is the goal, thin formal instruction is rarely the best method. It is more effective to weave a robust biblical view of beauty into all of the subjects so that students encounter beauty frequently and in a wide range of areas. Interweaving beauty in this way is more consistent with how the Bible teaches about beauty and with recent educational theories.[12] Beauty will be most helpful in developing spiritual life in students when it appears as a constant theme that points to God in every subject. This approach is also more effective because beauty does not operate in strictly logical formal patterns. It is essential to recognize that beauty is effective for the beholder even if the person seeing

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[11] Karl-Heinz Bernhardt, "בָּרָא," in *TDOT*, 2:246.

[12] James M. Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 16–18.

the beauty does not understand why what he or she is seeing is beautiful. Theologian Alister McGrath poignantly elucidates this extrarational function of beauty:

> To appreciate a rational argument, I need to think it through; it's not immediately obvious. Beauty, however, is quite different. Beauty is something we appreciate immediately. When we see a beautiful scene, person, or work of art, we instantly know there is something special about it. We do not need to be persuaded that something or someone is beautiful; something deep within us seems to tell us. An apologetic based on beauty is not initially about argument; it is about appreciation. The arguments begin when we ask what the beauty of nature points to—if anything.[13]

One way that this non-logical effect of beauty manifests is the power with which it appeals to both regenerate and unregenerate people. Many believers can testify to how God has used his beauty to draw them towards the truth.[14] Beauty is not redemptive, but like the conscience, it is powerful and effective in motivating people towards a greater degree of godliness.[15] It seems the best way to account for these variables is to make beauty a ubiquitous presence in the educational experience so that there are many opportunities for God's beauty to arrest the student's attention in whatever spiritual state he or she is in.

In addition to the complexity of different spiritual conditions, there is the complexity of how beauty affects a person's many faculties. Through the mind, spiritual realities affect a person physically, and physical realities affect a person's spiritual

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[13] Alister E. McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapid: Baker Books, 2012), 113–14. This effect of beauty is clearly attested in more depth by Robin M. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 3.

[14] While God's beauty will apply differently to the regenerate and the unregenerate, it is not possible to separate these applications firmly, and it is even more difficult to know the spiritual state of the students. Theologian Wayne Grudem affirms that the point of transition is especially hard to locate in children who have often heard Christian teaching. For them, "there may not be a dramatic crisis with a radical change of behavior from 'hardened sinner' to 'holy saint.'" Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 701.

[15] The similarities between conscience and aesthetic sensitivity are fascinating and would form an interesting study on their own. Both phenomena, for example, are innate, affected by the fall, operate apart from rational processes, need to be instructed or trained, and powerfully affect the human will.

condition.[16] The mind is also a complex of voluntary and involuntary activity as well as rational and non-rational processes.[17] Figure 1 below illustrates some basic but helpful principles in this regard. The division into material and immaterial is not meant to represent a crude body-soul dualism.[18] Both the material and immaterial parts are important, and the effects of beauty are not limited to either sphere. The outlined box that overlaps the material and immaterial parts of man represents the mind (or heart) of a person—the part of a person that processes experiences and responds to internal and external stimuli. This section is divided into two parts: the higher part is characterized by rational processes (e.g., decision-making), and the lower part is characterized by non-rational processes (e.g., reflexes, intuitions).[19]

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[16] To illustrate this truth, Christopher Bogosh uses a story about a headache he experienced. The headache can make him irritable and may lead him to act angrily (a sinful state of discontent and an outward act of sin). On the other hand, he may take two Tylenol, a physical act that dramatically assists his ability to avoid sin, which affects his soul and spirit. Christopher W. Bogosh, "Body-Soul and Biblical Counseling," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 5, no. 1 (2013): 215.

[17] I am referring here to broad kinds of functions that take place in multiple places, not specific parts of the brain or to Joseph LeDoux's low road and high road. For a more detailed explanation, see Matthew A. LaPine, *The Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 30–31.

[18] The exact relationship between the soul and the body is not clear to modern science, and it is not explained in Scripture. Neuroscientist Roger Sperry is one of many who express this ambiguity: "It is clear even to modern neurologists that man is more than molecules and that the part of man that transcends biological and molecular realities has some control over the biological thus defeating biological determinism." Roger Sperry, "Psychology's Mentalist Paradigm and the Religion/Science Tension," *American Psychologist* 43 (1988): 609.

[19] The relationship between the rational and the non-rational and that between the soul and the body would be better depicted by a helix as they feed into and inform each other in complex ways.

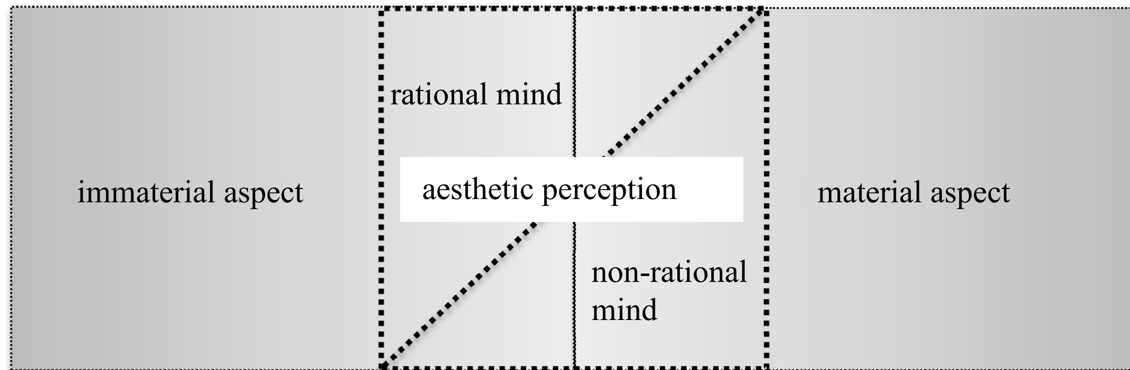


Figure 1. Aesthetic experience affects many dimensions

The figure shows how aesthetic perception fits into this nexus of human experience. Specifically, aesthetic perception affects multiple aspects of the human consciousness. Beauty is perceived through the physical senses, but it is also perceived in ways not accessible to the senses.[20] For example, the believer knows that the new heavens and the new earth will be beautiful. Beauty affects the material part of man; for example, beautiful sounds, sights, and smells cause the body to release endorphins.[21] Beauty also affects a person's soul; for example, a story of a beautiful act of kindness can bolster a person's moral will. Less directly, beauty can move a person to worship God—a

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[20] Perception through the senses is a complex process. Anjan Chatterjee is a neurologist who has written insightfully on neuroaesthetics. While his perspective is evolutionary, he provides insightful descriptions of how the brain processes aesthetic material. For visual aesthetics, the process begins in the retina of the eye, where rods and cones dismantle a visual experience into luminance and color, respectively. The signal carrying this information is then transmitted to the back of the brain, where it must be reconstructed. However, the complexity of reconstructing these signals from brain synapses is magnified because separate processing areas relate to different kinds of visual signals. There is an area that processes faces, an area that processes places, an area on the side of the occipital lobes that processes objects, and an area that processes the form of human bodies. On top of these four distinct traceable areas is another location that processes moving bodies or biological motion. But the parallel processing that takes place in interpreting the various signals from the eyes is just the beginning of all that happens. Anjan Chatterjee, *The Aesthetic Brain: How We Evolved to Desire Beauty and Enjoy Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 25.

[21] The physical ways that aesthetics affect neurological chemistry is well documented. For example, there are studies documenting aesthetic experiences altering endorphins so as to elevate a person's pain threshold. R. I. M. Dunbar et al., "Performance of Music Elevates Pain Threshold and Positive Affect: Implications for the Evolutionary Function of Music," *Evolutionary Psychology* 10, no. 4 (2012): 688–702; Mahnaz Shahnazi et al., "Inhaled Lavender Effect on Anxiety and Pain Caused from Intrauterine Device Insertion," *Journal of Caring Sciences* 1, no. 4 (2012): 255–61.

function properly native to the spirit (or soul). The power of beauty is evident, particularly in how beauty affects the understanding, the will, and the affections.

Exposure to beauty can often augment the presentation of spiritual truth. Beauty can instigate the necessary emotional state to improve brain function. In this way, beauty has clear benefits for education, and those benefits can also enhance spiritually beneficial activities, such as Scripture memory, meditation, and Bible study. This neurological benefit of beauty is one clear way that beauty is helpful for spiritual formation. When this truth is considered in connection with the prior observation that the effectiveness of beauty is not dependent on a logical understanding of the beautiful or other aesthetic elements, the usefulness of beauty is even more evident. These ideas free the teacher to use beauty widely with little preparatory instruction by assuring him or her that beauty can be effective in both regenerate and unregenerate students if the teacher uses biblical principles regarding beauty.

## Developing a Culture

If a classroom or school is going to leverage the truths regarding beauty discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis, then teachers and administrators must deliberately develop cultures that allow beauty to flourish effectively. The approach to beauty in a classroom is a zero-sum activity. Either it is being taught well, or it is being taught poorly. Education philosopher George Knight observes, "If educators do not consciously face up to their aesthetic responsibilities, they will make aesthetic impressions upon their students unconsciously and uncritically."[22]

Properly cultivating a culture that values beauty relies more on what Makoto Fujimura calls generative activities than defensive activities. To some extent, defensive or protective activities are necessary. Textbooks, artwork, and novels that undermine the

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[22] Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 31.

objectivity, importance, or God-centered nature of beauty should be exposed, but positive or generative activities should be primary. Kitsch and vacuous motivational posters need to come down.[23] However, the focus should be on activities that Fujimura describes as "constructive, expansive, affirming, [and] growing beyond a mindset of scarcity."[24] These activities must involve the words and actions of both the stated curriculum and the unwritten curriculum. These two kinds of curriculum manifest in three main areas that are all critical to a culture of theological beauty: beauty in words, beauty in action, and beauty in places.

Unfortunately, many schools use environments and rituals that are behavioristic and pragmatic. These approaches make the classroom resemble a sterile laboratory or an assembly line. In Scripture, people learn in environments through activities and analogies that evoke nature and human flourishing. These environments, activities, and analogies resemble the environment and activities of the home and the garden. The repeated emphasis on nature and human flourishing in Scripture is purposeful and instructive. God seems to use this imagery because it embodies ideas that are particularly suited to helping people learn and develop. Even the imagery of the temple and the illustrations of the church evoke elements of creation to teach critical truths. This pattern in Scripture, when considered, confirms that the non-formal and often unrecognized or hidden aspects of a school's use of aesthetics can affect a student's spiritual formation. The main point of this section is to reflect on the aesthetic aspects of a school. These reflections range from the attitudes on the ball field to the altitude of the

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[23] Calvin Seerveld writes powerfully on the dangers of substandard decorations: "Kitsch accepts the technocratic denaturing of ordinary life, but pretends to lift you above it, nostalgically. Kitsch is willing to be slick, it always glitters somehow, bewitching the simple with illusions of grandeur. . . . Kitsch canonizes immaturity; it panders to introverting experience . . . because kitsch thrives only on sentimentality." Calvin Seerveld, *Rainbows for the Fallen World* (Toronto: Toronto Tuppence, 1980), 63.

[24] Makoto Fujimura, *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017), 22.

ceiling tiles, and these pages offer suggestions as to how biblical aesthetics can enhance these elements of a school in order to advance spiritual formation.

**Culture of Beautiful Words**

To an extent, formation requires a certain degree of information that is communicated by words. The more carefully chosen the words, the more effective the communication. Christian schools cannot assume that students will understand beauty from a theological perspective if the schools do not teach and model what the Bible says about beauty. There is educational value in theological aesthetics. Aesthetics are a unifying principle that can help draw together a fragmented curriculum. Knight asserts that a challenging issue in curriculum development is to "find the pattern which holds the curriculum together. . . . [The world] has fragmented knowledge to the extent that it is challenging to see how individual realms of expertise relate to the whole."[25] Beauty can do much to heal this fragmentation. It provides a secondary avenue (the primary avenue being creation's theological end) to talk about all subjects or disciplines' cohesiveness as they all contain beautiful elements that share similar characteristics of beauty. If teachers talk about beauty in every classroom, then students will have a much deeper grasp of how their world fits together and points to the glory of God.

Teachers in every class should understand their subject in deeply aesthetic terms. They should possess a rich aesthetic vocabulary that applies to their subject matter, and every class should include reading material that highlights manifestations of beauty in that subject area.[26] Knight insists that it is "the responsibility of Christian educators to select the very best literature to accomplish the aim of their schools."[27] It might be

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[25] Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 223.

[26] This is obviously easier for some subjects than others. However, it is possible for every subject. In my recent reading, I encountered more chapters and essays on the aesthetics of numbers and mathematical functions, such as Euler's identity, than I read on the aesthetics of poetry.

[27] Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 231.

helpful in teacher training or even earlier in the employment application process to ask teachers to explain how the beauty of God manifests in the subject matter they intend to teach.

Teachers should strive to communicate their subjects in words that ring with echoes of the beauty of God, especially when they are talking about or talking to God. Professor of divinity and preaching Michael Pasquarello at Beeson Divinity School clarifies why beauty is important in how people talk: "Truth embodied in beautiful form evokes the power of imagination and stirs the affections to perceive its reality."[28] The imagination will make the ideas memorable and cause affections that deepen the hearer's commitment. Beautiful expressions of supplication, adoration, thanksgiving, and communion powerfully affect both the speaker and those praying with the speaker. Prepared prayers, prayer books, and praying Scripture can be helpful here. Prayers that stick in the memory so that they can be repeated throughout the day are a great blessing.[29] Words spoken well are well remembered. Fujimura rhetorically questions,

> Notice the phrases [Neil] Armstrong used to describe his experience [landing on the moon] "magnificent sight," "stark beauty." He used a simile—"like much of the high desert of the United States." Even at the pinnacle of technological accomplishment, this engineer used subjective, affective language. If on that day in 1969 the news report had simply told us "a man landed on the moon," would we remember it as well? Would it have affected us as deeply as the language that allows us "to land on the moon" too in our imaginations? We are poetic beings, whether on earth or on the moon. The language of beauty and majesty draws us into the mysterious realm causing us to wonder and dream.[30]

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[28] Michael Pasquarello III, *The Beauty of Preaching: God's Glory in Christian Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 194.

[29] James Smith, speaking of an exercise he did with written prayer in his class, found that written prayers were actually a great help to students who "perhaps struggled with a kind of piety that required 'spontaneous' prayer . . . . [They] found written, fixed-hour prayers to be a gift that help them pray." James Smith, "Keeping Time in the Social Sciences," in *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*, ed. David Smith and James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 150. I have seen this to be true in my own classes. The deadening mundane that Donald Whitney describes as praying "the same old things about the same old things" can be avoided to the joy and relief of many students when they are handed a well-written prayer to pray. Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 11.

[30] Makoto Fujimura, *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 81–82.

In every instance where words are used, there is value in choosing the words well so that the effort invested in the words reflects the value placed on the subject matter. By doing so, the chosen words engage the power that aesthetics lend to well-crafted expressions.

The unwritten curriculum reveals the deeper strata of reality in most schools. Even in the unwritten curriculum, words often reveal attitudes and values. Teachers and administrators must ensure that their words indicate a proper level of respect for aesthetics. They must guard against using terms or phrases that denigrate aesthetics. Teachers should train themselves to speak highly of beauty in every area. How a school treats, pays, and talks about the people who care for their facilities (janitors, groundskeepers, maintenance workers, and kitchen staff) reflects how they value aesthetics. If teachers refer to each other using last names as a sign of respect and decorum but do not do the same when referring to or addressing the janitors and kitchen staff, then their words suggest a deficiency.

**Culture of Beautiful Actions**

James K. A. Smith has been immensely helpful in recent years by rekindling awareness that people are shaped by their actions. Actions often express deep and real attitudes and affection, but they also form them. For Smith, actions, practices, and habits form a day-to-day liturgy that "turns our hearts" and "our loves" toward God.[31] Thus, the Christian teacher's responsibility is to establish regular rhythms that communicate a proper understanding of theological aesthetics. Formally, such instruction will come out in practices that are planned. Actions that unite aesthetic expression with theological awareness are particularly helpful. Music and communal singing are a rhythm that can be helpfully incorporated into the regular daily patterns.[32] The importance of singing in

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[31] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, *Cultural Liturgies*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 56.

[32] Christian educator Steve Turley affirms many that students "have learned through singing psalms and hymns to cultivate and conform their wants and desires to something greater than

awakening the soul and combating spiritual opposition appears in Scripture and the testimony of Christians.[33]

Christian educator Kent Young describes an experience that clearly demonstrates the relationship between aesthetics and spiritual formation. Young reflects that students who are harboring sinful attitudes towards each other cannot sing together well. He insists that any time spent restoring those relationships and dealing with personal sin is not only the right thing to do but also improves the musical quality of the lesson. To help deal with these issues that inevitably arise, Young says, "I began using a song greeting—a kind of call and response to begin class. When students enter the class, I sing something like, 'Praise the Lord' and they respond in four parts with, 'Praise the Lord, Oh my soul!' From that one greeting, I can quickly get a sense of the state of the student fellowship."[34] For Young's class the spiritually formative effects of aesthetics became immediately apparent.

The power of beauty in singing is a force that must be handled carefully. The music is not just a raft that carries the freight of the words. The tune is more like the mechanism of a jackhammer that drives the bit of the hammer deep into the hearers' and singers' hearts. Martin Luther (1483–1546) speaks of this in the context of singing the

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themselves. . . . [S]inging, perhaps more than any other practice, fosters a distinctively Christian orientation towards the world from which a comparably Christian culture blossoms." Turley also offers extensive notes from church history that show the value Christians have placed on singing the Psalms together as a deeply theological and aesthetic practice. Stephen R. Turley, *Echoes of Eternity: A Classical Guide to Music* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2018), 106, 112.

[33] On this point, the story of David's playing music for Saul is instructive (1 Sam 16:15). A helpful overview of the power of music is given by John Piper in a sermon on 2 Chr 20:1–25 entitled "Ambushing Satan with Song." After detailed exegesis, a personal anecdote, and quotations from Mary Slosser, Amy Carmichael, Martin Luther, and William Law, Piper concludes, "I don't think these testimonies . . . are pious platitudes. I think that they are strictly and terribly true. Satan cannot endure the spiritual songs of the saints. You can fight him with song." John Piper, "Ambushing Satan with Song, January 20, 1985, 2 Chronicles 20:1–25," in *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007), Logos Bible Software.

[34] Kent Young, "Take Everything Captive to Christ," in *Raise the Song: A Classical Christian Guide to Music Education*, ed. Jarrod Richey (Moscow, ID: Association of Classical Christian Schools, 2019), 53.

Psalms: “The book of Psalms is a sweet and delightful song . . . the music, or the notes, which are a wonderful creation and gifts of God, help materially in this, especially when the people sing along and reverentially participate.”[35] Luther speaks fairly frequently of the power that songs have to awaken the heart and turn it towards God. In another passage, Luther speaks specifically of how music was instrumental in his own spiritual growth, saying, “Next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor.”[36] If Luther is even partially correct, this practice of singing psalms in schools should be common.

Many similar activities can be built into a school day: singing the doxology at the end of chapel or a meal; beginning the day with a time of communal reflection, prayer, or singing; or ending the day with a time of testimony and thanksgiving for the ways God has worked during the day. Aesthetic rituals can be simple. Standing at the door to welcome students as they enter the classroom is a meaningful, beautiful demonstration generously offering time and love. Another example could be a teacher’s sitting with students to eat lunch or—as is the case with one of my colleagues—preparing a special meal for her students.[37] Fellowship or spiritual conversation can occur naturally and deeply over a shared meal or plate of cookies. Other shared experiences can engender spiritual conversations. Discussing popular songs can be a natural and powerful exercise in aesthetic and spiritually formative ideas.

Another element of the religious heritage that modern Christians can develop to beautify their schools is the Christian calendar. Its beauty lies in the sense that it is

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[35] Martin Luther, “The Last Words of David (1543),” quoted in Mark C. Mattes, *Martin Luther’s Theology of Beauty: A Reappraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 114.

[36] Martin Luther, quoted in Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 352.

[37] Carolyne Call has an excellent essay on the importance of incorporating hospitality, fellowship, and testimony into a classroom. See Carolyne Call, “The Rough Trail to Authentic Pedagogy: Incorporating Hospitality, Fellowship and Testimony into the Classroom,” in Smith and Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices*, 61–79.

decorated time. In the calendar, time has been ordered in a particular way to point toward eternal truth. Smith summarizes, "The liturgical year is constructed narratively, reenacting the life of Christ in rhythms of repetitions, inviting the people of God into that story such that the story of God in Christ becomes the story of the people of God."[38] Church historian Thomas Halbrooks agrees, "With the proper use of theology and symbolism, the Christian Year is both a useful and a powerful experience for the local church,"[39] and the Christian school. In the calendar, natural opportunities for deeper reflection are available.[40] Dramas could be written and performed; poems and songs could be composed to celebrate the calendar's events. Chapel services, songs, and prayers reflecting the calendar can help integrate spiritual truth into students' routine, thereby adorning time in formative ways.

Part of the usefulness of beauty in spiritual formation will come from training students to see godly attitudes and actions as beautiful. Integrating a biblical view of beauty can help accomplish this training, for even a cursory study will show that beauty is connected to righteousness.[41] Moral beauty should characterize the actions and

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[38] Smith, "Keeping Time in the Social Sciences," 150.

[39] G. Thomas Halbrooks, "The Theology and Symbolism of the Christian Year," *Faith and Mission 8*, no. 2 (1991): 14.

[40] A detailed, helpful, and balanced overview of the benefits of the liturgical calendar can be found in D. Bruce Lockerbie, "Living and Growing in the Christian Year," in *The Christian Educator's Handbook of Spiritual Formation*, ed. Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 130–42.

[41] Johnathan Edwards saw the importance of teaching young people that there is a distinct beauty to living righteously. In November 1744, he preached a sermon entitled "The Beauty of Piety in Youth." His text was "May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown, our daughters like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace" (Ps 144:12). In this sermon, he affirmed, "The virtue and piety of the youths is in many respects peculiarly desirable, and is much the beauty of a professing people of God. The piety of the youth of a people is spoken of here as beautiful and as a lovely sight to behold." Jonathan Edwards, "The Beauty of Piety in Youth," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758*, *WJE*, 25:106.

attitudes of the classrooms, hallways, lunchrooms, parking lots, locker rooms, and ball fields of Christian schools.[42]

Closely related to the beauty of virtue in students is the beauty of Christian character in teachers. A Christian educator's message depends on lived-out beauty. Earl Cairnes, who was chairman of the department of history at Wheaton College many years ago, insists, "The example of a radiant, honest, scholarly personality must accompany this basic practical as well as theoretic intellectual theistic orientation. Students usually remember the teacher long after the data of the subject have been forgotten."[43] Students should remember each teacher as a person beautifully adorned by the fruit of the Spirit.

**Culture of Beautiful Places**

To some extent, when people think about the role of beauty in spiritual formation, they first think about the elements that are discussed here—things like a fresh coat of paint, pictures on the wall, and well-maintained grounds. These things are certainly not the focus of beauty, but they are aesthetic realities that affect spiritual formation. Having a culture of beautiful places involves giving and receiving training on how to see and enhance the already present beauty.[44] The beautiful environment will include clothing, the building, the grounds, the decorations, and where students go on field trips.

The issue of clothing is contentious, but well-thought-out uniforms remind students of many spiritual realities. It is helpful to think of uniforms in connection with the school's purpose. Stephen Turley insists, "Uniforms embody a shared identity, a

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[42] Jeremy Treat has written a helpful article on a theology of sports that references the beauty of play in Christian worldview and also the importance of fair play as a virtue that adorns good sports. See Jeremy R. Treat, "More Than a Game: A Theology of Sport," *Themelios* 40, no. 3 (2015): 392–404.

[43] Earle E. Cairns, "The Essence of Christian Higher Education," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 111 (1954): 344–45.

[44] Fujimura, *Culture Care*, 46–48.

shared purpose."[45] Attending to personal appearance also indicates an appreciation for the activity one is doing and love for one's neighbors.[46]

On a larger scale, the building and grounds are important. Too many schools have been built in the modernist mode that emphasizes dehumanizing efficiency.[47] The connection between church architecture and theology is long-established. Historian and religion professor Richard Kieckhefer affirms, "Entering a church is a metaphor for entering into a spiritual process. . . . The form of sacred architecture will follow largely from the conception of the spiritual process it is meant to suggest and foster the type of dynamism it aims to promote."[48] Sadly, while many cathedrals were built with relatively good theology behind them, many schools were built in ways that do not express sound theology.[49] Renaissance architect Leon Batista Alberti expressed a summary principle for the design of schools: "Everything is best when it is tempered to its own importance."[50] Writing about beautifying schools, John Skillen explains Alberti's reasoning: the beauty of the building "is a matter of tempering (a) every room to its importance in the building as a whole, (b) every decorative element in the room to the room's role in the building,

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[45] Turley, *Beauty Matters*, 49.

[46] Paul Munson and Joshua Farris Drake observe, "Historically Christians have understood that clothing speaks (just as the heavens do) and that our main consideration in choosing clothes should be the well-being of those who have to look at us." Paul Munson and Joshua Farris Drake, *Art and Music: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 21.

[47] Joe Winston recalls his experience in such a school building: "At grammar school I met real science in a science laboratory, and I hated it from the onset. The room had no aesthetic qualities whatsoever and reminded me of pictures I had seen of Victorian workshops." Joe Winston, *Beauty and Education*, Routledge International Studies in the Philosophy of Education 24 (New York: Routledge, 2010), 109.

[48] Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21.

[49] Douglas Wilson confirms that sound theology always leads to the love of beauty: "When there is no love of beauty, we may say, reasoning *modus tollens,* that there is no sound theology. Our point is simply that a love for the triune and holy God is the foundation of any true love for beauty." Doug Wilson, "A Wine Dark Sea and a Tumbling Sky," in *Angels in the Architecture: A Protestant Vision for Middle Earth*, ed. Douglas Jones and Douglas Wilson (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2010), 24.

[50] Leon Batista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, trans. and ed. Joseph Rykwert, Niel Leach, and Robert Tavernor (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 292.

and (c) the whole building to its place and importance in the surrounding town and landscape."[51] Doing this requires considerable forethought and leadership as the school must determine its purpose carefully and then select the kinds of structures and decorations that anchor that purpose into the physical appearance.

The grounds of a school should also meaningfully reflect beauty. Gardens can contribute to the educational and formative agenda of a school, providing tangible reminders of spiritual truths.[52] The imagery of gardens is found throughout Scripture.[53] Gardens are an excellent place to begin studying science as they reveal the wonder and dignity of creation that a thawed frog drenched in formaldehyde on a stainless-steel plate seems to lack. If the schools cannot have gardens, then students can still benefit from field trips to arboretums and similar locations.[54]

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[51] John Skillen, *Making School Beautiful: Restoring the Harmony of Place* (Camp Hill, PA: Classical Academic Press, 2020), 85.

[52] Orthodox theologian and professor at the University of Virginia Vigen Guroian observes, "A garden is a profound sign and deep symbol of Salvation, like none other, precisely because a garden was our first habitation, and God has deemed it to be our final home." Vigen Guroian, *The Fragrance of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 84.

[53] Guroian, in a singular way, develops the importance of the aesthetic sense of smell. Citing numerous early church leaders, he describes how the fragrance of a garden illustrates an appreciation of God's presence. Guroian is the only modern scholar I am aware of who speaks seriously about the importance of smells or fragrance, but his short book is filled with references to Christian poets and theologians who saw fragrance as more than just a metaphor for the beauty of God. It is more than a metaphor because it is experienced. Smells affects the human body (mind and neurotransmitters) as other aesthetic experiences do. It is interesting that the imagery of incense as a type of prayer has often been associated with gardens. Puritan preacher Thomas Watson, talking about Christ's current session as a high priest who helps our prayers, offers the following words from a passage written by the church father Ambrose:

> Christ's prayer takes away the sins of our prayers. As a child, saith Ambrose, that is willing to present his father with a posy, goes into the garden, and there gathers some flowers and some weeds together, but coming to his mother, she picks out the weeds, and binds the flowers, and so it is presented to the father. Thus when we have put up our prayers, Christ comes, and picks away the weeds, the sin of our prayer, and presents nothing but flowers to his Father, which are a sweet-smelling savour. (Thomas Watson, *A Divine Cordial; The Saint's Spiritual Delight; The Holy Eucharist; and Other Treatises*, Writings of the Doctrinal Puritans and Divines of the Seventeenth Century [n.p.: Religious Tract Society, 1846], 21, Logos Bible Software)

[54] Steve Turley, every year, takes his students to the Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, and he tries to link the powerful sensation of being in a thousand-acre garden to the realities of redemption. His students write a reflective essay in which they discuss how the garden was a reminder, a foretaste, and a present token of God's goodness. Turley, *Beauty Matters*, 44.

The hallways and classrooms should also be beautiful. The structure, organization, and decoration of the classrooms should be thoughtful. The purpose of the classroom and biblical priorities should guide the aesthetic decisions. Teachers should consider whether their classrooms center on the right things. The decorative choices should communicate that learning is not a sterile, cold, individualistic practice but a lavish, generative discovery of the fullness of God's bounty in his creation. Skillen, drawing on a rich tradition of thought, shows that the proper ordering of a room is like the proper arrangement of a speech. The elements in the room give clear direction as to what is important. The rooms must be free from clutter, they must integrate well with the rest of the school, and they must emphasize the kinds of things that orient the students to think deeply and Christianly.[55]

The beauty of the environment can be enhanced by thoughtfully chosen art on the walls. The art must be chosen based on its quality, significance, and meaning. The art may be produced by students or even teachers in the school. Art made in the school says that the school values beauty and seeks to produce beauty even at the risk of personal embarrassment. This resolve expresses the school's intent to generate sub-creators who take the creation mandate seriously (Gen 1:28). Art made by master artists expresses the school's appreciation for beauty, but it does so in a slightly different key as the focus, in those works, is on the quality of the work. Among the decorations, there is a place for overtly religious art on the walls.[56]

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[55] Skillen observes, "Walking around the room should be like walking through a coherent speech an integrated history connecting all the elements into a whole." Skillen, *Making School Beautiful*, 170.

[56] Students should also be taught how to read art. Most people can benefit from a detailed introduction to the symbols and significant features that have been used throughout history. It might not be apparent, for example, why many subjects in religious art hold up three or two fingers, and even more obscure would be things like the mousetrap that Joseph is carving in the Merode altarpiece by Robert Campin (1378–1444), which is a symbol of the atonement. Many students will need help learning to see and appreciate the message contained in art that is abstract or non-representational. Jensen observes that such abstract art is sometimes a "different kind of devotional art that invited viewers to interact with the elements and composition of the painting itself rather than enter a narrative scene. Viewers who are untrained in how to look at this kind of art can feel lost without a recognizable subject. They don't . . .

The effectiveness of a culture of beauty will depend on whether students have been prepared to perceive and understand the beautiful elements around them. However, the beautiful surroundings of a well-thought-out educational environment provide the raw material for the Christian imagination to sample the beauty that is to come. In his book *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith insists that education is more about "the transforming of our imagination rather than the saturation of our intellect."[57] Smith continues through his book, developing the thesis that people are shaped more by their imagination than by their logic:

> A vision of the good life captures our hearts and imaginations not by providing a set of rules or ideas but by painting a picture of what it looks like for us to flourish and live well. This is why such pictures are communicated most powerfully in stories, legends, myths, plays, novels, and films rather than dissertations, messages, and monographs. Because we are affective before we are cognitive (and even while we are cognitive), visions of the good get inscribed in us by means that are commensurate with our primarily affective, imaginative nature.[58]

A beautiful environment and correct teaching on aesthetics provide the necessary components for students to flourish spiritually. Students will be nurtured, in part, by the tokens of good things that God has in store for his people.

## Engaging the Spiritual Disciplines

Many forms of brokenness manifest in a classroom. Students often vacillate between a rigid, legalistic spirituality and a jaded passivity. They are often plagued by a lethargy that undermines their ability to feel the reality of spiritual things. As mentioned above, Lewis observes that most modern students are lost in a "slumber of cold

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know how to engage a visual image that presents itself as only a play of form and color, line and texture." Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen*, 95.

[57] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 18.

[58] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 53.

vulgarity."[59] The following pages suggest that the spiritual disciplines enlivened by the beauty of God in its many forms can help free students caught in this kind of slumber.[60]

## Beauty Awakens

Terry Glaspey, speaking of the beauty of art, affirms, "Art, in all its forms, has the power to awaken us. We so often sleepwalk through our lives, missing the many little wonders spread out before us each and every day."[61] In Scripture, many times, God appears to people when they are facing disillusionment and despondency. The appearance of God in some physical form ministers to them, awakening them to a deeper reality.[62] When Christians, informed by a robust theology of beauty, can see instances of beauty as reminders of God's character, work, and disposition, their walk with God can be enriched. Beauty is a token or sign of who God is in a form perceivable to the human senses that can help link what a person knows about God more concretely to his or her experience. When Christians encounter this kind of beauty in the spiritual disciplines or other areas of their walk with God, these experiences can be spiritually refreshing.

## Beauty Is Inherent

Beauty can affect the practice of spiritual disciplines, intensifying their influence on the participant and awakening the participant's desire to engage in the

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[59] Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 13.

[60] By the term spiritual disciplines, I am referring to those practices that Donald Whitney describes as "personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth. They are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity that have been practiced by the people of God since biblical times." Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 17. Included among these disciplines are Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, fasting, solitude, silence, journaling, learning, confession, accountability, simplicity, submission, conversation, celebration, affirmation, sacrifice, and watching.

[61] Terry W. Glaspey, *Discovering God through the Arts: How Every Christians Can Grow Closer to God by Appreciating Beauty & Creativit*y (Chicago: Moody, 2020), 35.

[62] Examples are abundant in Scripture. Notably, Moses sees the burning bush after forty years in the desert (Exod 3:3). Joshua sees the "commander of the Lord's army" after Moses dies (Josh 5:13–15). Isaiah sees the Lord after King Uzziah has died (Isa 6:1–6). Ezekiel sees a vision of God's glory chariot while he is sitting by a Babylonian river in captivity (Ezek 1:1–28). And Cleopas and his companion visit by the risen Christ while they feel the burden of perplexing and unfulfilled expectations (Luke 24:18–32).

disciplines. Part of this effect is due to the fact that the disciplines possess an ontological or intrinsic fittingness or beauty in the discipline itself. This inherent beauty in the spiritual disciplines allows the attractive nature of beauty to motivate students to engage in the disciplines. In order to reveal the connection between the disciplines and beauty, the connections between beauty, fittingness, and morality must be taught.

For example, in the biblical form, meditation is an inherently beautiful act because it is fitting or appropriate that a creature should want to think the thoughts of his or her Creator. Biblical meditation maintains the proper relationship between man and God, resulting in the meditator's fruitfulness and God's exaltation. Beauty is also inherent in the discipline of worship. Worship does not need to be made beautiful. It does not need to be decorated. It is inherently beautiful. This is evident in the scenes of corporate worship described in the book of Revelation (e.g., 4:3-11; 5:1-14; 7:9-12; 14:2-4; 15:2-4; 19:1-8). Smith insists, "Worship is more like art than science, more like literature than logic. Worship is fundamentally aesthetic, not didactic."[63] Students who see this truth are often motivated to worship.

Similarly, the discipline of Christian fellowship is beautiful. In Psalm 133, fellowship is compared to "sacerdotal oil. The oil prepared for the use in the tabernacle was a special, fragrant oil."[64] Each of these disciplines is inherently beautiful in a way that can draw students to the discipline and reinforce their commitment while engaging their emotions in the discipline. Similarly, there is profound beauty to the words of Malachi that the prophet offers in comfort to the few remaining faithful: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed

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[63] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 144.

[64] Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, *Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 816.

his name" (Mal 3:16). The beauty of the conversation of the God-fearing is seen in that it attracts the attention of God.[65] Eugene Merrill emphasizes the intensity of this attention: "He [God] 'gave attention' (וַיַּקְשֵׁב, *wayyaqšēb*) and 'heard' (וַיִּשְׁמָע, *wayyišma`*). This hendiadys construction means that YHWH paid the closest heed to what was said. So moved was He."[66] Since God is omniscient, the anthropomorphic implications are symbolic. This highly stylized description of God's response is designed to invoke a response in the reader, and it suggests beauty in noticing what other people are saying, in delighting in it, and in recording it. Since God notices this conversation and approves, there is beauty in the conversation. Also, there is beauty in the record that is made "before him." Reciprocally, journaling suggests that the person writing in a journal has noticed a significance in the works and words of God and, therefore, wants to preserve them in a form more stable than memory.

**Beauty Integrates and Impels**

In addition to recognizing the inherent beauty of spiritual disciplines, students and teachers are spiritually strengthened when they learn to use spiritual disciplines enhanced by beauty in various academic fields. Recognizing the beauty in classes such as science and math will help remedy the deep fissures that sever science from art, faith from reason, and nature from grace.[67] Aesthetics and beauty can enhance the practice of each of the disciplines in each field of study. In math classes, students should be given

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[65] For more on this discipline, see Joanne J. Jung, *The Lost Discipline of Conversation: Surprising Lessons in Spiritual Formation Drawn from the English Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).

[66] Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary*, Minor Prophets Exegetical Commentary (n.p.: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 383.

[67] Catholic theologian Stratford Caldecott identifies these deep divisions as a structural flaw in many educational systems that needs to overcome. Stratford Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-Enchantment of Education* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2017), 12.

opportunities to meditate on the beauty of the order that exists in numbers and undergirds all of reality. Mathematician and philosopher Michael Schneider observes,

> Numbers are a map of the beautiful order of the universe, the plan by which the divine architect transformed undifferentiated chaos into orderly cosmos. Cultures didn't necessarily learn this from each other but only had to look at numbers and their relationships to see how they revealed harmonious models which are the same everywhere and at all times.[68]

One specific example of this order is the beauty and prevalence of what mathematicians have called the Golden Ratio. This ratio has historically been the subject of much Christian meditation. Catholic theologian Stratford Caldecott observes,

> A rectangle is described as Golden when the ratio between its sides is Φ [*phi*]. If you cut a square out of a Golden rectangle, the remaining piece is also a Golden rectangle. Both Leonardo da Vinci and Piet Mondrian used such rectangles frequently in their painting, and the ratio itself can be found governing the lengths of sections in many Beethoven movements. *Phi* is called "divine" because, like God, it contains within itself both identity and difference. Meditating on Φ and observing it in nature is thought to be a way of raising the human mind towards the divine unity.[69]

Certainly, this statement could be misleading, but Caldecott is not suggesting that this meditation will confer divinity on the meditator. The suggestion here is that meditating on these grand mathematical concepts that highlight God's beautiful wisdom and glory in general revelation recognize the dignity and wonder in the subject matter, transform the student, and brings glory to God. In every subject area, this same wondrous beauty of God can be found and meditated on to these same effects.

The Psalms are replete with examples that suggest that meditations on the phenomena of nature, events of history, and experiences in life are both desirable and beneficial.[70] When a person is meditating on the beauty of something in nature, history,

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[68] Michael S. Schneider, *Constructing the Cosmological Circle*, *Constructing the Universe Activity Books*, vol. 5, (n.p.: n.p., 2006), 81–82, http://www.constructingtheuniverse.com.

[69] Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth's Sake*, 66–67.

[70] The psalmists suggest a range of topics that the believer can meditate on. Seven of these topics are the law of God (Ps 1:2), the majesty of creation (Ps 8:3), the order of creation (Ps 8:4–5), the

or life, the deeper one meditates, the deeper one's appreciation of the subject grows. The joy that one finds in meditating is often linked to the beauty of the topic. The synergy that develops between meditation, beauty, joy, and interest draws the student deeper and deeper into the subject. With each level of depth, more beauty is revealed, causing joy and interest to impel the student further. These increasing depths in a rightly oriented Christian will lead to formative worship. Teachers should devote consistent effort to thinking how they can use this dynamic to encourage students to pursue a deeper love for their subject area and for God through beauty and the spiritual disciplines. Other disciplines can be used to a similar effect. If home economics class employs the spiritual discipline of service, then much beauty will be uncovered. Science class could become enchanted with beauty if science is oriented towards the discipline of worship. History classes that routinely use the events of history as a catalyst for prayers trace the hand of God over the affairs of humankind in a fresh way. The possibilities are many, and the reward would be great.

John Piper's well-known modification of the Westminster Catechism that the purpose of man is "to glorify God by enjoying Him forever" is a fitting conclusion to this discussion.[71] The spiritual disciplines are designed to help Christians in their pursuit of that delight in the nature of God, and the beauty of God's perfection draws in and fuels that delight. Christian students can rightly cultivate their appetite for God by meditating on the beauty of God. David Saxton, in summarizing the Puritans' emphasis on meditating on the character of God, concludes, "Nothing so expands the heart and soul of the believer to meditation than to consider each beautiful jewel in the diadem of God's

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person of God (Ps 63:6), the ancient works of God (Ps 77:11), the power of God in redemption (Ps 78:42), and the public works of God (Ps 143:5).

[71] John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001), 21.

person."[72] One of the Christian teacher's primary tasks must be to delight in meditating on God's beauty and then call his or her students in age-appropriate ways to enjoy this beauty so that they become enticed and transformed by it. This discipline must be taught to and practiced by Christian students so that the beauty of God can have its intended effect on them, namely, drawing out their hearts reshaping them into the same kind of beauty that will eventually be theirs when they are fully formed into the image of Christ.

## Conclusion

When Adam and Eve fell in the garden of Eden, death, destruction, and ugliness entered creation from the inside (Gen 3:7, 14-18). Because of his great love, however, God did not abandon his fallen creation. He came to Adam and Eve, calling them out of hiding (Gen 3:8-9). Because of their shame, and because they recognized their new ugliness, their impulse was to hide (Gen 3:10). This dynamic of God's calling through his beautiful grace and of humans' hiding because of their sin is an overarching theme of human history. The devil, who tempted Eve by distorting God's words, has continued his work of distortion. He has done much to denigrate and mislabel beauty. Discarded as trivial and rejected as a relic of a bourgeois past, beauty is stripped of any power to condemn ugliness, adorn goodness, and attract people to truth. Because relativism and naturalism have forced beauty out of the public arena, few people notice how much the Bible says about beauty. Because beauty in Scripture has been ignored as trivial, students are not routinely called to behold God's beauty in Scripture's pages. God intended for humans to respond to creation's beauty with worship and joy. Instead, humans have used the beauty of the bushes to hide our shame and fuel our sin.[73]

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[72] David W. Saxton, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Meditation* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 83.

[73] Speaking of the fig leaves as a thing that is restored to its proper purpose by redemption is not an idea original to me. M. Craig Barnes used the idea in a slightly different way: "My calling is to help them find the spirituality of the material. Even the fig leaves belong to God." M. Craig Barnes, *The Pastor*

Chapters 2–4 of this thesis have described the false ideas that have arisen as God's creatures have sought to hide from God's beauty or pervert it to serve their own desires. This final chapter offers practical steps forward. After God provided redemption, he does not take away any leaves or trees. Instead, he invites the redeemed to go back to them, to find nature's true purpose again. Dressed in proper redemption, the Christian teacher and his or her students must use beauty in all forms of revelation to appreciate the goodness of God. The path to restoring beauty as a powerful voice that calls students to spiritual maturity begins with a realistic assessment of the situation. It uses all available elements of culture, and it applies beauty through the disciplines of spiritual growth. Through these means, beauty becomes a powerful force in spiritual formation.

Isak Dinesen's short story *Babette's Feast* offers a helpful metaphor for the power of beauty. The story begins with two sisters, Martine and Philippa, who live in an ascetic religious community in a remote coastal village in Finland.[74] These sisters take in Babette, a refugee from the Franco-Prussian war. When Babette unexpectedly wins a lottery, she insists that the sisters allow her to prepare a feast to show her gratitude to them. Over several days, Babette orders and receives shipments of exquisite ingredients. Shipments of live sea turtles, quails, wines, rich spices, and alien plants begin piling up in the kitchen. The sisters become uncomfortable. They and other guests, fearing that the meal may be a sinful indulgence, vow that they will not enjoy the food even as they eat it. During the feast, course after course of food with various shapes, rich colors, and enticing aromas flow across the table. The only sound is the noise of eating as the guests strive to suppress their delight. However, soon, the guests, overcome with the beauty of the experience, begin to restore relationships that had soured. Wakefulness and alertness

*as Minor Poet: Texts and Subtexts in the Ministerial Life*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 31.

[74] Isak Dinesen, "Babette's Feast," in *Anecdotes of Destiny and Ehrengard* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 25–63.

revive among the guests, and old, worn-out religious phrases are repeated but now with meaning and vibrancy. Without even acknowledging the goodness of the food, the community is transformed. The feast ends as the guests leave the house, dancing in a circle and exclaiming that the stars and eternity have drawn near. The beauty of the feast comes at an enormous cost and sacrifice, but it reflects the generous and generative action that needs to characterize the Christian classroom. Such an approach to beauty can help free students from Gnosticism, which despises physical things, and from cultural deism, which fails to recognize God's presence in the details of life.

Dinesen's story bears a striking similarity to the event that transpired two thousand years ago in the house of Simon, the leper of Bethany. In this story, a woman, also an exile, appeared with an alabaster flask of pure nard, a fragrant and expensive ointment. Without ceremony or invitation, she poured the ointment over the head of Christ to the indignation and horror of the self-righteous and coldly contented critics (i.e., Christ's disciples) who surrounded her. In their spiritual blindness and grasping reserve, the disciples could not see the beauty in what the woman was doing, nor could they enjoy the fragrance that filled that room. Christ's words to them were poignant and searching: "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial" (Matt 26:10–12). Leon Morris, commenting on this scene, observes, "The word translated 'beautiful' here means 'good' as well as 'beautiful'; therefore, some interpreters prefer that translation here. But it appears that Jesus is not speaking of the action as morally upright but rather as a beautiful expression of devotion."[75] In part, it is beautiful because this anointing for burial is the only "really bright moment between the beginning of chap[ter] 26 and the death of Jesus.

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[75] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 649n19.

Only this woman honours him fittingly as he faces his death."[76] It is also beautiful because this act is in tune with God's view of reality. The ointment is doing what God created all good-smelling things to do—call attention to the real nature of God. The woman in this story probably did not understand that Christ was going to die, but she knew what beauty was for, and in that act of obedience, she brought joy to the heart of God and attention to the purposes of God.[77]

This thesis has sought to highlight how teachers can help make this kind of moment a more common occurrence in Christian classrooms. It has suggested how God's beauty, which appears in so many places and forms, can highlight the supreme worth of Christ. In a sense, this thesis is an offering, a small vial brought by imperfect hands to hopefully draw more attention to the supreme worth of the Ineffably Beautiful One.

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[76] John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1055.

[77] D. A. Carson observes, "Jesus' defense of the woman does not necessarily mean that the woman understood what she was doing, though it allows this. Jesus may well be using the anointing to intimate again his impending crucifixion." D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 527.

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ABSTRACT

THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF BEAUTY IN SPIRITUAL
FORMATION APPLIED TO THE CHRISTIAN
HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM

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This thesis develops a conceptual framework for understanding the relevance of beauty in the spiritual formation of contemporary high school students, and then this thesis surveys some practical applications of that framework. Chapter 2 defends the objectivity of beauty as necessary to hermeneutics and worldview. Chapter 3 surveys the literary features of the Bible and the Hebrew and Greek lexemes that are translated to mean something approximate to beauty. These surveys stress the importance of beauty to an accurate understanding of God's attributes. Chapter 4 argues that beauty has moral implications. In this argument, the chapter asserts: (1) beauty is a gift of common grace and (2) holiness is the beautiful and proper response to grace. The final chapter offers an overview of some ways that this framework can be applied to the classroom through the methods of the teacher, the culture of the school, and the practice of spiritual disciplines.

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