

A Better Understanding

HOW DID WE GET HERE? PART 3*

In our ministry of reaching the Art world and artists it is not unusual to get questions about the effectiveness and value of the work we do. I (Kirk) have been doing this now for about two decades and this is neither a new question nor an illegitimate one. Sarah and I ask ourselves this question all the time because we want to make sure we are following the path God has for us. In this series of newsletters we want to attempt, in some small way, to answer that question in hopes of inviting you to a better understanding of why we do what we do. In addition to these newsletters, we have posted some short videos (3-5 minutes) on our website engaging these thoughts with more information.

When you unmoor yourself from the Truth & Goodness—and it's source in God—whether intentionally or not, you drift. I suspect there was an unmooring from Beauty before unmooring from Truth & Goodness. As with Truth & Goodness, Beauty is also sourced in God. Theologian Hans urs Von Balthasar once wrote about this relationship:

"Beauty...dances as an uncontained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another. Beauty is the disinterested one...No longer loved or fostered by religion, beauty is lifted from its face as a mask, and its absence exposes features on that face which threaten to become incomprehensible to man. We no longer dare to believe in beauty and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance. We can be sure that whoever sneers at her name 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."

Balthasar is talking about three characteristics that are all found in God—Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Let's face it, only God is completely and perfectly true, good and beautiful—is Jesus anything less? Balthasar uses an analogy about these three characteristics as if they were three sisters in a dance. He writes this analogy so that our minds get a better grasp on these infinite characteristics of God. He imagines the dance where one of the sisters, Beauty, is actually harder to grasp than the other two. This is why Balthasar calls Beauty "the disinterested one" and why she is dancing around the other two—the "double constellation". Nevertheless, since they are sisters, they dance together. They NEED to dance together or it becomes harder to understand any of them.

Then Balthasar makes an observation, issues a challenge, and then calls out a warning.

His observation is that our culture (and the Church) has treated the sister Beauty with contempt. We have treated her as shallow, merely surface, a mask—when in fact she is more than that. The consequence has driven "sister Beauty" away from her other two sisters, Truth and Goodness.

Then Balthasar issues his challenge. He says that we need the same "courage" to understand and engage with Beauty as it takes for the other two sisters of Truth and Goodness. In other words, even though harder to understand than Truth and Goodness we should still be willing to interact and wrestle with her just as much as we do the other two.

Years ago, when I worked on Summer Projects (Cru's mission project) in southern New Jersey there was a place near Cape May that looked West over the water—a perfect place to watch the sun set. And these sunsets were utterly fantastic—Beautiful. Many people would drive out there to experience them. Now, the "truth" of those sunsets was that they were a great ball of gas, energy, and light located light years away from the earth. That light from

the great ball passed through atmospheric gases, clouds, and the angle across the earth's spherical shape to showcase colors and tones that made anyone's mouth drop open in amazement. The "Good"-ness of those moments was that same great ball of gas, energy, and light warmed us throughout the day, helped us enjoy the beaches nearby, and caused our bodies to release pleasurable hormones making us feel good about the world and ourselves.



The Three Graces, by Giovanni Martinelli, c. 1635-40

But what of *Beauty* in those moments? Where was that sister in the sunsets? Let me ask you a few questions to perhaps make my point here. When I saw those sunsets, why would my mouth drop open? Perhaps your mouth has dropped open in similar moments.

Isn't that where Beauty resides? She's the sister standing right next to us when we see those sunsets, saying "I KNOW...RIGHT!?!?!?" It's why we don't completely understand and yet absolutely need her presence.

Perhaps Isaiah fell on his face before God seated on His throne in chapter 6 of his book for the same reason? Of course, Isaiah fell down because he was sinful, but I also think he may have been overwhelmed by God's

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beauty, and had no choice but to fall on his face. God sitting on His throne would be more beautiful than a thousand sunsets on Cape May—and Isaiah saw that.

Perhaps the Apostle Paul was reveling in the Beauty of God and the earth when he wrote in Romans 1, "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."

Psalms 96 says:

¹¹Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹²let the field exult, and everything in it!

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

¹³before the Lord, for he comes...

God can't separate some part of Himself from the others. If you believe He is the source of Truth, then you also must accept the other parts of Him as well. He will never approach with Goodness leaving Truth and Beauty behind. The Apostle James wrote in the first chapter of his book: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, **with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change**" (emphasis mine). All God's righteousness comes with His mercy, all His love comes with His justice because He is the only being able to perfectly work that way. It is the same with Truth, Goodness, and Beauty—they all reside within Him and none can be divorced from His character.

Perhaps the reason our culture has unmoored itself from Truth and Goodness is not because of simply ignoring both or even intentionally choosing the opposite (though these are dramatically evident); instead, might I suggest it is because we first ignored Beauty and drove her away?

In the next installment of this newsletter series, I will talk more about this and Balthazar's warning. As always, if what you have read stirs up any questions please feel free to write to me.

*See Newsletters: August 2020 & March 2021 for "Part 1: Taking the Temperature" & "Part 2: What do we do now?" of this series. ■

Blessings—

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top: our backyard before having it cleared for re-grade; bottom: our backyard after it was cleared. Water run-off from the property to the right of our yard is ending up under our house so we need to have the whole yard regraded. The landscaper we had hired had health issues and stopped in the middle of the project.

Please Pray

- » We've found a new landscaper with a plan that we think is the best solution for our property. Please pray we are able to secure the work of regrading as soon as reasonable. It will really help our old house to remain sound.
- » We hear rumors of "spiritual awakenings" happening here in the US. Not many, but then God is not one to always be public about His work. Pray that God would prepare us for whatever He would wish related to this.
- » We are seeing some deepening of relationships here in our community. Continue to pray that we see our neighbors take the next step toward the Lord - even place their trust in Him.

★ For more information about us and our ministry, visit our website:
www.birdandkey.com
also check out Friday Arts Project on Facebook or website:
www.fridayartsproject.org

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