

A Better Understanding

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO. PART 4*

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.

In the October 2021 newsletter, I shared Hans urs von Balthasar's quote about Truth, Goodness, and Beauty as three sisters in a dance, I related it to looking at a sunset and how we respond, and what that shows us about God.

In this newsletter I will be talking about Balthasar's warnings at the end of the quote:

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.

What is this "act of mysterious vengeance" Balthasar mentions?

What Balthasar is saying is that the way we treat "Beauty"—what/how we think of it, how we apply it, etc—will affect what happens to both Truth and Goodness in our lives and in our culture. Beauty's relationship with Truth and Goodness is unusual, it is "an uncontained splendor", "the disinterested one" meaning it is hard to pin down. Nevertheless, it is essential there is an "inseparable relation" between them. I don't always understand how or why God is working in my life the way He does, but I know He is working and I think Beauty is similar in this scenario. We might not completely understand Beauty, but imagine a life without it?

Balthasar says that since we have made Beauty shallow in our lives and culture and not treated it properly with Truth and Goodness we risk losing all three—the "act of mysterious vengeance". How have we treated Beauty? We generally treat Beauty as "surface stuff", no more important than what we see with our eyes—Balthasar's "mask" in the quote. We say what is really important is Truth, how we think and reason, and Goodness, how we treat our neighbors. This, according to Balthasar is risky.

Could this be why our culture seems unmoored from Truth and Goodness? Not because people have walked away from Truth or redefined Goodness, though these are realities today; but because we drove Beauty and its power out of our lives first. Now she's returned and taken away Truth and Goodness.

Think about it in how we relate to God. We can't relate to only part of Him, it is all of Him or nothing. If we somehow (which is impossible to begin with) tried to build a relationship with only one characteristic of God, it would be a flawed relationship. In fact, we'd eventually lose that one characteristic because it wouldn't be consistent with the other parts of God.

For example, if we only related to God's love, where would justice go? If we only related to His righteousness, what would happen to mercy?

The reason Beauty has a level of primacy with Truth & Goodness here is perhaps because of what I wrote in our previous letter, Beauty helps us live with what we DON'T understand. It helps us live with the mysteries of Truth and Goodness. I cannot confess to you that I completely understand the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. But, oh,



The Three Graces, by Lawrence Alma-Tadema, c. 1876

brothers and sisters, can there be a more beautiful, and powerful moment in human history? Beauty allows me to inhabit exactly that spot.

Let me share an example that might help in understanding this.

Why is a third of the Bible written poetically? Or why is another 40-45% of it narrative or story; whereas the last 25% is prose, discourse, sermons and letters? So three quarters of the Bible is written in more creative, even artistic, forms—forms that invite greater need of understanding the mystery of how Beauty works with Truth and Goodness. Only one quarter of the Word of God is written in what is considered more "logical" or "reasoned" forms. Neither of these forms is more important than the others, but I don't think it is an accident God

continued>>

has chosen creative forms to communicate His Word.

And so, Sarah and I live, work, relate, connect, cultivate in the area of the Arts in our culture. We take Jesus with us when we do. We want to woo Beauty back to her sisters Truth and Goodness because by doing that it makes the non-believer in the Arts go, "Heh? I never saw it that way." We want to champion Beauty to those in the Church—the Church to which we belong. Because by it, the people of God, and the message of God become that much more interesting to those who haven't heard, when His people are the most creative and excellent at making beautiful things. The Church once led the way on the path of Beauty, it can again someday.

*See Newsletters: August 2020, March 2021 & October 2021 for "Part 1: Taking the Temperature", "Part 2: What do we do now? & Part 3: How did we get here?" of this series. ■

Blessings—

Sarah and Kirk



Audrey and I at the Rock Hill Christmas Parade in December 2021.

Please Pray

- » We are on the verge of securing a landscaper. Thank you for your prayers, but we aren't done yet. Pray God provides in all ways to fulfill this need. Our property needs to be regraded.
- » Pray that God allows us to get into significant spiritual conversations with ease in the coming months and year. God has really built relationships through us, now seems a season for trusting God for response.
- » Pray for financial provision. We love our work and believe God is doing some unique things in and through us. To keep doing it we are trusting His provision.



Updates

» Audrey—my bosom friend—has gone to be with Jesus. Life here will not be the same. We're having a "Celebrate Audrey Service and Reception" on Saturday, April 23, 2pm at First ARP Church in Rock Hill, SC. Please join us, if you're able.

Her obituary is on the Greene Funeral Home's website:
<https://www.greenefuneralhome.net/obituary/audrey-ann-butler/>



Stream our podcast—Kirk's sermons—currently available on Apple Podcast or the RSS feed:
<https://audioboom.com/channels/5021206.rss>

MINISTRY FUNDING STATS

How close are we to being fully-funded?

CURRENT SOLID SUPPORT

69%

Kirk Irwin & Sarah Kennedy Irwin
birdandkey@gmail.com
k (646) 261-2847
s (321) 287-4507

- ★ 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

- ★ If you would like to partner with us in ministry, visit our giving page on Cru's website:
www.cru.org/0402593