

Beauty, Creativity, and the Arts. Part 1

Wonder: What is God like?

"In the beginning God created..." (Genesis 1:1)

"Gratitude exclaims, very properly, 'How good of God to give me this.' Adoration says, 'What must be the quality of that Being whose far-off and momentary coruscations are like this!' One's mind runs back up the sunbeam to the sun." – C.S. Lewis

God charges man to exercise dominion over creation

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, (Psalm 8:3-6)

"Looking at man, [the author of Genesis] sees in him something essentially divine, but when we turn back to see what he says about the original upon which the "image" of God was modeled, we find only the single assertion, "God created." The characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire and the ability to make things.' -Dorothy Sayers

"Gotta kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight." – Bruce Cockburn

God loves art

The building of the Temple (Exodus 26)
The calling of Oholiab and Bezalel (Exodus 31)
Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 3)

God endows man with the skill to create:
"I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you..." (Exodus 31:6)

The story we live in

- 1) God made the whole man
- 2) In Christ the whole man is redeemed
- 3) Christ is the Lord of the whole man now and the Lord of the whole Christian life
- 4) In the future, as Christ comes back, the body will be raised from the dead and the whole man will have a whole redemption.

“Steal past those watchful dragons...”

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ..For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Romans 1:18, 21-23)

“I wrote fairy tales because the Fairy Tale seemed the ideal Form for the stuff I had to say. Then, of course, the Man in me began to have his turn. I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralyzed much of my own religion in childhood.

“Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.” - C.S. Lewis

2 Samuel 12:1-14 - “The LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city...”

Art reflects reality as it is and also as it will be

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes...
(Isaiah 63:1-3)*

Despair vs. Hope

Absurdity/meaninglessness vs. Purpose and significance

Disorder vs. Order

Vincent Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” (1889)
“When I have a terrible need of – shall I say the word – religion, then I go out and paint the stars.”

“None of the children knew who Aslan was...but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don’t understand but in the dream it feels as if it had some enormous meaning...so beautiful that you remember it all your life.” – C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*

Beauty points to redemption

I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. (Genesis 9:11-13)

O Joy that seekest me through pain, // I cannot close my heart to thee; // I trace the rainbow through the rain, // And feel the promise is not vain, // That morn shall tearless be. - George Matheson

"The books or 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. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshipers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited." C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

The necessity of art

"We read to know we are not alone." – C.S. Lewis

Now, you women, hear the word of the LORD; open your ears to the words of his mouth. Teach your daughters how to wail; teach one another a lament. (Jeremiah 9:20)

"The true purpose of art is the same as the true purpose of anything: it is not for ourselves or for our own self-expression, but for the service of others and the glory of God. Or to put all of this another way, making art is an expression of our love-love for God and love for our neighbor." Philip Ryken.

"Art is the means by which it becomes possible to name the narratives in our lives that might feel meaningless without contemplation and storytelling." - Don Chaffer

What is good art?

*"True beauty dwells on high; ours is a flame
But borrowed thence to light us thither." –George Herbert*

"The greatest poems (indeed all of the greatest artistic works) have been made by men who valued something else much more than poetry." –C.S. Lewis

Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

"Poetry takes something that we know already and turns it into something new." – T.S. Eliot

What does it mean to be a Christian artist?

"The man who really loves God, who is working under the lordship of Christ, could write his poetry, compose his music, construct his musical instruments, fashion his statues, paints his pictures, even if no man ever saw them. He knows God looks upon them." – Francis Schaeffer

"If I understand the gospel, it tells us that we are to spread the Good News to all four corners of the world, not limiting the giving of light to people who already have seen the light. If my stories incomprehensible to Jews or Muslims or Taoists, then I have failed as a Christian writer. We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it."
-Madeleine L'Engle

Four Quartets, T.S Eliot (1943)

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error.
The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre-
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.

Show the Way, David Wilcox (1994)

You say you see no hope
You say you see no reason we should dream
That the world would ever change
You're saying love is foolish to believe

'Cause there'll always be some crazy
With an army or a knife
To wake you from your day dream
Put the fear back in your life

Look, if someone wrote a play just to glorify
What's stronger than hate
Would they not arrange the stage
To look as if the hero came too late?

He's almost in defeat
It's looking like the evil side will win
So on the edge of every seat
From the moment that the whole thing begins, it is

**Love who mixed the mortar
And it's love who stacked these stones
And it's love who made the stage here
Although it looks like we're alone**

**In this scene set in shadows
Like the night is here to stay
There is evil cast around us
But it's love that wrote the play
For in this darkness love can show the way**

So now the stage is set
Feel you own heart beating in your chest
This life's not over yet
So we get up on our feet and do our best

We play against the fear
We play against the reasons not to try
We're playing for the tears
Burning in the happy angel's eyes, for it's...