

**a Few  
Reflections  
on Beauty**

**by ralph c. ennis**

# Beauty and the Activism of the Good News of Jesus and the Kingdom of the Triune God

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:18-21)*

If wholeness enhances beauty and beauty encases wholeness, then the gospel of Jesus and His kingdom restores corrupted humanity and creation to its original beauty and wholeness. If such wholeness detracts from beauty, then Jesus' gospel is not really good news for the restoration of a creation or humanity that is groaning continuously.

The wholeness and beauty of the Gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom comes with delay and a promise. We still suffer through a fallen world. Our hearts, imaginations and bodies long for far more than any saint has experienced on this plane of reality. But the promise of more sustains us. And as the Apostle Paul experienced, "For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Corinthians 5:4).



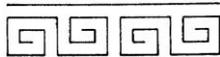
The historical expansion of the Gospel into Russia came as ambassadors from Prince Vladimir saw beauty within the Eastern Orthodox Church. They reported that they couldn't tell if they were in heaven or on earth when surrounded by such beauty. And thus the Christian faith entered Russia.

Into today's pluralistic world, images and music disseminated by mass media are a significant aspect of socialization of the young. Thus the artist has a profound impact on the valued beliefs of this generation. How followers of Jesus view this obstacle/opportunity is strategically important for the expansion of the Gospel.



***How do you sense God leading you to create beauty  
as an expression of your heart for Him?  
Do artistic expressions move people?***

***Can these movements become a starting movement  
into the gospel of Jesus and His kingdom?***



# Beauty and Spiritual Transformation

*Ephesians 5:25-27*

*... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*



To indicate that beauty is not a significant aspect of spiritual transformation is to ignore Jesus' work within His bride today. He expresses His intent within the language of beauty – a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any blemish.

***How do you see beauty growing in your soul?***

***What beauty do others see growing within you?***

*Ezekiel 16:14,15*

*And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD. "But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his."*

Beauty can become an idol. Instead of trusting the Author of beauty, fallen humanity quickly turns to trust in beauty itself. It seems we are also inclined to prostitute our beauty to get favor from other humans instead of trusting in the One who has lavished beauty upon us.



***As you examine your heart, do you trust in your beauty  
or do you desire beauty to achieve fame for yourself?***

***How are you aware of the impact of beauty on your trusting heart?***



# Beauty, Symbolic Reasoning and the Silent Language of God

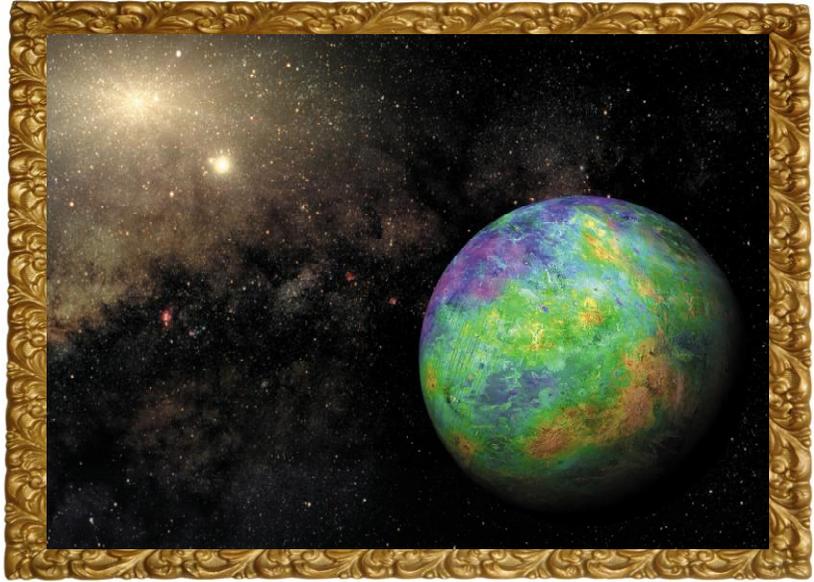
*Romans 1:20*

*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

*Psalm 19:1-4*

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*

*Psalm 29:2 "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness."*



The play of the artist/musician/writer is to create a knowing that human souls embrace through the lens of their worldview wrapped within the limits of their senses. This worldview is constantly under the support and assault of our sensual abilities. But input from our senses without symbolic reasoning, strips the soul from the pursuit of broader meanings such as "why live?" It is through metaphor that we explore these meanings.

The metaphor is a powerful linking of language to concrete spatial realities that usually invoke multiple senses. And a case can be made that all words are spatially related at some level of abstraction. For example, a company might be compared to the metaphor of a wounded mother bear protecting her baby cubs. Or truth might be compared to a rock that stands firm against the pounding of the sea. Such metaphors allow us to vicariously experience our emotional reactions to some concrete sensual reality while exploring another aspect of life.

The silent language of God seems based on the human capacity to connect spatial realities with abstractions that relate to the attributes of God. For instance, the galaxies tell of the glory of God. Is not His glory beautiful? As we gaze into the night sky, we are gazing into the glory of God. Do other aspects of nature tell of

other attributes of God? The psalmist declared that “The earth is filled with you love, O Lord ...” If part of human love language is beauty, is not the sun rise in the morning a “speaking” from God to us that He loves us?



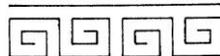
***What does the continuum of beauty-ugliness communicate to your soul about the attributes of God?***

***Is the beauty of God’s holiness evident to you?***

***How does His beauty impact your present living?***

***Notice your everyday surroundings and be open to your response to these surroundings.***

***How do you sense God silently “speaking” to you through these everyday surroundings?***



# Art and Pornography

Beauty devoid of all pride, lust, shame or shamelessness seems out of the reach and imagination of fallen humanness. Beauty, with shadows of lust contained by a sense of shame, allows the artist to explore human sexuality within the boundaries of art and without wallowing within the realm of the pornographic – beauty displayed to arouse shameless lust. Thus, for one person an artistic display/movement may be art and for another pornography. Still others see an “art of pornography” by highlighting art and pornography’s common appeal to human sensuality. Without a societal discourse of goodness, any one judgment of art can jar the majority view of pornography. Are there no guidelines or hints by God revealed in Scripture that allows for attraction to beauty and disgust of that deemed pornographic?

## *Song of Solomon 4:1-3*

How beautiful you are, my darling!

Oh, how beautiful!

Your eyes behind your veil are doves.

Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead.

<sup>2</sup> Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing.

Each has its twin;  
not one of them is alone.

<sup>3</sup> Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;  
your mouth is lovely.

Your temples behind your veil  
are like the halves of a pomegranate.

## *Ezekiel 23:18-21*

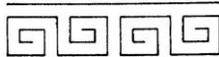
When she carried on her prostitution openly and exposed her nakedness, I (God) turned away from her in disgust, just as I had turned away from her sister. <sup>19</sup> Yet she became more and more promiscuous as she recalled the days of her youth, when she was a prostitute in Egypt. <sup>20</sup> There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys



and whose emission was like that of horses. <sup>21</sup> So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt your bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled.

*Ephesians 4:19*

Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.



***How do you discern between sensuality and sensitivity within your soul?***

***Is your heart drawn to the beauty of art?***

***Is your heart drawn to pornography as art?***

***Where is God in the mix of your artistic heart?***

***Are you aware of times when your heart is drawn away from God and toward lust as you encounter and engage with the art/music/dance, etc.?***

***How do you handle these times to move from sensuality to sensitivity without deceiving yourself regarding the power of lust?***



# Beauty of Mathematics

Most of us see no or little beauty in mathematics. Our eyes and hearts have often been trained to view this beautiful language with drudgery or suspicion. Suspicion that this discipline is only an attempt to objectify, not value. And similarly, feelings of drudgery may be aroused due to the exacting nature of the language.

But for all who enjoy the beauty of architecture it is good to remember that this art form is heavily laden with mathematics. The Greeks explored the proportions of the golden ratio in their building. Similarly, the nature of “pi” as a special irrational number intrinsically linked to the mathematics of circles has fascinated mathematicians for thousands of years. From infinite series to exploring mathematical limits and  $n^{\text{th}}$  dimension, space, mathematics provides us with tools to describe natural realities and imaginary spaces. The artist uses tools of paints,

words, musician instruments, etc., often in exacting ways, to describe and explore the realities of natures and the imaginations of the mind wrapped with emotions. And so the mathematician uses his/her tools to explore nature and imagination with beauty that can potentially excite with emotion.

Symmetry is a key element within artistic expressions. Theoretical physicists are currently examining the possibility of super-symmetry within the foundations of creation. The role of symmetry in mating selections is examined by biologist's. And symmetry is a fascination of mathematicians. Thus the artist, the scientist and the pure mathematician are not far separated in their pursuits, only in their approaches. Truth (a recognized accuracy) of a reality (imagined or observed) that is wrapped in beauty (symmetric or asymmetric) appeals to them all.



*“There is the ever-present danger when you discuss beauty in science, mathematics, and technology that readers will assume the word is being used metaphorically. Could a mathematical proof, scientific theory, or piece of software be beautiful in the real, literal way that a painting or symphony or rose can be beautiful? Yes. The beauty of a proof or machine lies in a happy marriage of simplicity and power--power meaning the ability to accomplish a wide range of tasks, get a lot done.” David Gelernter, DISCOVER Vol. 18 No. 09, September 1997*



*Have you exposed yourself to this arena of beauty?*

*Do you link symmetry with beauty in human faces?  
Can the exploration of beauty speak into the pursuit of  
mathematical simplicity and complexity?*

*Does mathematics bore you, excite you? Explain.*

*How are you aware of symmetry and asymmetry in the world around you  
(i.e. the shape of a baby's head, the human body,  
architecture, flower arrangements, etc.)?*

*How might your experience and exploration of the beauty around you be  
enhanced by opening your awareness to the simplicity  
and complexity of the language of mathematics?*



## Toward an Abstract Essence of Beauty

Art comes in many forms – the art of sound waves from an orchestra playing Bach, the art of light waves reflecting from a Rembrandt painting or projected from a movie projector, the display of particles revealed within a Michelangelo sculpture, the movement of bodies on the dance floor, the poetic lines of Emerson.

These art forms are filtered through human sensuality and various views of preciousness. With our various senses we perceive an external to which we are connected across degrees of distance. With various intensities of assigned values, we separate objects and concepts upon some continuum of preciousness-distain. Art can excite us to embrace both a connected external and an internal as a precious beauty or to distain it as an ugliness.

At an abstract level, beauty can be conceptualized as the artist's play of spatial particles, waves and the emotion of jealousy through some "language" that is perceived through human senses of consciousness. God has created lots of space and highlighted it with a diverse array of discrete particles in continuous motion. But it is God's Name Jealous (Exodus 34:14) that places the play upon a beauty-ugly continuum. As being created in the image of God, we can perceive jealousy primarily through the play of sexuality. And within

jealousy we can understand preciousness (and boundaries of possessiveness). Without this innate panhuman awareness of various degrees of preciousness, all art would be stripped of its power to craft the soul and to be crafted by the soul of humanity.

At this abstract perception of beauty, we can understand that the Jealous Triune God is not only the Creator but also the Original Artist crafting preciousness and things precious. At a concrete level, the same can be known by simply gazing into the evening sunset or meditating on God's instruction to Abraham to sacrifice his son.

Is all art sexual in nature? Is all preciousness sexual in nature? Is all jealousy sexual in nature? Can any art form be completely stripped from a masculine/feminine mystic? Is all beauty crafted through the lens of sexuality? Can the artist lay aside his or her sexuality as the scientist attempts to lay aside his or her subjectivity? Can he/she succeed?



Abraham & Isaac by Rembrandt, 1634



***Is the jealous heart of God beautiful to you?***

***Is your heart beautiful to you?***

***Do your attractions to beauty and distain of ugliness  
draw you deeper into the heart of God?***

***How are the jealousies of your heart aligned  
to the jealousies of the heart of God?***

***Are you aware of the differences between godly  
jealousy and envy that rots the soul? Explain.***



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