

## **God, the Happy Artist (and Road Signs for Pilgrims)**

Genesis 1:9-26

Peter Hiett

May 6, 2007

This last summer on my Sabbatical in London, our friends George and Carol Mackenzie took Susan and me to the National Gallery. It's London's giant, free, art museum full of priceless art.

I never saw this coming, but I was utterly amazed at the Peter Paul Rubens, for Rubens painted so many biblical themes with such depth and passion.

I remember walking into one room and seeing this picture:



**Figure 1 "Samson and Delilah" by Peter Paul Rubens (c. 1609-1610)**

It's titled "Samson and Delilah." (I had Zach put a bikini top on Delilah . . . I didn't want to get letters . . . but in the original she doesn't have one.) As I stood staring at it, George walked up next to me and said, "You've got to wonder how Samson, knowing so much of God, could have made a mistake like that. I don't understand."

We both stood there in silence, gazing at the painting, and then I said, "Oh, I understand." George looked a moment more and said, "Yeah, I guess I do too."

Well, that's incredible art, that can preach a thousand sermons with one picture. Samson is passed out on Delilah's lap. He has surrendered his strength to her beauty. She is sick with ambivalence; Philistine soldiers wait at the door. In the background on the shelf are the pagan idols Venus and Cupid. The painting reveals the human condition and the biblical story so well: the desire to be known, the attraction and tragedy of sin, the

longing for a savior.

You'll remember Samson surrenders his strength to Delilah and all hell breaks loose. But in the end, he surrenders his weakness to God, and the kingdom of heaven breaks loose on the Philistines. And Samson slays more in his death than in his life.

Sound familiar?

Millions come through the National Gallery and see the Gospel in art painted hundreds of years ago.

Well, I stared, I ached, and God spoke. I didn't understand all I was feeling. Then George and I walked into the next room.

It was shocking. All the paintings were of church buildings . . . or preachers preaching in church buildings. And all were boring. A little plaque explained that the difference between the two rooms represented a couple of decades in time and exhibited the impact of the Protestant Reformation on the low countries in Europe. Due to fear over the "idoltrous excesses of the Roman Catholic Church," and the renewed focus on the "Word of God as correct doctrine," artists began to paint pictures of preachers preaching, and they avoided biblical stories that might lead to idolatry.

In other words, they stopped painting the Word of God and started painting preachers *preaching* the Word of God.

Well, you can see their point, can't you? Especially if I removed Delilah's bikini top. The Church, especially since the Reformation, has always had a rather ambivalent attitude toward art and beauty.

What do we do with that?

Genesis 1:9-25:

*And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*

*And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night,*

*and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.*

*And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.*

*And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.*

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann writes that "the good" used here does not refer primarily to a moral quality but to an aesthetic quality. It might better be translated "lovely," "pleasing," or "beautiful."

In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the Hebrew here is translated *kalos* not *agathos*. *Agathos* means useful good; moral good. *Kalos* tends to mean aesthetic good—not good *for* something; just good, beautiful.

God sees land, trees, seed, and fruit, and He sees that it's beautiful.

Genesis 1:26:

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."*

Then at the end of the sixth day, on the edge of the seventh day, "God saw everything that he had made, and look! It was very good, very beautiful."

Scripture reveals that the Lord delights in His good creation. He's an ecstatic and sensual artist. I mean by that He "senses"—He "sees"—that His creation is beautiful.

He doesn't *argue* that it's good. He doesn't say, "This is good for something else. It's good to enhance the moral fiber of society," for instance . . . or good for some other purpose. It's just good, beautiful. It'll be millions of years before any person can come along and *use* it—turn it into an end table.

It's just beautiful, but that doesn't mean it's illogical. Perhaps it's just *more* logical than we can comprehend.

You really don't comprehend beauty;  
Beauty comprehends you.  
You really don't argue beauty;  
You proclaim beauty.

You say, “Look at that flower. It’s beautiful! Look at that sunset!” But if you have to argue that the sunset is beautiful, it loses its beauty. You really don’t argue beauty; you proclaim beauty or exhibit beauty.

In Matthew 5:6, after proclaiming the beatitudes (which aren’t arguments but proclamations of beauty), Jesus says, “You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before men that they might see your good works and give glory to your father in heaven.”

What good works do Christians do, or what good works do *you* do that make the world say, “Wow! Praise God for those beautiful Christians!”

- Is it when we picket in front of the Capitol steps for better legislation?
- Is it when we point out depravity in others?
- Is it when we argue, “The evidence demands a verdict, so you’d better believe!”?
- Is it when we debate atheists and *win*?

Is it *then* that the world says, “Wow! Praise God for those beautiful Christians!”?

Jesus says, “Let them see your good works [*kalos ergon*].” It’s a phrase He only uses here and in one other place in Matthew. “Let them see your beautiful deeds—your beautiful things—your lovely works.”

Well, God sees that His creation is lovely, beautiful, and good. He creates land, sea, plants, trees, fruit, seeds, sun, moon, stars, seasons, fish, sea monsters, birds, and animals . . . and then God creates man. Then God creates the last, ultimate thing in the creation story. He creates a *bare, naked lady*.

William Blake wrote, “The naked woman’s body is a portion of eternity too great for the eye of man.” So is a bare, naked lady bad? No. She’s so good, so lovely, so beautiful, so good that a man can barely endure the beauty.

I mean, if I were going to pick an idolatry, I think my first choice would be bare, naked ladies . . . and then some kind of alcoholic beverage, then pizza, then the island of St. Barts, and then maybe the Denver Broncos.

But do you see? The more beautiful a thing is the more tempting it is for us to turn it into an idol.

In Romans 1, Paul argues that God is revealed through His creation. However, in vs. 22, humanity:

Claiming to be wise . . . became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts . . .

He gave them up to their desire to comprehend, control, and consume. He gave them up . . .

. . . to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and

served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Idolatry is putting a created thing in the Creator's place. It could be pizza, beer, a man, a woman, or even yourself. Idols destroy us as we destroy them, and they lose their beauty.

The Old Testament refers to idolatry as harlotry. It's a relationship meant to be governed by love that becomes governed by lust and consumption.

I think worshipping nature and consuming nature are two sides of the same coin. "Tree hugging" and "deforestation" are both idolatry. If there is nothing that governs your relationship to beautiful trees, you'll either worship them or try to consume them . . . or both.

Guys, if there's nothing that governs your relationship with women, you'll either worship women or abuse women . . . or both. And then they'll no longer be beautiful to you. That's what prostitution, pornography, and adultery are all about.

In Moses' day, the Canaanites worshiped sex, fertility, rain, trees, sea monsters, cows, sun, moon, and stars. And worship was a business arrangement. Worship was an effort to control those things and possess their attributes.

Well, probably the greatest temptation to idolatry is not simply naked women but beauty itself, *for* yourself—beauty as a possession you comprehend, control, and consume.

Do you remember the temptation Eve fell to? It was the fruit of a tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: the knowledge of beauty and corruption. She doesn't trust God to give her that fruit as a gift in grace. She takes it, possesses it, and everything gets ugly.

Now, you may not believe this, but the most beautiful thing ever seen on planet Earth was a man named Jesus—the Ultimate Adam. What did Eve do? What did the Bride do? What did *we* do with Jesus? We tried to comprehend Him, control Him, and consume Him. Instead of receiving Him as a gift, we took His life and nailed it to a tree. We broke His body, and His blood spilled out.

- When it did, a Roman centurion fell to his knees and worshiped. But it wasn't idolatry.
- When Jesus died, we consumed His body broken and blood shed, but it wasn't idolatry.
- His body broken and blood shed is fruit of the tree—the cross. But eating it is not idolatry; it's not death but life. It's eternal seed dropped into broken soil . . . not idolatry but worship.

Do you see why? Because that cross is the revelation of uncreated beauty given as a gift.

The Heart of God  
The Word of God  
The One we were made for  
The One who *is* beauty

Not the creature but the Creator.

Well, that was a boatload of theology. If you didn't follow it all, don't worry. We'll be talking about it more later on. But for now, my point is simply this: The beauty of created things is a problem for us humans, because we tend to turn those created things into idols.

And so the natural impulse of religious people is to outlaw beauty, which is to outlaw Peter Paul Rubens and his paintings, which is to outlaw the proclamation of the Word, which is to crucify the Beautiful One.

The natural impulse of religion is to comprehend, control, and contain beauty, which is just more idolatry—the idolatry of *us*.

How could you outlaw creation anyway? How could you outlaw seed, fruit, sun, moon, and stars? How do you outlaw naked women without outlawing the human race? That's a problem, and idolatry is a problem.

Well, most scholars agree that Genesis 1 is a *polemic*—an argument specifically formulated to deal with idolatry in ancient Israel. It turns out that the Genesis creation story is remarkably similar to other ancient Near Eastern creation stories, yet remarkably different:

- Time is not circular but linear, like we're going somewhere.
- The seventh day is not bad but good.
- The things the Canaanites worshiped as gods (like Marduk, the son of the sun god, who sliced Tiamont the sea monster in two, making the firmament of heaven and earth; or Baal the god of rain, fertility, and fruit; or waters, sea monsters, sun, moon, stars, rain, sex, and fertility) *aren't* gods but the good creation of the Creator God.

So the Hebrews are told that each of these things are *not* gods but pieces of art that reveal the Artist—creation that reveals the Creator.

I Timothy 4:4:

For everything created by God is good [“kalos,” beautiful], and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving [“eucharist-ia”] for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

Every created thing goes from idol to temple when I say, “Thank you, Jesus,” for that word of thanks puts the created thing in its proper place . . . not as creator but as creation bearing testimony to the Creator.

So I'm to drink every cup of wine in remembrance of Him. I'm to say, “Thank you, Jesus, for the fruit of the vine.” Then I remember He made it, it's His, and He is Lord, not the wine. He loves me, and He will fill me. “Don't be drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit.”

Guys, when you see a beautiful woman, you don't have to deny that she's beautiful, as if that's something bad. Say, “Thank you, Jesus, for her.” Then suddenly you remember she belongs to God and not to you. She's His good creation, neither to worship nor to consume. And God Himself will satisfy the ache within you to surrender your strength to great beauty.

The truth is, she couldn't satisfy that ache anyway. She's not the beauty that you

seek but the *sign*.

You do realize that God has “subjected all creation to futility.” That is, all signs fade . . . for a reason. Beauty doesn’t last here. After about 21 or 22, it’s downhill until you’re dead: wrinkles, flab, bald spots . . . or maybe it’s uphill, for God is leading us to greater and greater beauties, such that physical beauty is like a signpost pointing to greater beauties that we can now only barely begin to perceive.

The signpost reads, “God is good, He created this good. But pilgrim, don’t stop here. You are being made for Him.” Don’t stop at the sign to Niagara Falls; read it and keep going. “Hey, Samson, Delilah is a sign but not your destination. Don’t surrender yourself to her until you’ve surrendered yourself to Him.”

You see, everything in creation in Genesis 1 points to Him. It’s beautiful because He is beauty. But it all points to Him:

- The light we see points to the light we can’t yet see.
- Even the dark and the deep reveal the brilliance of His mercy.
- We are the land.
- Jesus is the seed.
- The Spirit bears the fruit through His work on the tree.
- Jesus is the substance of the Sabbath, the meaning of days, months, seasons, and years.
- Jesus is the harvest of bread and wine. He is the Lamb slain, the animal on the altar.
- Jesus is the man, and we are the woman—His Bride.

All creation points to the Creator and His love for us. And when we get Jesus, we get all things with Him, for we’ve come to see the greatest beauty, the heart of God, so we’ll receive all lesser beauties with Him. So don’t hang on; keep going.

You know, we’re each growing in our ability to enjoy beauty. An infant won’t even notice a Peter Paul Rubens. A toddler will pick his nose in front of a Monet. But children grow. Maybe we’re all growing. Maybe life is like an art appreciation class.

1. Perhaps the first sign is a dandelion on the front lawn when you’re a kid. But it dies, your heart aches, and you look further.
2. Then perhaps it’s a song, but the song gets old.
3. Then perhaps it’s religion, but it turns out to be dead.
4. Then perhaps it’s a lover: a bride or groom. You taste ecstasy but it’s not enough.
5. Then perhaps it’s a believer who’s kind, but the kindness is flawed.
6. Then perhaps you begin to see Him—the One behind all the signs—Jesus Christ and Him crucified—the love of God—the Beautiful One.

But, you see, life is a journey from glory to glory, a journey toward beauty that is God. Life is an art appreciation class or an *artist* appreciation class. You are learning to love *Love*. In other words, you are learning to see beauty.

A group of visitors at a summer resort had watched the sunset from the gallery of the hotel. A fat, unromantic-looking man had lingered until the last glow faded, and had seemed thrilled through and through by the beauty of it all.

One guest, more observant than the rest, wondered about this, and so at supper she said to this man, who sat next to her, “You certainly did enjoy the sunset. Are you an artist?” “No, madam, I’m a plumber,” he responded with a slow grin. “But I was blind for five years.”

You see, even the darkness between signs is a sign itself teaching you to love beauty. He had seen sunsets, then he was blind, and then he saw sunsets as he’d never seen them before.

Perhaps we encounter the dark in this world so we can learn to love the light in the next. Perhaps we encounter chaos, pain, and suffering so we can see the beauty that shines in its midst. See . . . and not only be plumbers but be artists.

An enthusiastic young man who had just received his plumber’s license was taken to see Niagara Falls. He looked at it a moment and said, “I think I can fix this.”

You don’t fix great beauty;  
great beauty fixes you.

God calls you to the torrent that is His cross, not so you would fix it but so it would fix you. So that sacrificial love would shape you in His own image.

A bored tourist walking through the art galleries at the Louvre commented to a security guard, “I don’t find anything exceptional in these paintings.” The guard replied, “These painting are not judged by us. We are judged by them.”

We don’t judge great art; great art judges us.

Scripture reveals the greatest art. In Revelation 5, all creation (“every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth”) praises Him who stands on the throne: the slaughtered lamb; “Jesus Christ and Him crucified”; the greatest art; the love of God poured out into creation; body broken and blood shed; “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”

In Matthew 26, Jesus reveals that He is the Passover Lamb. And His disciples can’t see it. But this strange woman can. Mary of Bethany sees the beauty of Jesus; she sees sacrificial love, and then she takes a flask of the most precious of ointments, worth a year’s wage. She pours it on Christ’s head. He will smell it as He hangs on the cross. It is sacrificial love.



The disciples ask, “What is this good for?” Jesus says, “Leave her alone. It’s a *kalos ergon*—the beautiful thing.”

After years of darkness, she sees the beauty. She doesn’t fix the beauty; the beauty fixes her. She doesn’t judge the beauty; the beauty judges her. She sees the beauty, she becomes beautiful, and she does the beautiful thing—the *kalos ergon*—the good work. And Jesus says, “Wherever the gospel is preached, her story will be told.”

What are those “good deeds”—those *kalos ergon* that we do, for which the world (the pagans) gives praise to God? Well, probably not our legislation, argumentation, or provocation. But how about sacrificial love? Did the world think Mother Teresa was beautiful? Did the world think St. Francis was beautiful?

You know, there is a place for making arguments about the Beautiful One, but we are always to exhibit the Beautiful One. You don’t argue great art; you *see* great art. We are called to witness great art and become great art giving glory to the Artist. “Let your light so shine before men.”

This summer after we went to the National Gallery, we went to Oxford for courses on apologetics: that is, how to make a reasoned argument for the faith. I love that kind of stuff, and it can be extremely helpful. Yet at times it feels like you’re explaining the prudence of an insurance policy or something, rather than testifying to an unspeakable beauty.

(And for all our arguments, at least in the western world, evangelism doesn’t feel like very good news. And it hasn’t been very effective.)

Well, after Oxford, Susan and I traveled to France. One morning we went to see the Marc Chagall Museum in Nice. Marcia Hinds heads our Fine Arts Ministry, and Marc Chagall is one of her favorites. She said we should go.

Well, we arrived early and sat outside with two busloads of Japanese tourists. You know, the Japanese have been notoriously resistant to evangelism. It probably has something to do with atomic bombs and the ugliness of war . . . so few are willing to listen.

The French have been notoriously secular and don’t want to listen. And Marc Chagall was a Jew . . . an exiled, Russian Jew.

Well, once inside, I was amazed at all the biblical themes. And I was especially intrigued by this [one] piece.

I don’t think I’ll ever forget sitting on a bench, with apologetics running through my mind, watching the Japanese tour guide explain this painting to a mob of attentive, Japanese tourists.

The painting is titled, [*La Création de l’Homme* – “The Creation of Man”]. Do you see it?

- Here’s the first Adam with Eve, then dead in trespasses and sins but in the arms of the Angel of God.
- Here’s the covenant rainbow.
- The giving of the law of Moses.

- A rabbi with a goat’s head carrying the law away from the people.
- David playing his harp for the people.
- Jeremiah lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem.
- Jacob and his ladder; he’s carrying a menorah representing the seven days of creation.
- References to Marc Chagall’s life and hometown.
- Then here is Jesus Christ and Him crucified—the Ultimate Adam—the Eschatos Adam.

[image: *La Création de l'Homme* – “The Creation of Man” by Marc Chagall (1958)]

It’s the creation of Adam.

I couldn’t understand any of the Japanese, but the tour guide went on for a long time. And I thought to myself, “How could she not, in some way, be preaching the Gospel?” And if she wasn’t, the painting surely was. And they were listening. The Japanese were seeing . . . seeing that God is good—beautiful.

We work and work, and argue and scheme, to evangelize the world. But an exiled, Russian Jew in secular France picks up His paintbrush and worships the Beautiful One. And the world crosses the ocean to come see.

Your life is to be that canvas. Your life is the creation of Adam.

So on the night He was betrayed, He took bread and broke it saying, “This is my body given to you. Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of me.” And in the same way after supper, having given thanks, He took the cup and said, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me.”

So Samson, come surrender your strength, your weakness, to great beauty. Delilah, Bride of Christ, come surrender your shame. Nothing in all creation is more beautiful to Him than the Bride . . . undressed of her self-righteousness so He can dress her. See the Beautiful One. Ingest the Beautiful One and live beautifully.

[Communion]

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St. Francis said, “Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” Your life is the beautiful canvas. But we can’t paint ourselves beautiful. We can’t dress ourselves in righteousness. He dresses us.

We have a Fine Arts Ministry. There are beautiful paintings hanging in our

narthex and downstairs. That's because art is worship. But we are also worship. Whether you're a plumber, carpenter, doctor, electrician, mother, or whatever, you are to be beautiful.

We come and surrender to Him, our strength to His beauty. We surrender our weakness to His strength—our shame, pain, and fear. We are His Bride, naked before Him. Nothing is more beautiful to Him in all creation than His Bride undressed and surrendered before Him in love. *He* makes us beautiful. He dresses us.

Besides our Fine Arts Ministry, we also have a ministry in our church called Marketplace Ministry. Wherever you work, you are to be His representative.

Do you see that our Fine Arts Ministry and our Marketplace Ministry are the same thing? All of our ministries are the same thing. We see the Beautiful One, we ingest the Beautiful One, and we live beautifully, in Jesus' name, to the glory of God. Amen.

#### Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. . . ." And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

~ *Genesis 1:9-26, 31*

The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.

~ *Proverbs 8:22-31*

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

~ *Revelation 4:11 (KJV)*

Genesis is news about a transaction which redefines the world. The known world, either of chaos or of management,

now becomes a new world surging with the mystery of God's gracious, empowering speech. For that reason, it is important to hear this text as a declaration of the gospel. Our interpretation must reject the seductions of literalism and rationalism to hear the news announced to exiles. The good news is that life in God's well-ordered world can be joyous and grateful response. . . . All of creation is characterized by God's delight:

I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the sons of men  
(Proverbs 8:30-31).

Delight is here understood as structured into the character of reality. The wisdom which rejoices belongs to createdness. (On God's delight, see Isa. 5:7, Jer. 31:20, where the same term reports his attitude toward Israel.) The creature's proper mode of speech about creation is not description but lyric, not argumentation but poetry. The texts most closely paralleled to Gen. 1:1-2:4a are not scientific explorations but the Psalms which speak of God's generosity and the world's grateful response. Thus, the morning and evening shout for joy (Ps. 65:8). God waters, enriches, blesses, and crowns (vv. 9-11); and as a result, the hills are wrapped in joy (v. 12) and sing and shout for joy (v. 13). God's movement toward creation is unceasing generosity. The response of creation is extended doxology (Job 38:7; Ps. 19:1). . . . Blessing theology defines reality in an artistic and aesthetic way. Throughout the narrative, God judges the results of his work "good" (1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25), and in verse 31, he pronounces the whole "very good" (v. 31). The "good" used here does not refer primarily to a moral quality, but to an aesthetic quality. It might better be translated "lovely, pleasing, beautiful."

~ *Walter Brueggemann, Genesis*

Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again"; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical encore.

~ *G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy*

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 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. So they are without excuse. 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. . . . For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

~ *Romans 1:18-22, 8:19-22*

Gen. 1:1-2:3 is a polemic against the mythico-religious concepts of the ancient Orient. If, with traditional exegetes, we understand 1:1 to assert that God created the whole universe, by implication out of nothing, this is a rejection of the common notion that matter pre-existed the gods' work of creation. The polemic, intent of Genesis is even more clear in its handling of the sea monsters and the astral bodies: for this writer they are not gods who compete with Yahweh; they are merely his creatures who display his power and skill. The concept of man here is markedly different from standard Near Eastern mythology: man was not created as the lackey of the gods to keep them supplied with food; he was God's representative and ruler on earth, endowed by his creator with an abundant supply of food and expected to rest every seventh day from his labors. Finally, the seventh day is not a day of ill omen as in Mesopotamia, but a day of blessing and sanctity on which normal work is laid aside.

~ *Gordon Wenham, Genesis*

The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

~ *Revelation 12:15-16*

The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

~ *Psalms 19:1*

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 worshippers. 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 yet visited.

~ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

We have all forgotten what we really are. All that we call common sense and rationality and practicality and positivism only means that for certain dead levels of our life we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstasy only means that for one awful instant we remember that we forget.

~ G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

Middle-class culture and middle-class religion have never handled artists well. They do not like most art because it makes them uncomfortable. The culture and religion of the middle class are designed to maintain psychological comfort and a happy-minded adjustment to life. True art disrupts this pleasant state and forces the comfortable members of the bourgeoisie to give up their illusions concerning life. In his book *One-Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse wrote that by reminding us of what is absent, art makes us discontent with what is.

~ Tony Campolo, *Partly Right*

Only mystics, clowns and artists, in my experience, speak the truth, which, as Blake keeps insisting is perceptible to the imagination rather than the mind. Our knowledge of Jesus Christ is far too serious a business to be left to theologians and exegetes alone. From the Middle Ages these professionals have monotonously neglected art and the imagination as guides to religious truth. I find myself in complete agreement with those who wish to reinstate the mystics, clowns and artists alongside the scholars. The imaginable is the believable.

~ Malcolm Muggeridge

I recall a clergyman once telling me after a wonderful concert that for the first time in his life he realized that by enjoying the beauty of the music he was obeying God, while before that experience obedience had always been associated with unpleasant tasks for him.

~ Diogenes Allen, *Spiritual Theology*

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works [*kalos ergon*—beautiful deed] and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

~ Matthew 5:16

On the wall of one of the cathedral bays at Saint John's, the one called the Poet's Corner, there is an inscription carved into the stone that quotes Willa Cather: "Thy will be done in art as it is in heaven." Amen, I say. And in plumbing and paper pushing and publishing as well. And in teaching and boardmembering and doctoring and bricklaying, for that matter. Or in whatever else it turns out is the work that you and I are given to do by the One who is looking forward to seeing our "stone" in the long-awaited Cathedral. . . . Not because we will see the Cathedral in our lifetime or even see our own work completed or because we will be hailed as the cornerstone itself, but because it is part and parcel of the reason the Dreamer sent us here.

~ Robert Benson, *Between the Dreaming and the Coming True*

One day I was trying to dig a trench for a sewer line—no small task in a world of frozen tundra. An Eskimo man whose face and hands displayed the leathery toughness of many winters came by and watched me for a while. Finally he said simply and profoundly, "You are digging a ditch to the glory of God." He said it to encourage me, I know. And I have never forgotten his words. Beyond my Eskimo friend no human being ever knew or cared whether I dug that ditch well or poorly. In time it was to be covered up and forgotten. But because of my friend's words, I dug with all my might, for every shovelful of dirt was a prayer to God. Even though I did not know it at the time, I was attempting in my small unsophisticated way to do what the great artisans in the Middle Ages did when they carved the backside of a piece of art, knowing that God alone would see it.

~ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer*

At the end of his life Renoir had arthritis so bad he had to tape the brush to his hand. He was wealthy, and people asked, "Why are you doing this?" He replied, "Pain lasts a moment; beauty lasts a lifetime."

~ Mark Brewer, *Sermon at LMCC, June 6, 2000*

Now when Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, a woman came up to him with an alabaster flask of very expensive ointment, and she poured it on his head as he reclined at table. And when the disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor." But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing [*kalos ergon*—beautiful deed] 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. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her."

~ Matthew 26:6-13