

Beauty Reconsidered

A few weeks ago I did a piece on the importance of meditating on things that are beautiful. It was a reaction to the drabness many rigidly-religious sects think is the moral way for women to appear in public. My idea came from Philippians Ch. 4, where Paul advises us on things we should fix our minds on. And the phrase that stood out to me was, "what ever things are lovely ... think on these things."

I've noticed the Mennonites and other austere sects have rejected the world's gaudy fads, preferring drab clothing, and make-up free faces.

I can see their point when I consider some of the insane fads our young people jump into – super loose clothing, wild hair colors and do's that should have been don'ts. Say nothing of choices they will regret later when they gain some common sense - like grotesque tattoos and many cosmetic surgeries.

But there is another consideration people need to make when they look at beauty more deeply. Many cite John Keats' famous lines, "Beauty is truth; Truth beauty/ That is all we know on earth,/ And all we need to know." But If that were "all we need to know," then why the sense of loss when we come away from soaking in the grandeur of the Grand Canyon, feeling there must be more: I can't keep the memory of that awesome trench in my mind forever. I can't pray to it, and climbing to get closer to it could get me killed.

In short, natural beauty seems to be a momentary tonic for our souls, but one can't eat it; thus it has to be a prompting toward something higher, a means to an end, but not an end in itself.

Among the beauty lovers who frequent galleries are a few that want to spend their whole lives basking in art's greatness. But in the end, a strange despair too often sets in.

At ten, I begged to get out of the car on out trips west so I could climb up on bluffs like the ones I saw Roy Rodgers shooting from, but all I got for my trouble were scrapes and pricks from cactus needles, bringing regrets.

Few love great scenery more than I do, but when the drinking is done, I often come away with sadness as sunsets melt into darkness or stars give way to clouds. So I've learned that it's not the scenery's beauty that I desire, but a need to visit the *maker* of that beauty.

A friend of mine in college told of visiting a poet in San Francisco he had admired. Entering his smelly apartment, he met a mean-spirited grumpy and frumpy guy he was glad to get away from. So some creators of the beautiful are not exactly lovely themselves.

To go deeper, consider what C. S. Lewis tells us about the beauty quest. "God has given us the morning star.. Ah but we want so much more ...We do not want merely to *see* beauty, we want something else which can hardly be put into words – to be *united* with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to be part of it."

So Lewis goes on to reveal that it's not sunsets, we're after, or morning stars, it's God. I've always had that conviction, especially when lying under a full-stared cloudless, moonless May night sky. I've often felt it was God I was seeking or at least a clue to the mystery of that vastness. I think Frost felt that way too when he wrote, "But no, I was out for stars;/ I would not come in even if asked, and I hadn't been"(Come In).

Consider St. Vincent Millay's matchless sonnet: "On Hearing a Symphony of Beethoven," "Sweet sounds, oh beautiful music do not cease/ Reject me not into the world again/... This moment is the best the world can give/ The tranquil blossom on the tortured stem./ Reject me not sweet sounds, oh let me live..

Solomon tells us "God has made everything beautiful in its time." And Plato thought there is an Ideal, of which earth's beauties are but shadows. I think God's put them there to prompt His sons and daughters to seek Him out. That's the effect they have on me.

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