

**Dr. James Hart**  
**B.H. Carroll Colloquy: Right Worship and Beauty**

**SESSION 3**

- D. Examples of differing degrees of participation.
- a. Jesus Christ, the refulgence of God.
  - b. The Church as the mystical Body of Christ.
  - c. The scriptures as the icon of Christ.
  - d. I Cor. 10—the participation of bread and wine in the reality of the body and blood of Christ.
  - e. All creation. Everything that **is** finds its being in God, comes from God and ultimately returns to God in worship.
- E. Participation (*koinonia*)=a means of grace (to varying degrees) that allows the created order, and particularly humankind, to reach its appointed end: eternal participation in the divine life itself through Jesus Christ. (See Hans Boersma, Heavenly Participation, p. 104)
- F. In his book “Heavenly Participation,” Hans Boersma interacts theologically with Augustine’s Sermon 227: “One of the most interesting lines in Sermon 227 says the following about consuming Christ’s body and blood [at Holy Communion (or Eucharist)]: *‘If you receive them well, you are yourselves what you receive. You see, the apostle [Paul] says, We, being many, are one loaf, one body.’* (from 1 Cor. 10:17). Boersma explains the radicality of that statement from Augustine: In partaking of the Eucharist, “...you become the body of Christ; you become what you eat.”<sup>13</sup> Alexander Schmemmann in For the Life of the World: “You are what you eat.” As we partake of the Eucharistic bread, the Body of Christ broken for the life of the world, we become the ecclesial bread, the Church, the mystical Body of Christ broken for the life of the world. Augustine drew on 1Cor. 10:17: “The bread is one; we, though many, are one body.”

*“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in*

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<sup>13</sup> Hans Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011)

*the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.” 1 Cor. 10:16-17*

“Body” occurs twice in this passage. First, it refers to the eucharistic body. Second, it refers to the ecclesial body. Of the three bodies of Christ frequently referred to in the Great Tradition (the historical physical body, the Eucharistic body, and the ecclesial body), St. Paul takes the last two and links them together. He maintains that when, by faith, we partake in the one eucharistic body (communion), the Spirit makes us one ecclesial body (the Church). As St. Augustine wrote, we become what we have received. The Eucharist, or communion, makes the church and sends it on mission.

- G. Increasing or intensifying participation in the life of the Triune God
  - a. For the life of the world.” John 6:51
  - b. Fall in love with God by being a regular, weekly communicant of Christ’s body and blood in bread and wine.
  - c. As we participate, we become the Body of Christ, broken and poured out for the life of the world.

## **8. A Beautiful Song: Re-enchanting the Gospel with Objective Beauty in Worship and Theological Discourse**

- A. One way to break through the ugliness that militates against the faith is to re-enchant ourselves and the world with the objective beauty of God.
- B. Overcoming the pragmatic sacred secular divide by embracing objective beauty in worship, theological discourse, and apologetics.
- C. A privileging of beauty is an attractive and alluring path to God.

D. Dr. Reggie Kidd: “With One Voice”

*“A theology that cannot be preached is not worth having,” I once heard a preacher declare. I can’t argue with that. Truth that can’t be applied isn’t worth bothering about... The whole premise of Christianity is that to do us any good God’s love had to come down from heaven, right here to where we live.*

*“Here’s a corollary to the preacher’s quip: a theology that cannot be sung is not worth having either. Authentic Christian faith is not merely believed.*

*Nor is it merely acted upon. It is sung—with utter joy sometimes, in uncontrollable tears sometimes, but it is sung.*<sup>14</sup>

*“Song is a means he has given us to communicate our deepest affections, to have our thoughts exquisitely shaped, and to have our spirits braced for the boldest of obediences. Through music, our God draws us deeper into a love affair with himself.”*<sup>15</sup>

Not only true with music, but with all artistic expression, even the art of doing theology. This is the role of beauty in worship and theological study and discourse—the communication and application of the truth and goodness of God that fires our hearts and souls with an intense love of God, and therefore an intense love of all mankind.

- E. Contemporary culture: A Secular Age, by Charles Taylor, describes the downward progression of secularism since the early 1500’s, in three manifestations.
- a. Secularism=not sacred
  - b. Age of Reason: secularism= a non-religious posture toward the sacred, compartmentalizing the divine life of God as separated from human flourishing.
  - c. Now, the secular stands actively opposed to the sacred through intolerance of faith. While I don’t believe in an ontological separation of the sacred from the secular, there yet seems to be a growing distance between people and communities of faith and those who privilege such ideals as rationalism, scientism, narcissism, individualism, relativism, racism, sexism, nationalism, consumerism, violence, sexual immorality, oppression, idolatry, greed and generally a culture of death. These militate against the sacred, specifically the story of the Triune God and its fulfillment in Christ and His mystical Body, the Church.
  - d. Taylor proposes that in our modern imagination, the self has become consumed with immanence and buffered against the transcendent, becoming immunized against seeing the world as enchanted by divinity. This buffered self disallows (or resists) the breaking in of the light of God.

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<sup>14</sup> Reggie Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ’s Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), p. 13

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14

- e. One way to break through the buffer: re-enchant ourselves and the world with the beauty of God.
  - f. Dietrich von Hildebrand: distinguished between the merely subjectively satisfying and the objectively valuable. Poet Dana Gioia wrote that Hildebrand “understood the centrality of beauty not merely to art but to philosophy, theology and ethics... There is no more important issue in our culture--sacred or secular--than the restoration of beauty.”
- F. Hans Urs von Balthasar advocated for a “kneeling theology” instead of the usual “sitting theology.”
- a. The most effective attainment of theological application comes through an enthusiastic embrace of objective beauty.
  - b. In *The Glory of the Lord*, Balthasar proposes a reversal of the order of the classical transcendentals, to beauty, goodness and truth. The objective beauty of God arrests, claims us, and then sends us. Together, beauty, goodness and truth reveal the very nature of God manifested uniquely and ultimately in Jesus the Christ.
  - c. Philosophers tend to come to beauty last, placing the transcendentals in the order of truth first, then goodness, and finally beauty, almost as an add-on. Balthasar was convinced that over the past 4 or 5 centuries, objective beauty had been marginalized or even neglected from theological discourse. When beauty is “made” absent through neglect or intentional marginalization, the good is no longer attractive, and ultimately the true no longer matters. Joseph Ratzinger: “to disdain or to reject the impact produced by response of the heart in the encounter with beauty as a true form of knowledge would impoverish us and dry up our faith and our theology. We must rediscover this form of knowledge. It is a pressing need of our time.”
  - d. Faith has both an objective content and a subjective disposition. Communicating the faith involves both. Faith is fundamentally the appropriation of the mysteries of the unknowable God. Beauty lifts us up into the mystery of God. It has the capacity to reach into our flesh with a purely spiritual light. Beauty conjoins immanence and transcendence, body and soul, intellect and senses, mind and heart, subject and object, supernatural and natural, even God and the world. In the Incarnation the infinite mystery of God is revealed to us in the ultimate beauty of Christ, the ultimate mediation of God. In the incarnation, the infinite God entered into human flesh and became

flesh himself. In Christ, the *unapproachable* light of Divinity is *approachable* in the Incarnate Son. Likewise, objective beauty is the enfleshment of the truth and the goodness of God. By virtue of objective beauty in Jesus Christ, truth is really true and goodness is really good.

- e. Balthasar: “Beauty is the word that shall be our first. Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an uncontained splendour around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another.”<sup>16</sup> Beauty forms the context for the true and the good, so theological discourse should start with beauty. He defines beauty as the unity of form and splendor. The simultaneity of this form and radiance results in the simultaneity of objectivity and subjectivity. In the encounter of the truly objectively beautiful, we are arrested, claimed, and sent. Ultimately, the beauty of God in Jesus Christ transforms us and then sends us to transform others by the simultaneous encounter of form, and experience of splendor, of the truth and the goodness of God revealed in Jesus Christ.
- f. Balthasar uses a classical understanding of objective beauty. Objective beauty occurs at the intersection of three things: wholeness; harmony, and radiance. When those three things converge, you have the objectively beautiful. Beauty is not synonymous with prettiness or comeliness, or that which is subjectively pleasing. Beauty arrests us, exquisitely shapes or transforms our thoughts and our hearts into Christ-likeness, then sends us on mission in obedience, to love the World to the God who is love. Resonant with the thinking of James K.A. Smith and emphasis on directing one’s affections to God. (Also Jeremie Begbie)
- g. Balthasar “Before the beautiful—no, not really before but *within* the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only ‘finds’ the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it.”
- h. Robert Webber in *Younger Evangelicals*: “Plato declared, ‘Beauty makes truth splendid.’ Beauty, whether it is that of an individual, a place, a landscape, or an environment, has the power to communicate

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<sup>16</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1986)

a sense of well-being. **Beauty is the eyesight of insight.**”<sup>17</sup> Later in that same book (212) he recounts the story of Prince Vladimir of Kiev’s delegation of followers visiting Hagia Sofia church in Constantinople. “We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth, for surely there is no such splendor or beauty anywhere upon earth. We cannot describe it to you: only this we know, that God dwells there among men, and that their service surpasses the worship of all other places. For we cannot forget that beauty.”<sup>18</sup> Webber commented that this statement points to “...the unity between form and spirit in the beauty of God’s creation.”<sup>19</sup> In his critique of an overly scientific approach to theology, such as the privileging of historical critical methodology, Balthasar wrote, “The inner sanctum of theology lies rather on the side of rhapsody than on the form of discourse that externalizes itself in distinctions and definitions.”<sup>20</sup> This is the kneeling theologian enraptured by the beauty of God.

#### G. Subjectivity of Beauty

- a. Beauty participates in the presence and glory of God, but never reaches the fullness, or infinite perfection of God’s own beauty, which is the only truly objective beauty.
- b. All earthly beauty leaves us wanting more, expecting, looking for something beyond. Beauty is sacramental, participating in varying levels in the objective beauty of God.
- c. C.S Lewis in *The Weight of Glory*, “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 worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are

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<sup>17</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002) p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1986).

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.”

- H. Any move toward objectivity of beauty is essentially a move toward God. The level to which a specific genre participates in truth and virtue determines its place on the sliding scale. I suspect that some music and art, for example, participates more vividly and viscerally in the truth and goodness of God. Beauty that seeks to *participate* in the only truly Beautiful, True and Good One begins to move toward objectivity. But it can't arrive since our world is only sacramental of a greater reality.
- I. Beauty is objective to the extent to which it participates in the only truly Beautiful One. Beauty that participates in the Beautiful One does communicate and apply the truth and goodness of God that fires our hearts and souls with an intense love of God, and all humankind.
- J. Beauty and virtue go hand in hand.
- K. God's beauty and glory are ultimately revealed "...in the face of Jesus Christ." (2Cor. 4:6). As we proclaim and re-enact and remember the story of God in Jesus the Christ, we are communicating the beauty and glory of God.
- L. So what?
  - a. Keep the Gospel of Jesus Christ at the very center of our worship and our theological discourse.
  - b. Participate in God's beauty and glory by giving attention to the full employment and embrace of objective aesthetics in our architecture, our liturgies, our preaching, in all of our worship arts, and even in our handling of scripture through interpretation and presentation. Additionally, (most importantly) we are called to live lives of beauty. That beauty is alluring and winsome to our world that is so devoid of such beauty, and living lives of beauty, goodness and truth is truly the hope for our darkened days.

- c. Joseph Ratzinger: “I have often affirmed my conviction that the true apology of Christian faith, the most convincing demonstration of its truth . . . are the *saints* and the *beauty* that the faith has generated.”<sup>21</sup>

M. Preface of the Christmas liturgy: we see that vision and rapture, form and light work simultaneously to bring us to God through Jesus Christ.

*Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give You thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*For in the mystery of the Word made flesh a new light of your glory has shone upon the eyes of our mind (Webber: eyesight of insight), so that, as we recognize in him (Jesus) God made visible, we may be caught up through him in love of things invisible (or the invisible God).*

Vision and rapture, form and light work simultaneously to bring us to God. That is the work of beauty, in the beauty of the only truly objectively beautiful one, Jesus the Christ.

And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty” (August 24, 2002). Other formulations of Ratzinger’s leading apologetics principle are found in *Feast of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 124; *The Ratzinger Report* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), pgs. 129-30; *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p. 373; and *Truth and Tolerance* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), p. 226.