Faithful Lives

"Beauty Will Save The World"

Faithful Lives

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Faithful Lives: Christian Reflections on the World is an annual journal produced by College of the Ozarks. The goal of the publication is to foster deep and substantive Christian thought in all areas of life by publishing articles that assume and explore the truthfulness of the Christian worldview perspective. Previous issues of the journal can be freely accessed on the College's website at: www.cofo.edu/Academics/Faithful-Lives.

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Michael Ashley
Stoneware with ash glaze
2024
Courtesy of the artist

Guest Editorial

"Icons of Hope for a Nation at War"

An unusual icon of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child popped up one day when I was searching the internet for modern Madonnas for a church art exhibition. Unlike traditional Eastern Orthodox depictions of *The Virgin Who Shows the Way,* where Mary points to a Man-Child Christ, seated for all eternity on her knee, the two figures in this holy artwork were posed directly opposite each other. They seemed to have stopped their conversation to turn their eyes towards the viewer, their hands touching in a gesture of intimacy. The unconventional composition was dynamic, arresting, luminous. I discovered the icon-maker was a Ukrainian artist named Lyuba Yatskiv and the website displaying the image, a gallery, unknown to me, in the West Ukrainian cultural center of Lviv.

As a collector and curator of exhibits of modern sacred art, I know from experience how difficult it can be to find commercial

The Virgin Who Shows the Way (detail)
Lyuba Yatskiv
Acrylic on gessoed wood
2022
Courtesy of the artist

venues willing to present religious works. What made the IconArt Contemporary Sacred Art Gallery in Lviv such a find was its emphasis on showcasing icons in modern variations. Scrolling through its internet pages revealed holy images made from unusual materials like glass, "found" objects, and even tapestries woven with metallic thread in addition to traditional gesso-covered wood panels. You could see these West Ukrainian icon-makers were respectful of the theological and artistic conventions of this ancient religious art form but were willing to experiment with unusual painting techniques, color palettes, and sacred subjects, drawing on both modern art and Ukrainian folk traditions.

This online introduction, almost ten years ago, to a new school of iconography in Lviv has taken my life as a retired journalist—turned art collector—in unexpected directions. Before the global pandemic and the Russian invasion, I was able to travel to Lviv three times to meet artists, view their works, and better understand my own heritage as the grandson of Ruthenian immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who, like the icon-makers, were Greek Catholics. My virtual contact with the Lviv circle of artists since the onset of the war has further deepened my understanding of the true value of sacred art, especially for a community of faith, living at the extremes. It was a privilege for me to share their works from my collection in the *East Meets West: Women Icon Makers of West Ukrain*e and *Art in Time of War* exhibitions at the College of the Ozarks, which inspired the *We Are Together: Icons of Hop*e project.

There are good historical reasons why Lviv should be the home of this unique form of contemporary sacred art. Located on the great continental divide where Eastern and Western Europe meet, this architectural gem of a West Ukrainian city has been enriched by the cultures of the Latin and Byzantine worlds, which come together in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. This dominant

We Are Together, Kateriya Shadrina, Acrylic on gessoed wood, 2022, Courtesy of the artist

faith community in West Ukraine acknowledges the Pope in Rome as head of the Church but follows the Eastern Orthodox form of worship and the veneration of icons. Straddling the crossroads of Europe, the region has seen outside overlords come and go in the modern era—Poles, Habsburg Austrians, Tsarist Russians, the Nazis, and Soviet Communists, whose official policy was to destroy Lviv's culturally-mixed religious heritage.

Stalin engineered a one-sided "merger" of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics and the Russian Orthodox Church after World War

II, turning Ukrainian property over to the Moscow Patriarchate. For over forty years the faithful risked arrest to worship in the underground. Since Ukraine became an independent nation almost thirty-five years ago, iconographers working in the new style have played a key role in helping Greek Catholics reconnect to a once-flourishing culture of sacred art-making all but lost under Communist rule. Now the Kremlin is trying once more to "russify" Ukraine, and the Lviv school of icon-makers have taken on the challenge of creating holy images that give spiritual sustenance to Ukrainians as they fight to preserve their ethnic identity and hard-won freedoms

Seven weeks after the Russian invasion in February 2022, the IconArt Gallery organized a group exhibition for the Lenten season. The title, *Waiting for Salvation,* captured the mood of fear, uncertainty, and courage mixed with hope among the Ukrainian Greek Catholic artists in the show. The capital of Kyiv held, the Russian advance was halted, and the country went on war footing. Two icons from this Lenten show by Kateryna Shadrina in the

Waiting for Salvation, Exhibition at ICONART Contemporary Sacred Art Gallery, Lviv, Ukraine, February 2022

Art in Time of War exhibition beautifully underscored the vital importance of banding together as a community in contrasting images of a gathering of the faithful and the hopeful.

The icon, *We are Together*, suggests the anguished followers of Jesus in a prayerful huddle in the aftermath of the Crucifixion, bringing to mind images of Ukrainians seeking shelter together in the Kyiv metro during Russian missile and drone attacks. One head protrudes above the confining black rectangle of present woe into the white field of eternity. Faith in the ultimate goodness of God expands into a visionary image of future salvation in the second *Tree of Life* panel, where the crouching figures have leapt to

Tree of Life, Kateryna Shadrina, Acrylic on gessoed wood, 2022, Courtesy of the artist

their feet in a joyous round dance, encircling this evergreen biblical symbol, which appears at the end of the Bible in a scene of the New Jerusalem with leaves available to all "for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2)."

At a time when support for Ukraine from the U.S. and other Western democracies has ebbed and flowed, sending "icons of hope" from American artists to the embattled Greek Catholic community in Lviv not only serves to boost their morale and provide important material support but also delivers an uncompromising message that we are truly together as sacred image makers, working with different cultural idioms, in different styles and mediums, but united in our shared faith and hope in Christ as the Prince of Peace.

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Essays

Broken Signpost: Dostoevsky on Beauty and Redemption in a Fallen World

Brad Pardue

"[B]eauty will save the world!"[1]

~ Prince Myshkin (*The Idiot*)

"Beauty is a terrible and awful thing!"[2]

~ Dmitri Karamazov (*The Brothers Karamazov*)

Fyodor Dostoevsky's writings, particularly his novels, are widely praised as some of the greatest works of nineteenth-century literature. Indeed, J.I. Packer declared, "Dostoyevsky is to me both the greatest novelist, as such, and the greatest Christian storyteller, in particular, of all time."[3] However, many readers are also likely to find Dostoevsky's writings difficult. Frederick Buechner said of *The Brothers Karamazov*, often regarded as his most significant work, "[it] is digressive and sprawling, many too many characters in it, [and] much too long."[4] Even Dostoevsky himself acknowledged this

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1 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot: A Novel in Four Parts*, Trans. Constance Garnett (New York, NY: Heritage Press, 1956), 346.

2 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Trans. Contance Garnett (New York, NY: Barnes & Nobel Books, 1995), 97.

3 Karl Nötzel, ed., *The Gospel in Dostoyevsky: Selections from His Works* (Ulster Park, NY: Plough Publishing House, 1988), *vii*.

4 Julia Roller, ed., *25 Books Every Christian Should Read: A Guide to the Essential Spiritual Classics* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), 245.

Portrait of Fyodor Dostoevsky
Vasily Perov
Oil on canvas
c. 1872
Google Arts & Culture, Public Domain
https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13499483

aspect of his prose, declaring, "For 20 years I have painfully felt, and seen more clearly than anyone, that my literary vice is . . . *prolixity*, but I can't seem to shake it off."[5]

The world that Dostoevsky depicts in his novels is often dark, and most of his characters are deeply flawed. And yet his works also explore the possibility of redemption. He believed that beauty had an important role to play in this redemptive process. In the words of Prince Myshkin, the central character in his novel *The Idiot*, "[B]eauty will save the world."[6] But in a fallen world, beauty is, to use N.T. Wright's phrase, a "broken signpost."[7] Beauty can also lead us astray or become a source of temptation. Another of Dostoevsky's characters, Dimitri Karamazov, declares, "The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious . . . [and] terrible. God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man."[8] This essay will explore Dostoevsky's complex understanding of beauty and why he believed that our desire for and experience of true beauty can ultimately be redemptive.

A Brief Biographical Sketch of Dostoevsky's Life

Fyodor Dostoevsky was born on November 11, 1821, in Moscow. He was the second son of Mikhail Dostoevsky, a doctor, and his wife Maria, who came from a merchant family that had fallen on hard times. He spent his early years in a house on the grounds of

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5 Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: A Writer in his Time*, Ed. Mary Petrusewicz (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 471.

6 Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 346.

7 N.T. Wright, *Broken Signposts: How Christianity Makes Sense of the World* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2020), 93.

8 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 97.

the Mariinsky Hospital for the Poor, where his father worked. In 1828, his father was granted noble rank, which allowed the family to purchase a small estate near the village of Darovoe.

In 1837, Dostoevsky's mother died of tuberculosis. Shortly thereafter, his father sent Fyodor and his older brother Mikhail to St. Petersburg, where Fydor was enrolled in a military academy for engineers. Further family trauma followed two years later when his father, who had given in to alcoholism, died. The official cause of death was a stroke, but rumors circulated that he had been murdered by his serfs.[9] Many of Fyodor's later stories would explore complex relationships with difficult fathers and *The Brothers Karamazov* would even pose the question, "Who doesn't desire his father's death?"[10]

Although he was studying engineering, Dostoevsky's real passion was literature. Around the time of his father's passing, he wrote to his brother that his goal was "to learn 'what life and man means' . . . I can study characters from the writers with whom the best part of my life is passed in joy and freedom . . . Man is a mystery. The mystery must be solved, and if you spend your whole life trying to solve it, then don't say you have wasted your time."[11] This brief statement effectively captures the vocation that would fuel his literary output for the next forty years.

After graduating from the academy in 1844, Dostoevsky devoted himself to writing. He published his first novel, *Poor Folk*, in 1846. It was praised by the influential literary critic Vissarion Belinsky, and

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9 Richard Freeborn, *Dostoevsky* (London, UK: Haus Publishing, 2003), 18.

10 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 646.

11 Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, 19.

Dostoevsky gained a reputation among St. Petersburg's intellectual elites. He became a member of the Petrashevsky Circle, a group whose members discussed utopian socialist ideas introduced from Western Europe. Eventually, he joined a secret revolutionary society organized by Nikolai Speshnev (Dostoevsky would later refer to Speshnev as his Mephistopheles).[12]

Unfortunately, when revolutions erupted across Europe in 1848, the government of Czar Nicholas I took a growing and hostile interest in revolutionary groups at home. On April 23, 1849, Dostoevsky was arrested along with several of his associates. He was held in the notorious Peter and Paul Fortress for four months before being marched out to face a firing squad in December. Although he did not know it at the time, the Czar had already commuted the sentence of death imposed on the accused conspirators and reduced it to four years of penal servitude in Siberia.

Dostoevsky would later offer a fictionalized account of his near-death experience in his novel *The Idiot*. Prince Myshkin says of witnessing an execution about to take place, "But the chief and worst pain may not be the bodily suffering but in one's knowing for certain that in an hour, and then in ten minutes, and then in half a minute, and then now, at the very moment, the soul will leave the body and that one will cease to be a man."[13] Myshkin then continues, "He was to be shot for a political offence. Twenty minutes later a reprieve was read to them, and they were condemned to another punishment instead. Yet the interval between those two sentences . . . he passed in the fullest conviction that he would die suddenly in a few minutes. . . . He told me that those five minutes seemed to him an infinite time, a

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12 Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 152.

13 Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 24.

vast wealth. . . . But he said that nothing was so dreadful at that time as the continual thought, 'What if I were not to die! What if I could go back to life—what eternity! And it would all be mine! I would turn every minute into an age; I would lose nothing, I would count every minute as it passed, I would not waste one!' "[14]

Early in 1850, Dostoevsky was sent to a prison camp in Omsk, Siberia. He would not return to western Russia for ten years, a period that his biographer Joseph Frank calls "The Years of Ordeal."[15] His interactions with other prisoners, most from the peasant classes, revealed to him the profound distance between the ideas of Russian liberals and radicals and the realities of Russian life. His experiences also provoked a deep fascination with the psychology of crime that would inform many of his later writings.

He was released in February 1854, after which he began compulsory service in the Siberian Army Corps. While in prison, the only book he was allowed was a copy of the New Testament. Shortly after his release, he would write a letter in which he described his Credo, "to believe there is nothing more beautiful, profound, loving, wise, courageous and perfect than Christ . . . What is more, if someone proved to me that Christ was outside the truth, and it was really true that the truth was outside Christ, then I would still prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth."[16] This deep faith would never leave him despite his many doubts.

It was during this period that he met Maria Isaeva, the wife of a drunken officer named Alexander Isaeva. Dostoevsky quickly

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[14] Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 58-59.

[15] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 161.

[16] Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, 40.

fell in love with her. After her husband's death in 1855, Maria and Dostoevsky began a relationship and were married in 1857. Shortly thereafter, Dostoevsky suffered a serious epileptic seizure, a condition that would continue to plague him for the rest of his life.[17] In 1859, he was released from military service and allowed to return to St. Petersburg, although he would remain under police surveillance until his death.

In 1860, he published *Notes from the House of the Dead*, a fictionalized account of his experiences in Siberia. This work helped to reestablish his reputation as a significant Russian writer. Frank notes, "Prison memoirs have become so familiar to us (and Russian literature is now, alas, so rich in examples of them) that one tends to forget it was Dostoevsky who created the genre in Russia."[18] Thus began a tradition that would later include the writings of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

Two years later, in 1862, Dostoevsky visited Western Europe for the first time, passing through several German states, Belgium, France, Britain, Switzerland, and various northern Italian cities. He reflected on his impressions of Europe, mostly negatively, in his "Winter Notes on Summer Impressions." He travelled to Europe again in 1863, losing most of his money at the Roulette tables in Wiesbaden and Baden-Baden. He also began an affair with a young Russian

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[17] Prince Myshkin, from *The Idiot*, also suffers from epilepsy. He says of his epileptic fits, in words that may reflect Dostoevsky's own experience, "what does it matter that it is an abnormal intensity, if the result, if the instant of sensation, remembered and analysed afterwards in health, turns out to be the acme of harmony and beauty, and gives a feeling, unknown and undivined till then, of completeness . . . Yes, for this moment one might give one's whole life" (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 208).

[18] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 361.

woman in Paris named Polina Suslova. She would inspire such later characters as Nastasia Filippovna in *The Idiot* and Grushenka in the *Brothers Karamazov*.

His wife Maria, whom he had left behind in Russia in poor health during his travels, died in April of 1864. His beloved brother Mikhail also died in July of that year, and Dostoevsky remained the primary source of financial support for Maria's son Pasha and his brother's family, a major source of economic strain.

In early 1866, he published the first two parts of his novel *Crime and Punishment* in the periodical *The Russian Messenger*. Joseph Frank says of the novel's portrayal of Raskolnikov, "Dostoevsky . . . internalizes and psychologizes the usual quest for the murderer in the detective story plot and transfers this quest to the character himself; it is now Raskolnikov who searches for *his own* motivation. This search provides a suspense that is similar to, though of course much deeper and morally complex than, the conventional search for the criminal."[19] A few years earlier, Dostoevsky had translated and published some of the short stories of Edgar Allen Poe, who was also fascinated by murder and the macabre (one thinks in particular of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart").

Dostoevsky was also working at this time on a short novel called *The Gambler*. To help him with this work, he hired a twenty-year-old stenographer, Anna Snitkina. He quickly fell in love with Anna and, even though he was twenty-five years older than she, the two were married in February 1867. In April of that year, they set out for Europe, in large part to escape his creditors.

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[19] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 484.

It was during his four years abroad that he wrote and published *The Idiot* (1868-69). He would say of this project, "For a long time I have been tormented by an idea, but I had been afraid of turning it into a novel because the idea was too difficult and I wasn't ready for it, although the idea was completely seductive and I was in love with it. The idea was—to depict a completely beautiful man."[20] During this period of writing, tragedy once again struck. Dostoevsky and Anna's first child, a daughter named Sonia, was born in Geneva in March 1868, but she died of pneumonia three months later. Dostoevsky was utterly heartbroken. The couple moved on to Italy, where he completed the final portion of *The Idiot* in 1869.[21]

Dostoevsky and Anna finally returned to St. Petersburg in July of 1871 after four years abroad. Their daughter Lyubov had been born in 1869 in Dresden. Their son Fyodor was born shortly after their return to Russia. Between 1873 and 1877, Dostoevsky published a serialized column entitled "A Writer's Diary." The series sold more than twice as many copies as his earlier works, increasing his influence among the reading public in Russia and finally providing some economic stability for the family. He even received an invitation to court from Czar Alexander II.

The Brothers Karamazov, regarded by many as Dostoevsky's greatest work, appeared in installments in *The Russian Messenger* between February 1879 and November 1880. The story centers on the

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[20] Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, 84.

[21] Frank writes of Prince Myshkin, "Both his joyous discovery of life and his profound intuition of death combine to make him feel each moment as one of absolute and immeasurable ethical tension that was (and is) the soul of the primitive Christian ethic, whose doctrine of totally selfless agape was conceived in the same perspective of the imminent end of time" (Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 579).

murder of the patriarch of the family, Fyodor, and on Fyodor's four sons: Dmitri, Ivan, Alyosha, and the illegitimate Smerdyakov. Sigmund Freud would later call the book "the most magnificent novel ever written" and would be fascinated by the complex family relationships it explored.[22] Yet even as he reached the height of his fame, Dostoevsky's health, never good, began to deteriorate. He was diagnosed with acute pulmonary emphysema, and he passed away on February 9, 1881, just four months after *The Brothers Karamazov* was complete.

Dostoevsky on Beauty & Redemption in a Fallen World

In 1868, during a visit to Basel, Dostoevsky saw Hans Holbein the Younger's *Dead Christ* (1521-22). His wife Anna later recalled, "the Dead Savior, a marvelous work that horrified me, and so deeply impressed Feodor that he pronounced Holbein the Younger a painter and creator of the first rank. . . . [T]he whole form [of Christ] is emaciated, the ribs and bones plain to see, hands and feet riddled with wounds, all blue and swollen, like a corpse on the point of decomposition. . . . Feodor, nevertheless, was completely carried away by it."[23] A reproduction of this painting hangs in the home of the character Rogozhin in *The Idiot*. As Rogozhin and Prince Myshkin study it, Myshkin declares, "that picture might make some people lose their faith," and Rogozhin responds, "That's what it is doing."[24] However, this stark depiction of Christ's death seems to have deeply resonated with Dostoevsky, whose works often grapple with the profound tension between beauty and suffering in our fallen world.

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22 www.laphamsquarterly.org/roundtable/one-can-scarcely-help-clarifying-him (Accessed: 09/04/24).

23 Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 549.

24 Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 199-200.

Beauty was a central concept in Dostoevsky's writings as he sought to make sense of the world's complexities. He has one of the characters in his novel *The Possessed* (1871-72) exclaim, "without science, without bread, life is possible—only without beauty it is impossible, for there will be nothing left in the world."[25] This sentiment encapsulates Dostoevsky's belief that beauty is not merely an aesthetic experience but is necessary for human existence. Further, beauty has a key role to play in the process and experience of redemption.[26]

For Dostoevsky, beauty can serve as a conduit to the divine, a reflection of the sacred in the mundane. However, while beauty can point towards the divine, it is always marred by the imperfections of the world.[27] For example, many of Dostoevsky's characters express a deep appreciation for the beauty of the natural world. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Father Zossima's brother, Markel, declares, "there was always such a glory of God all about me, birds, trees, meadows, sky, only I lived in shame and dishonored it all and did not notice the beauty and glory."[28] Likewise, Ivan admits to Alyosha, "though I do not believe in the order of things, still the sticky little leaves that come out in the spring are dear to me, the blue sky is dear to me."[29] And yet, the world as we all experience it is also full

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[25] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Possessed: A Novel in Three Parts*, Trans. Constance Garnett (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1913), 454.

[26] Rember Prince Myshkin's statement from *The Idiot* quoted above, "beauty will save the world!" (Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 346).

[27] Wright, *Broken Signposts*, 93.

[28] Nötzel, *The Gospel in Dostoyevsky*, 172.

[29] Ronald Osborn, "Beauty will Save the World: Metaphysical Rebellion and the Problem of Theodicy in Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov," *Modern Age*, Vol. 54, Is.

of ugliness. Indeed, most of Dostoevsky's novels are set in grungy urban environments where the beauty of nature is mostly obscured.

Dostoevsky also appreciated human beauty and many of his stories revolve around beautiful women. Nastasya Filippovna in *The Idiot* is described as "extraordinarily beautiful," and Grushenka in *The Brothers Karamazov* is "very good-looking with that Russian beauty so passionately loved by many men."[30] However, as one critic has observed, "In Dostoevsky, outward beauty saves no one and nothing: his few beauties are either demonic or simply unhappy . . . In externalized . . . beauty there is no constant and stable intention toward the Good; that outward beauty wreaks vengeance on people, for its accessibility to sight and to touch, and what is more, wreaks vengeance on itself in the form of its own overabundance."[31] The figure of Nikolai in *The Possessed*, whose physical attractiveness belies his dangerous ideas, offers a male equivalent to these female characters.[32] For Dostoevsky, physical beauty can all too easily become a source of temptation and conflict.

This reality plays out repeatedly in Dostoevsky's novels. As the cynical divinity student Rakitin observes, "A man will fall in love with some beauty, with a woman's body, or even with a part of a woman's body (a sensualist can understand that) and he'll abandon his own children for her, sell his father and mother, and his country,

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1-4 (Winter-Fall 2012): 103.

30 Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 31; Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 134. "Grushenka" comes from the Russian *grusha*, meaning "pear," and probably suggests forbidden fruit (Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, vii).

31 Konstantin Isupov, "Dostoevsky's Transcendental Esthetic," *Russian Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Winter 2011-12): 76.

32 Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 649.

Russia, too."[33] As he composed these lines, Dostoevsky may have been recalling his own affair with Polina Suslova in Europe while his first wife lay sick at home back in Russia.[34]

Dmitri Karamazov, who is captivated by the beauty of Grushenka, recognizes the profound tension in our experience of the beautiful. He declares, "I can't endure the thought that a man of lofty mind and heart begins with the ideal of the Madona and ends with the ideal of Sodom. What's still more awful is that a man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of the Madonna, and his heart may be on fire with that ideal, genuinely on fire, just as in his days of youth and innocence. . . . The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man."[35]

In his novella *Notes from the Underground*, Dostoevsky's unnamed central character talks frequently of "the sublime and the beautiful" but he ultimately rejects these ideas as romantic dreams that have no practical meaning for his life.[36] The more sympathetic (if still profoundly conflicted) character of Ivan Karamazov from *The Brothers Karamazov* also wrestles with the moral ambiguity and the suffering all around him. His fleeting experiences of beauty are not enough to reconcile him to the realities of life in this fallen world. In a chapter entitled "Rebellion," Ivan ultimately declares that he had

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33 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 69-70.

34 Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 384.

35 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 97.

36 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground and The Grand Inquisitor*, Trans. Ralph Matlaw (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1960), 50.

decided to "return his ticket" of admission to such a world.[37]

Ivan's doubts, and his sensitivity to both beauty and suffering, were clearly shared by Dostoevsky himself. Dostoevsky described himself as "a child of the age, a child of disbelief and doubt."[38] Throughout his life and in all his writings, he wrestled with what seemed to be God's "appalling absence" but also his "subterranean presence."[39] But he, like his characters Alyosha Karamazov and Prince Myshkin, ultimately affirmed that divine presence, even if it required, in the phrase often associated with his near contemporary Søren Kierkegaard, a "leap of faith." In Dostoevsky's own words, "the need for beauty develops most strongly when man is in disaccord with reality, in discordance, in struggle, that is when he lives most fully, for the moment at which man lives most fully is when he is seeking something."[40]

In the midst of darkness and suffering, Dostoevsky explores a vision of beauty that transcends the ugliness of the world. For him, beauty is a profound spiritual force capable of bringing about redemption. This beauty is most vividly expressed through acts of unmerited love and compassion, often by characters who are themselves flawed and downtrodden. A powerful example of this is found in *Crime and Punishment*, where the prostitute Sonya becomes the means of Raskolnikov's redemption. Sonya, despite her own suffering and degradation, embodies a Christ-like love that is selfless, sacrificial, and redemptive.

Dostoevsky's portrayal of Sonya and other similar characters is

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37 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 226.

38 Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, 61.

39 Roller, *25 Books Every Christian Should Read*, 245.

40 Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 308. Frank calls this "an aesthetics of transcendence."

grounded in his profound theological convictions. Central to his worldview is the belief that all humans are created in the image of God.[41] This image, no matter how marred by sin, endows every person with inherent worth and the capacity for redemption.[42] For Dostoevsky, the beauty of unmerited love—especially when it is shown by those who are themselves broken—reflects the beauty of God's grace. It is through these acts of love that the divine presence, seemingly absent in the world's suffering, becomes manifest. In this way, Dostoevsky suggests that redemption is not found in escaping the world's darkness but in engaging it with a love that mirrors the divine.

This brings us back to Dostoevsky's fascination with Hans Holbein the Younger's *Dead Christ*, which he saw in Basel, an image that never left him. Beauty for Dostoevsky is revealed in its purest form in the incarnation and in the suffering of Christ on our behalf. As he wrote in a letter in 1854, he believed "there is nothing more beautiful, profound, loving, wise, courageous and perfect than Christ."[43] When he initially set out to write *The Idiot*, he hoped in its central figure, Prince Myshkin, to depict "a wholly admirable human being," a Christ-like character.[44] Over the course of the novel, Myshkin shows himself

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41 He wrote in a letter in 1876, "Christ directly announces that in man, besides the animal world, there is a spiritual one. . . let men originate from anywhere you like (in the Bible it's not at all explained how God fashioned him from clay, took him from the earth), but it is said that God 'breathed into him the breath of life'" (quoted in Osborn, "Beauty will Save the World," 104).

42 He seems to have felt that this image was most evident in the unrefined peasants, in "the spontaneous Christian instincts of a simple Russian soul" (Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 435).

43 Freeborn, *Dostoevsky*, 40.

44 Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, vii.

to be innocent, compassionate, and willing to suffer and sacrifice for others. But it was ultimately in the person of Christ, who lived among us in this broken world, and who suffered and died for sinners, that Dostoevsky see the truest manifestation of beauty.

Conclusion

As the biographical sketch at the beginning of this essay makes clear, Dostoevsky was not, in many ways, a very appealing figure.[45] Shortly after his reprieve from execution in 1849, he wrote to his brother Mikhail, "I swear that I will not lose hope and will keep my soul and heart pure. I will be reborn for the better."[46] However, he battled depression throughout his life. He was unfaithful to his first wife and was a compulsive gambler. He also often expressed antisemitic ideas.[47] His fiction also contains some of the most compelling depictions of fallen and flawed characters in Western literature.

Through the lives of these flawed characters, Dostoevsky reveals the deep and often painful contradictions at the heart of the human experience. His writings remind us that beauty, while profound and powerful, is also a broken signpost, pointing us toward the divine but always marred by the imperfections of our world. Ultimately, for Dostoevsky, the beauty that truly redeems is not superficial but reveals itself through suffering, sacrifice, and love, most fully in the self-giving love of Christ.

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[45] Philip Yancey offers a fascinating comparison of Dostoevsky with his almost puritanical contemporary Leo Tolstoy in Chapter 6 of his book, *Soul Survivor: How Thirteen Unlikely Mentors Helped My Faith Survive the Church* (New York, NY: Galilee, 2003).

[46] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 182.

[47] Frank, *Dostoevsky*, 745, 836.

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Saw's Bane (detail)
Richard Cummings
Polyethylene and stainless steel
2023
Courtesy of the artist

MELT: A Walkthrough of the Exhibit

Richard Cummings, Michael Ashley, and Laura Ashley

the *MELT* exhibition, as the title implies, refers to the use of heat in the creation of our work. All three full-time art faculty here at College of the Ozarks require heat to melt materials for our artwork to be realized. Mr. and Mrs. Ashley use heat in their ceramic firing processes. Myself, I use heat to melt recyclable plastics into abstract paintings.

On another level, *MELT* refers to this particular exhibition as an entity unto itself. There are many different physical and visual elements present in the work. Mr. Ashley has exquisitely crafted his own rugged aesthetic in his clay vessels. Mrs. Ashley's clay forms exhibit a completely contrasting, refined aesthetic. And my own artwork presents both a contrasting media as well as a contrasting visual vocabulary. But even with our individual visual aesthetics and artistic voices, we are able to harmoniously combine our work together into a unified visual experience (in harmony with additional work by our adjunct professor, Cletus Johnson). So, we are not only melting physical materials to make the actual work; we are also melding our artistic styles into a cohesive visual exhibition.

Finally, the *MELT* metaphor may be taken one step further to include the relational, human element, where diverse individuals join together as a unified faculty to educate our students.

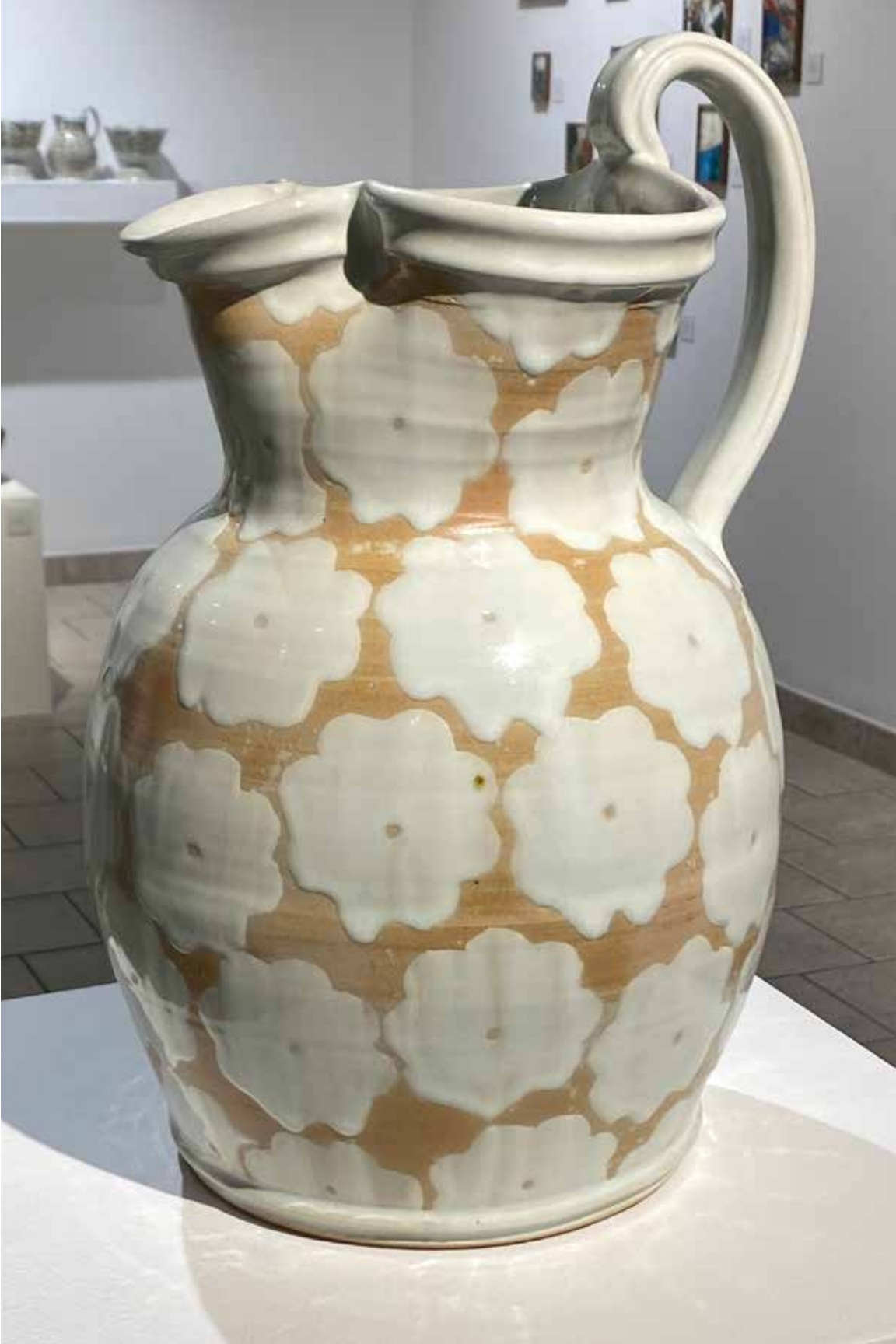
Richard Cummings — Boger Gallery director

The inspiration for my (Laura) pieces in the *Melt* exhibit came when Dr. Anne Allman gave me a vase, or something like a pitcher and basin set, that was from her mother. She gave it to me for decoration, and I just really loved how the two pieces interacted together and how the pitcher sort of nested in this basin. The set recalls utility in a way, but it's also a very important sort of centerpiece in the home. It is kind of a throwback to when people actually used pitchers in basins, but now it's become something of a decorative piece. This image is sort of the main piece that I had envisioned in my head when I started working, but it took several tries to get one that was actually satisfying.

Another aspect that shaped the work happened during the summer when I went home for a little bit, and my mom and I stayed up really late one night just talking about glass pieces that she had. We talked about how she loved the shape of different pieces and where she got them. The experience really spoke to the transformative and interactive dynamic of trading vessels, passing down vessels, and how vessels sort of disappear into the domestic space and then reappear again and reveal themselves over time. All of this draws me to pottery as an art form, and I wanted to celebrate that in these forms.

These pots were produced in a salt kin that we fired three times over the summer, and these pieces were from the last firing. The use of a salt kiln is traditionally a German style of firing where you add salt to a kiln that is around 2200 degrees. The temperature is quite hot and consequently, the salt will actually self-glaze the pot. However, it also helps the glaze run. I think that "melt" in my work is maybe a little bit quieter, but you might encounter it—like the drip of the glaze or the pull down of the glaze—the gravity of the glaze running down the pot. I was able to achieve that with help firing the salt kiln.

Large Pitcher
Laura Ashley
Salt-fired porcelain
2024
Courtesy of the artist

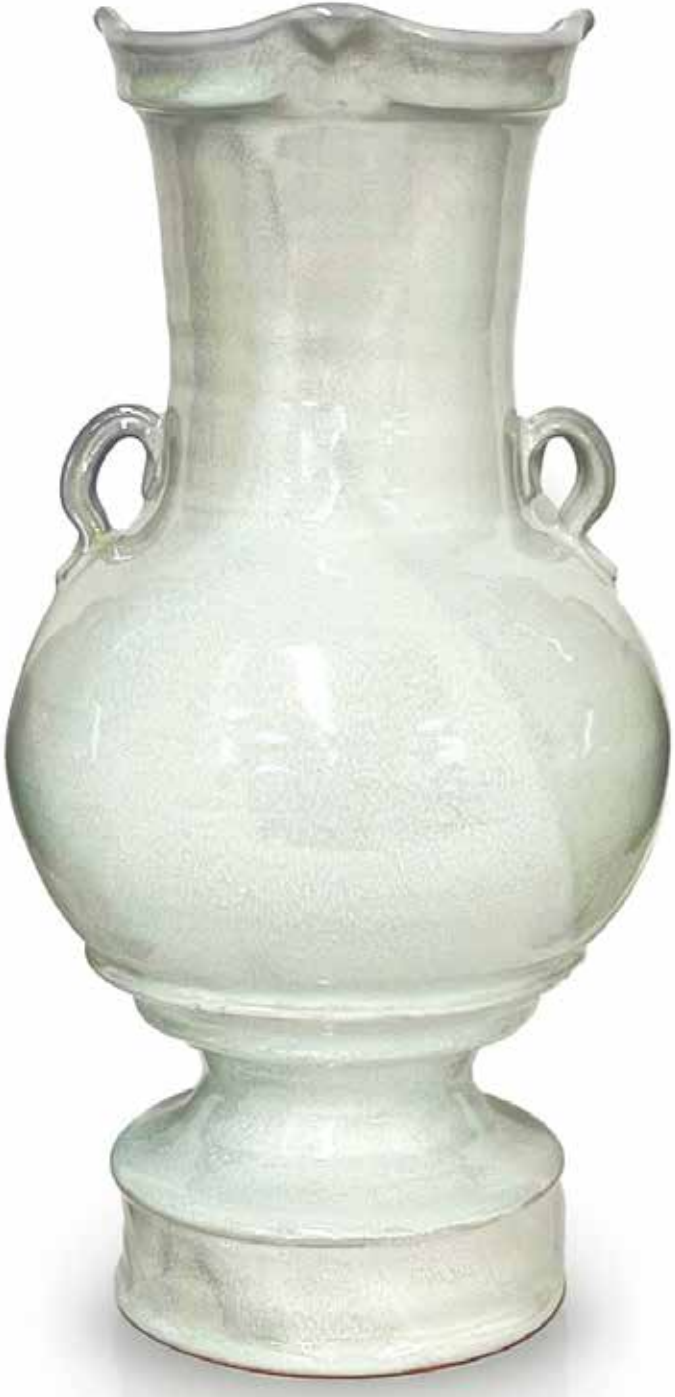


Oftentimes in my work, I think about the posture of the pots. These pots are very much anthropomorphized. I sort of see them as people. So, all the pitchers have, you know, the I'm a little teapot thing . . . they all have arms . . . they all have bodies, and necks, and faces. Whenever I'm throwing, I'm constantly thinking about an upward motion, like pulling up. So, the way that the glaze melts down is a nice contrast to this upward motion. As I'm throwing pots, I actually think more about throwing the inside because I want them to look inflated. I want there to look like there's air being held in the pots, sort of like a balloon, maybe even tension on the surface.

In thinking about pottery art and art as pottery, I view pottery—especially functional pottery—as interactions with the user or a conversation with a user. Like, I would encourage you guys to pick things up, look at the bottom. There's a wonderful moment when you're just washing the dishes and you're washing handmade work that just sort of reveals itself to you. I really wanted to—with high-fire—work with porcelain and celebrate those moments in the work.

— Laura Ashley

Footed Vase
Laura Ashley
Salt-fired porcelain
2024
Courtesy of the artist



I am a very positive person. I wake up, sing, smile. My glass is half-full. However, last year, I had a very tough year. It consisted of health problems—some serious neck and shoulder problems—and lots of doctors. Weekly appointments and rehab consumed my schedule. Moving heavy blocks of clay required immense effort. For a person who uses his body to make art, physical ailments that limit motion can be extremely challenging.

Family crises and other issues added to these health problems. All that to say, it was a difficult season.

All of last year I felt like I couldn't make anything. It was too painful. I love to fish, but I couldn't go fishing; it simply hurt too much. All of this was very hard. And while I am generally a positive person, I started to experience anxiety, depression, and panic attacks. These newfound challenges forced me to consider what it means to be grounded in gratitude no matter the season—a difficult question, but an important one. While I didn't welcome the pain that caused this wrestling, I did learn to be grateful for it, for how God used it to shape me more into the image of Christ. My own challenges caused me to grow in compassion for people who suffer from chronic pain or a debilitating injury. If I'm honest, before this season I felt like people who complained about hurting all of the time or felt they couldn't think clearly due to overwhelming anxiety were simply making a choice. They just needed to choose to make the task happen. But sometimes we truly can't make our plans happen—and that weakness or limitation causes us to wonder if we will ever be able to function the same way again. Throughout my own challenging circumstances, I learned to love my neighbor who may encounter similar—or even more severe—limitations.

The Big Eddy Platter
Michael Ashley
Stoneware with ash glaze
2024
Courtesy of the artist

I didn't just grow as a Christian during this difficult season, however; I grew as an artist. Art is about ideas. We use physical processes to create, but every creation communicates an idea. People can see the craftsmanship in it and appreciate it, but the artwork is the idea. Art comes from ideas, so the whole time I was suffering from pain and anxiety, my brain was working. Art was happening there. My mind was really active, and I was storing up colors and textures and shapes and forms—ideas. And I did lots and lots of glaze testing.

During the summer, after a year of difficulties—and still suffering from a lot of pain—my body had enough strength to engage in the physical act of making art. All of the idea work that had been fermenting in my mind for the past twelve months just all poured out into my artwork, which was really wonderful for me. In fact, everything I contributed to this show was made in one weekend. I worked day and night while my wife and others were firing the salt kiln over a weekend. All of the ideas stored in my head just came out, and I was fortunate that it was quite a volume of work. I fired it all during the work week, the first week of school, so this is really fresh. This is raw; this is new.

The process of suffering from acute pain and struggling to physically produce art has forged a new focus in my life right now—being present. For me, that means to be in this time, in this place, in this community, with my family, my friends, my colleagues and my students. Presence can be a difficult quest, but it is my aim. This focus is illustrated by the work in this exhibit, such as "Tea in the Garden" and "A Walk in a Garden"—these come from my mother and father's yard and garden. My mom has beautiful irises that are blue and purple, and she has always grown them. I just love them. There are magnolias designs on some of my work, stemming from family ties in Mississippi. Another piece in this exhibit is called "Cricket Creek Bluff." Cricket Creek is where I go in the summer

Decanter and Cup with Irises
Michael Ashley
Stoneware with ash glaze over decals
2024
Courtesy of the artist

with my fishing buddy Kenny Garrison—we go way up the creek because of the solitude found there. We fish from sunrise to sunset, taking in God's creation. We notice and point one another toward beauty in our surroundings. My friend Dan Kline gifted me with the ash that is present in every glazed pot in this exhibit, so all the surface and the texture results are connected to a real relationship. Being present—connected—in my physical, spiritual, professional, and social communities has shaped me in profound ways, and that is visible in my art. I'm grateful for the gift of seeing beauty after suffering—and even in the midst of it.

— Michael Ashley

melt plastic for art.

This creative and material reality happened quite serendipitously. I wasn't initially trying to make art by melting plastic; I was attempting to make a recycled substrate to paint on. I have always had a fascination with and have drawn close to things that are broken, discarded, and thought of as ugly or worthless. Though I was trained in painting, for twenty years I made assemblage art. That journey too began as a serendipitous revelation that led me to glorious bits of rusted metal, discarded plastic and even scraps of bone found on the sides of roads, in parking lots, and the forgotten swales of civilization. A curious byproduct of being an assemblage artist/educator is once students find out that you use a particular material, those materials just start appearing on your desk in the art department.

My journey to painting with plastic began when beloved painting and art education professor, Dr. Anne Allman retired from College of the Ozarks after forty years of dedicated service. Consequently, I was going to begin teaching the painting courses in the department. As I mentioned before, I like finding the potentials in broken, forgotten, and discarded things. So, I had it in my mind that I would create panels out of recycled plastic so that I could begin painting on these panels. Now, paint doesn't usually adhere to plastics. Plastics have what is known as low surface energy, which makes the material notoriously difficult to stick anything to, like paint. But, during an "art blowout" night in the department, where art students and faculty built simple vibrating robots that could draw patterns, I researched and discovered that if you use a blowtorch and heat up the plastic to where it shines, the surface energy becomes altered and paint can actually adhere to the plastic surface. So that was my idea. I was going to make recycled plastic panels and paint on them. It was a natural departure from but still connected to the years I

River Vessel (Ozarks Ladscapes Series)

Michael Ashley

Stoneware with ash glaze

2024

Courtesy of the artist

spent working in found-object assemblage. The problem, however, was shortly after I began making my first panel I realized just how beautiful the surface of the panel was. It had color, contrast, texture, and depth. At that moment I realized that I was actually painting with heat and recyclable plastic. But is this really painting? I thought. Well, people paint with acrylic paint. What is acrylic? Plastic. Acrylic paint is just pigment in a plastic binder. So, instead of using a paint that forms a plastic surface through cross-linking via evaporation, I just take plastics that are already chemically linked and then melt them together to make beautiful compositions. The process to me is extremely fascinating, and I really take to heart the fact that these things are societal discards; items no longer of use or value.

My work in *MELT* is a bringing together of discarded plastic bits into communities of beauty and integration. The materials that I use are humble: used Target® bags (I melt hundreds upon hundreds of Target® bags in my work). I melt Styrofoam®; like the little polystyrene peanuts that protect the contents of fragile packages, the clear, hard plastic of CD cases, and even red SOLO® cups. The piece *Gratitude for Fellowship* in *MELT* is composed of unused polystyrene cutlery left over from the faculty luncheon that is held before each semester begins. I know that the caterer is just going to throw the unused cutlery away. The pieces of plastic in the piece never realized the purpose for which they were created, a fact that saddens me a little. This object that was formed to be a fork never had the opportunity to lift morsel to mouth.

My purpose as an artist is to find the cast-aside things, see the potential and the beauty in them, and place them in community with other discarded things. It's amazing to me how there is so much potential in this world, and a lot of that potential is just cast aside because a thing is considered useless, or maybe it had a use at one time, but it is now anachronistic and no longer has a place or function.

Composition in Red, Black, Yellow, Orange and Light Blue
Richard Cummings
Polystyrene with acrylic and metal leaf
2024
Courtesy of the artist

I find that there is something truly fascinating and extraordinary created in these communities of discards. I am struck by how my artistic process becomes a metaphor for a Christian's existence. We are redeemed in our brokenness even as we have been cast aside by the world. We have had every flaw and ugliness pointed out to us over the years, and yet God takes that brokenness and says, My blood covers you. You are beautiful. Come join in my community. And, in that moment we mysteriously find our wholeness in the divine relationship to which we have been invited to participate.

One of my favorite pieces in the *MELT* exhibition is the very last piece that I made. As I mentioned earlier, students will collect things and bring them to me throughout the semester. One of the common things that students bring me are the green caps from their applesauce pouches that they get in their cafeteria box lunches. So, between the fall and spring semesters of last year, students brought me 223 applesauce caps. And I used all 223 of those applesauce caps to make the small square green piece which is part of the Quadriptych on Gratitude and is titled, quite appropriately, *Gratitude for Students*. Without the students, we would have no purpose for being at College of the Ozarks. The students make this community possible, and I am extremely grateful for the richness that students bring into our lives—into this community of broken people, where everybody has something beautiful to offer because everyone bears the image of God, even in our brokenness.

In many ways, when I find a new or interesting piece of plastic, I view it as a gift. It is a potential that was gifted to me so that I can form it into something that may even be used by the Holy Spirit to reveal and connect the Creator of the universe with an individual. Even if my work never fulfills such an aspirational prayer, the sheer enactment of our nature as creators reflects how God created us. As I live my gifted creativity out, I pray that people might come to

Halo
Richard Cummings
Polyethylene
2024
Courtesy of the artist

understand that all of this melting is really an act of worship. I tell my students, when you do the things that God created you to do in the way that God created you to do them, and you recognize where that gift comes from, what you produce, what you make, what comes out of your mind, what comes as a result of your hands becomes an act of worship, because you have done exactly what God placed you here to do.

So, *MELT* is an appropriate name for this exhibition, and it is also appropriate for all the lives that come here and the influence that we share as a community of joined individuals—all in the goal of creating something better than what we arrived with. And when we create a beautiful community from broken people, what we create is a proclamation of the promise that God has given to us. When Christ returns, everything will be made new and there will be New Creation. When we proclaim the New Creation through the gifts we have now, we are really celebrating and anticipating the wholeness that our restoration in Christ is going to bring. *MELT* captures the idea that as we live in this community, we may not be perfect, but we are being perfected through Christ as we are being transformed into his image. One day we will finally be perfected through him and realize all the wonderful, individual, and integrated aspects of who God created us to be.

— Richard Cummings

Footed Bowls
Laura Ashley
Salt-fired porcelain
2024
Courtesy of the artist

Richard Cummings is a professor of art and Boger Gallery director at College of the Ozarks.

Michael Ashley is an associate professor of art and supervisor of the clay studio at College of the Ozarks.

Laura Ashley is an assistant professor of art at College of the Ozarks.

Creativity and the Image of God

Nigel Halliday

I was recently asked to write an article for a Christian journal on 'Five reasons why art matters'.[1] The first reason I gave was that we are made in the image of God, and creativity is part of that imageness. God our Creator has made us to be creative, and the arts in their broadest sense are part of the fun of being fully human as God made us to be, in His image.

This was supposed to be an uncontroversial, entry-level piece to encourage Christians to take an interest in the arts. So I was quite taken aback when I sent the article to some of my friends, especially those leaning towards Dutch Reformational philosophy, who replied with some force: "No, no. Being 'in the image of God' refers to our function in ruling over God's creation. Any relationship between human creativity and God's creativity is merely an analogy; and, in any case, we are not really creative in the way that God is."

As one with a long interest in Dutch Reformational thought, quoting Kuyper and sympathizing with Dooyeweerdian modal aspects, I was quite surprised by the emphatic conviction and consistency of their responses. I felt a little foolish, as though I had carelessly wandered off-side and let the team down. My friends pointed me to Richard Middleton's book *The Liberating Image* to set my thinking straight.[2]

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[1] Nigel Halliday, "5 Reasons Why Art Matters (Whether It Has a Capital "A" or Not)," *The Big Picture* 8, Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology (November 2023), 3-6.

[2] J. Richard Middleton: *The Liberating Image: The* Imago Dei *in Genesis 1* (Grand

Trinity (from the CIVA SILVER Codex)

Edward Knippers

Two-color woodcut

2004

Courtesy of the artist

But the effect of reading it, as I explain here, has been to convince me that our being in the image of God is not so easily defined: rather, it seems to me fundamentally rich and multi-faceted, a source of wonder and delight, like a work of art itself—and creativity is part of that imageness after all.

In What Way Are We 'In the Image of God'?

Middleton helpfully summarizes three ways in which Christians have understood what it means for us to be made in the image of God:

Substantial: for a long time, Christians held that there was something in our very substance that is like something in God. This would usually be identified as rationality, freedom of choice, emotion, and/or creativity.

Relational: based on the juxtaposition in Genesis 1:27 of "in the image of God he created them" and "male and female he created them," Barth and others argued that it is in our relationality that we are in the image of God.

Functional: based on the juxtaposition in Genesis 1:26 of "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" and "and let them rule . . . ," a combination of ideas repeated in verses 27 and 28, this view holds that being made in the image of God means our God-given function to rule over creation as the Lord's representatives or agents in the world.[3]

Middleton also emphasizes how little the Bible offers to help us unpack and explain what it means to be in the image of God. Historically, most interpretations tend towards isogesis, as writers simply read back into

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Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005).

[3] Middleton, *The Liberating Image* 17ff. See also p. 26.

the concept of "image" whatever they choose to highlight in their own humanity that differentiates them from the rest of God's creatures.[4] He commendably admits that he is, as much as any writer, in danger of tendentiousness in preferring one interpretation over another; and he recognizes that the functional interpretation is particularly favored among Kuyperians because it fits neatly with their emphasis on the cultural mandate.[5]

That said, he strongly backs the "functional" explanation, this being, he says, the growing consensus among twentieth-century Old Testament scholars:

The cumulative evidence suggests that the biblical *imago Dei* refers to the status or office of the human race as God's authorized stewards, charged with the royal-priestly vocation of representing God's rule on earth by their exercise of cultural power.[6]

Middleton makes the good point that the substantialist argument ignores our physicality: if our imageness reflects aspects of the Lord's being, then it must—by definition—be non-physical. But, he objects, the common understanding of 'image' in OT times would be of an idol in a temple: so our being made in the image of God must surely involve our physical existence, as God's living representatives in the world.[7] This obviously ties in with the OT prohibition of making images of God, not just because we are to worship God as He is in reality and in the ways and places that He ordains; but because the OT is looking forward to the coming of Jesus, who *is* himself the image

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4 Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 18.

5 Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 31, 32, 35.

6 Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 235.

7 Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 24.

of God (Colossians 1:15), while we are only *in* the image of God. Middleton's functionalist argument is also supported, throughout a substantial proportion of the book, by his research exploring analogies with images and gods in other cultures around OT Israel.

But, as William Lane Craig observes, Middleton seems to undermine his own case by conceding that to fulfil our function of filling and ruling the earth (that is, building a culture), we need a host of other necessary capacities. Ruling the earth and building an ever-growing civilization implies a created order in constant state of development, involving changes that need to be considered and judged. We need rationality, self-awareness, relationality, morality, imagination, exercise of the will, and creativity.[8] But these are the very qualities highlighted by the exponents of substantialism, which also seem to match qualities that the Lord has and members of the animal kingdom do not. As Craig goes on to assert, the substantialist argument is quite compatible with the functionalist argument; and in practice the functionalist argument seems to presuppose the substantialist one. We need—among other things—creativity in order to rule.

Indeed, Middleton repeatedly connects the Lord's ruling and the Lord's creation. When Genesis 1 asserts that we are made in the image of God, this must, he says, mean as a bare minimum "that the human vocation is modeled on the nature and action of the God portrayed in Genesis 1."[9] But this minimal definition therefore must surely point not just to ruling but to creating. Later on, seeking to

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[8] William Lane Craig: "Doctrine of Man (Part 4): Evaluating Construals of the Image of God," 29 January 2020. https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-doctrine-of-man/doctrine-of-man-part-4. Accessed 25 October 2024.

[9] Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 60.

distinguish the Lord's use of power from power in the hands of sinful humanity, Middleton says that this idea of "rule" is not just about power. It "integrally includes . . . wisdom and artful construction. The God who rules the creation by His authoritative word is also the supreme artisan who constructs a complex and habitable cosmic structure."[10] He later returns to this theme when summarizing his argument: God, he says, is pictured as "both artisan and ruler . . . bringing into being a wisely crafted world through the exercise of royal power."[11]

I can see the argument:

God is creative.

We are creative.

Therefore, creativity is part of our being made in the image of God.

Such argumentation has the formal hallmarks of a false syllogism. But to argue that being "in the image of God" consists in our function of ruling the creation under God, and that therefore our rational, volitional, imaginative and creative capacities are, by definition, *not* part of our being made in the image of God, even though they are capacities necessary for ruling, shared by God and apparently not shared by the rest of creation, seems perverse. Surely ruling and creativity go together.

Do We Have to Choose?

Reading Middleton, I began to wonder if this is a case of systematic theology digging itself into a hole that does not need further excavation. At the Reformation there was a need to counter the distinction

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[10] Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 89.

[11] Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 271.

that Roman Catholicism had drawn between "image" and "likeness." Aquinas had argued that the Fall had affected us only in our "likeness" to God, which he took to be our supernatural aspect. However, in our being in the "image" of God, he argued, we were ontologically like God—of the very same substance—and therefore in those aspects, especially our reason, uncorrupted by the Fall. The Reformers rightly insisted that "image" and "likeness" were a Hebraism referring to the same thing, and the Fall has affected every aspect of our being.[12]

However, to go on seeking more and more precise definition of "image," although obviously an intellectual itch we continue to scratch, may be seeking clarity where Scripture offers none. I wonder if we might instead find more joy with biblical theology, which encourages us to let the unfolding of the Bible story shape our theological formulations. Biblical theology might prod us to wonder why, since being made in the image of God is such a big deal, the Lord seems to leave its definition so undeveloped.

The opening chapters of Genesis refer to "image" three times, each reference having a different nuance. Only in Genesis 1 is it linked to ruling. In Genesis 5:3 the new-born Seth is said to be in Adam's own image, which does not involve delegation or representation, but more likely points to his inherited sinfulness. Then in Genesis 9:6 we are reminded that mankind is made in the image of God as a warning against shedding human blood, the implication of which is to reinforce the inherent value of human beings. A strictly functionalist reading of 9:6 would imply that our value is in what we do, rather than in who we are.

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[12] Graeme Goldsworthy: *In These Last Days: The Dynamics of Biblical Revelation: Biblical and Systematic Theology in the Service of Understanding Scripture* (London: Apollos, 2024), 149–50, 263, 268.

As Christopher Watkin writes in *Biblical Critical Theory*, there are clear consequences that follow from our imageness: it immediately establishes our worth and forms the basis of our identity.[13] But then, he suggests, we are left to explore, in a rich, multi-faceted way, what else might be involved.

Perhaps all three options for understanding image are simultaneously correct. As Watkin underlines, it is in the nature of God, of His creation and of His word to be rich and multi-faceted, just as God's grace is "multi-colored (1 Peter 4:10), inviting and rewarding endless exploration, in contrast to modernism which is 'encumbered … by its desire for logical certainty."[14]

In his new book seeking to unite biblical and systematic theology, Graeme Goldsworthy appears to tread this path, referring repeatedly to our being made in the image of God, but declining to define it. He refers to ruling as being "an aspect of the image of God," but he also emphasizes that we are made not only to rule but to relate to God in love and fellowship, and to one another in marriage and community. For this to be the case, we need to be endowed with capacities that God himself has, to hear and speak, to relate and to love.[15] It seems very difficult to mark a distinction between what being made in the image of God requires us to do, and what doing that requires us to be.

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[13] Christopher Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*: *How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), 86–95.

[14] Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 61. See also p. 86. On the reductivism inherent in modernism, see Patrick Deneen: *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

[15] Goldsworthy, *In These Last Days*, 283, 483, 550, 569.

In the opening chapters of *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach's classic study of realism in literature, he compares Greek myths with biblical stories. He argues that Bible stories miss out a mountain of narrative detail that Greek writers would have supplied. This, he suggests, is deliberately done in order to invite readers of the Bible to enter the text imaginatively, and ponder the richness of its implications for themselves, in ways that Greek myths never did, because they did not directly implicate the lives of their hearers or call them to personal response.[16]

I suspect that in a similar way Genesis 1 may leave our imageness so vaguely defined because it is something we are to explore and understand by experience, in a way that is never complete. If ruling and creating go together in the work of God, it seems reasonable to see our imageness as encapsulating not just the function of ruling but all those other qualities and capacities that the Lord Himself has and that are required in subduing, ruling, and filling.

Creativity Misused

I have also come to suspect that behind the functionalist view may be a commendable humility, seeking to downplay human creativity in the face of the hubristic modern world, where it is widely misused and misjudged.

Nowhere is that hubris more clearly seen than in the glorification of "creativity" in modern art, with the artist promoted to modern-day prophet and novelty becoming the *sine qua non* of art. In his recent *Art Rethought*, Nicholas Wolterstorff traces out how the art world of the last fifty years has been overrun by what he calls "art-reflexive"

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[16] Erich Auerbach: *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), especially chs. 1-2.

art, fixating on the question of "What counts as art?" Here novelty is its own justification, as artists constantly test the boundaries of what can be admitted to the artistic arena.[17] The functionalist view certainly reminds us that whatever we create should be under the Lord, and for His glory.

The idea of artists being "creative," however, has been with us for much longer. The ancient Greeks thought of poets as creative: the word "poet" derives from the Greek word ποιέω (*poieo*): "to make." Painters and sculptors were not viewed so highly because Greek dualism tended to look down on those who got their hands dirty: painters and sculptors were seen as mere molders and shapers. Renaissance thinkers, consciously reviving Platonic thought, rediscovered the idea of poets as creative, but, needing to square paganism with the prevailing rule of Christianity, they married it, ironically, with a functionalist interpretation of the image of God. This resulted in a belief in a "godlike power that humans exercised on earth." They "imagined a creative, transformative energy by which humans (in imitation of God's own creative activity) shaped earthly life through cultural-historical action, whether in city-building, alchemy, politics, scholarship, or the arts, the latter gradually extended to include visual artists."[18]

However, it was in the Enlightenment that the idea of "artist as creator" really took off in an unhelpful direction. This was partly because the Creator God was precluded from discussion, and creativity had to be

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[17] Nicholas Wolterstorff: *Art Rethought: The Social Practices of* Art (Oxford; University Press, 2015), see chs. 17-18. Wolterstorff sees this move as an interesting development that shapes how we think about "art," whereas I see it as a parched desert into which modernism has been led by its presuppositions and commitments.

[18] Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 29. See also p. 35 n. 66.

found in another source. But also, as church and other institutional patronage fell away, the art market itself changed. Artists had to make works on their own initiative, and then find a buyer. This tended, over time, to put emphasis on the artist's unique personality, their vision and "creative genius."

The idolization of human creativity grew to a crescendo through the nineteenth century towards early Modernism. The Romantics gave primacy to the strength of their own emotions. The Impressionists and Expressionists, still producing beautiful works rooted in representation of the physical world, nevertheless foregrounded their individual experience of the world and responses to it.

Then in the early years of the twentieth century, you can almost sense the frisson as Picasso and Braque move from Analytical Cubism, in which the facets of the painted image are still derived from the reality of the subject, to step into Synthetic Cubism, where images are conjured up *de novo* from visual clues that the artist decides to include. Meanwhile, Kandinsky and Mondrian are moving into the complete novelty of non-representational painting: out of nothing—represented by the blank canvas—they conjure up forms that supposedly address the human soul.

For some, this humanistic optimism abruptly hit the buffers in the First World War. The British Official War Artist Paul Nash ironically entitled his painting of the churned Flanders mud as "We Are Making a New World."[19] However, in revolutionary Russia the optimism continued: El Lissitsky, for instance, made visually stunning works with titles like

[19] Paul Nash (1889–1946), "We Are Making a New World," (1918; oil on canvas, 71.1 x 91.4 cm; London: Imperial War Museum).

"The New Man."[20] In France and Germany many abstract artists of the 1920s intersected with modernist architects such as Corbusier and Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus who, with an often disastrously misplaced confidence, believed they were designing a new world for a new humanity. This emphasis on novelty and personal creativity persisted through the drama of Abstract Expressionism and the mind-numbing tedium of Post-Painterly Abstraction.

As Wolterstorff describes, underpinning these developments in art is what he calls "the grand narrative" of the arts, a deeply humanistic and hubristic story of progress, in which writers such as Clive Bell and Clement Greenberg drew on Kant and Hegel to argue that, in Modernism, "Art" was progressing to find its true identity. Freed from any utilitarian end such as narrative, meaning, representation and, perhaps most importantly, morality, art was instead to be appreciated purely aesthetically. There was a kind of aristocratic element about this, since such appreciation required sensibilities that not everyone might have, but, thankfully, Bell and Greenberg and their circles had them in abundance.[21] The "grand narrative" was never universally held. I remember at an art historians' conference in the 1980s listening to Charles Harrison arguing that a work of art might be explained as simply, "He did it for the money."[22] And over the past 50 years the "grand narrative" has proved unable to account for Conceptual Art. But the whole period is spanned by an idolization of unconstrained human creativity, as if wisdom, beauty and the joy of creativity were simply expressions of our own cleverness.

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[20] El Lissitzky (1890–1941), "New Man," (1923; colour lithograph, 33 x 33.7 cm).

[21] See Wolterstorff, *Art Rethought*, especially ch. 3.

[22] See also Michael Baldwin, Charles Harrison, Mel Ramsden, "Art History, Art Criticism and Explanation," *Art History* 4:4 (December 1981): 432-56.

Creativity Humbled

But the fact that some non-Christians use their creativity, unsurprisingly, in ways that do not honor the Creator, should not detract from our celebration of our creativity as part of being made in the image of God. Human creativity need not be a challenge to the rule of God, but a humble acknowledgement of how He has made us to be, and a means to fulfil His calling for us to subdue and fill the earth.

There are differences, of course. The Lord creates *ex nihilo*; we only create out of what He has created. Also, He created perfectly, by just a word. We create by our wills, but not with that authoritative precision. Most of our making involves trial and error, experimentation and discovery. Very rarely does the end product of our efforts look much like what we envisaged when we started. Usually, our creation is marked by a sense of dissatisfaction, if not disappointment, and a determination to keep on trying.

We create in subjection to our own Creator, but we do create. We make things that the Lord did not. Tolkien described us as "subcreators"; others describe us as improvising on the materials that God has given us.[23] We make arrangements in this world that the Lord did not. We make up stories that have never been told. We write music that has never been heard before. Our freedom and creativity is constrained—or should be constrained if we are living under the Lordship of Christ—but it is still real.

In addition, this creativity is part of how we answer our calling to rule the earth. As Watkin observes, when Adam names the animals he is constrained by what God has made, but he is also exercising

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[23] Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 96–98.

intellectual and creative freedom: he is not simply transcribing names dictated by God.[24] And God is *interested* in what Adam will choose to do: the Lord, we are told, brought the animals to Adam "to see what he would name them" (Gen 2:19). Wheat, Ellis Potter points out, naturally grows along riverbanks, mixed in with other plants. Humanity's decision to make wheat grow in fields, separated from other plants, is "artificial," the result of human artifice. It is an imaginative, creative intervention by human beings in the world, different from how God originally made it.[25] The Lord has made us to do new things in His world.[26]

The Joy of Faithful Creativity

Creativity is part of the way God has made us to be like Him, and to fulfill His mandate to rule over the earth, to subdue it and fill it. This leads, I think, to an open-ended list of delightful consequences. Let me suggest a few.

Firstly, novelty, under God, is a good thing. Modernism's pursuit of progress was really a Christian heresy: unchained from worship of God, our culture pursues change and growth as an end in itself, congratulating itself on its own genius, just as modern art values

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[24] Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 99.

[25] Ellis Potter, *Staggering Along with God: An Interview Biography* (Destinée Media, 2018), 111.

[26] A recent cartoon in the London *Guardian* (*Saturday Magazine,* 28 September 2024, 78) showed the Lord trying to come to terms with Adam and Eve's decision to resurface the Garden of Eden with astroturf. They explained that it was easier to maintain, especially as Cain and Abel, seen pummeling each other in the background, had been churning up the grass playing soccer.

novelty as a justification in its own right.[27] But this does not make creativity and change in themselves a bad thing. Quite the opposite: we cannot build a culture or achieve anything without them. In Isaiah 43:18 the Lord himself rejoices to be doing "a new thing," and Jesus has brought in a new covenant with better promises (Heb 8:6).

Our creativity, like every aspect of our lives, serves a purpose. It is part of our worship and service of our Creator God, and the fulfillment of our role as stewards of the earth. But secondly, we should try to avoid a narrowly utilitarian view that creativity must always have a serious end in view. There is a proper joy to be found in creativity itself, for this too reflects the Lord's own attitude to His creation. C. S. Lewis , I think, is suggesting this when he has Aslan *singing* creation into being in *The Magician's Nephew*.

There is, as Watkin argues, a glorious pointlessness to our creativity, which echoes God's creation. The Lord was not bound to create, nor—a big debating point in the medieval origins of modern science—was the shape of His creation bound by other constraints, such as Aristotelian "forms."[28] There is a wonderful freedom in the Lord's creation and, as Loren Wilkinson in *Circles and the Cross* points out, we often overlook the sheer joy that the Lord takes in His creation for its own sake.[29] Creativity can just be fun. Lincoln Harvey makes an interesting, parallel argument for why we enjoy sport. It is the sheer pointlessness of games and the arbitrariness of the rules we choose that makes them fun. We could, for instance, conceive of a game like soccer where two balls are in play at the same time. It actually sounds

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27 See Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 525.

28 Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 63.

29 Loren Wilkinson, *Circles and the Cross: Cosmos, Consciousness, Christ, and the Human Place in Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023), 80.

like an interesting game, but it is not soccer, where, if a second ball comes onto the pitch, the game has to stop until it is removed. Those are the rules. We could have chosen different rules, which would make a different game. The enjoyment of playing is bound up with our freedom to make up the game rules. In some small way, Harvey argues, this echoes the joy the Lord has in His own unconstrained creation.[30] Art and sport are also alike in the way they can be corrupted into something ugly by money.

Thirdly, following from this sense of gratuity in creation, there is in creativity something of love and gift.[31] Unforced by outside necessities, God has freely chosen what He would create. It is characterized by richness and variety, and comes with His blessing that it may flourish and grow. It is entrusted to us for our care and enjoyment as a gift. In our own creativity, although we can doodle and make things for our own enjoyment, mostly we make things to share with others. We pay more attention to the decoration of rooms or the preparation of meals that we share with others, rather than ones that are only for ourselves. We tell stories and jokes to others. We listen to each other performing music. There is something sad about a completed novel that hasn't been published. We channel so much of our creativity into making things for others to enjoy, and we offer them as gifts, in love.

My fourth point follows as a consequence. I have argued elsewhere that beauty is a great Christian apologetic;[32] and so too, I think, are imagination and creativity. Although our culture takes these for granted, they have no logical role in a materialist universe bound by

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30 Lincoln Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport* (London: SCM Press, 2014).

31 Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 61.

32 Halliday, "5 Reasons," 3-6.

purely physical laws. Freedom, choice and individualism are necessary for creation and our delight in creativity.[33] The daily choices we make about how to dress, how to wear our hair, how to arrange our work space or dining table, bring charm and delight into our lives because they are not the product of iron necessity, nor do they seem to assist us in a Darwinian struggle to survive, but are freely made by creative individuals, living out what we have been made to be by our loving, creative Father.

Finally, the Fine Arts—that branch of creativity that intentionally creates images that encapsulate and explore our ultimate commitments[34]—are also a means of fulfilling our calling to "subdue the earth." They are a means to explore aspects of human life and experience, as fallen creatures of a holy God. At a most basic level, for instance, drawings and paintings of the world around us help us to see what is there: they draw our attention to things we might have missed. Especially in our fallen state, where aspects of the world can seem alien, even hostile, an artist, by careful, purposeful looking at something we prefer to pass by unnoticed, can make it more familiar, and therefore less alien. Calvin Seerveld has argued for many years that we need to recapture this idea of the artist as one who serves their community, creating beautiful things that invite us to constructive, imaginative observation and engagement.[35]

Works of art, such as paintings and sculptures, which more profoundly

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[33] Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 38.

[34] I am here following Hans Rookmaaker. See my 'Rookmaaker and Art Theory', *The Big Picture* 3, Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology (Hilary 2022), 13–16; and, "5 Reasons."

[35] See, for example, Calvin Seerveld: *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves: Alternative Steps in Understanding Art* (Carlisle: Piquant, 2000).

explore our fundamental beliefs are not only constrained by the materials God has made for us, but by the truth that is in Christ. Properly exercised under God, they help us to explore our experience of life, or to engage with something we have never thought of before. They can help us to interrogate our values, to gain a richer engagement with the stories that underpin our identity, to celebrate our Creator. All of these are part of the way we fulfil our calling to subdue and fill the earth through human culture under God.

Conclusion

I am increasingly convinced that a biblical-theological understanding of our being made in the image of God points us away from a single definition. Like God's creation itself, and like a work of art, our imageness is intrinsically rich and multi-faceted. This is frustrating to our desire for definitional clarity but is exciting for our lived experience as creative rulers of the world, under God who loves and delights in His creation, and calls us to do the same, while continuing to form and fill it with love and generosity.

Nigel Halliday trained as an art historian at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and the Courtauld Institute, London, where he gained his PhD in research on responses to Cubism and Surrealism in Britain in the 1920s and 30s. He then worked for many years as a church leader, while continuing to teach and to write on Christianity and art. His current research explores the influence of the Reformation on Michelangelo's later works.

Irresistible Beauty: The Untapped Role of Beauty in Christian Apologetics

By Daniel Blackaby

"The time for beauty is over." So declared the nineteenth-century French novelist Gustave Flaubert. "Mankind may return to it," he continued, "but it has no use for it at present. The more Art develops, the more scientific it will be."[1] Many modernist artists shared his sentiment, and beauty was toppled from its lofty pedestal as an ideal worthy of artistic pursuit.

Christians have lamented the artistic abandonment of beauty and found many of the modern replacements a poor substitute. Yet, in many ways, the church has inadvertently adhered to Flaubert's worldview. The church gives lip service to the importance of beauty while functionally holding it at a distance, the proverbial unruly step-sibling of Truth and Goodness. In our current age, beauty often is allotted no more prominent role in our theology, evangelism, and apologetic discourse than it was in the science-inspired art of the modernists. Akin to the elves in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, beauty is a diminished relic of a bygone era, worthy of reverence even as the world advances into the future without it.

Flaubert foreshadowed an eventual return to beauty. The time is now ripe for that restoration. In recent decades, the discipline of Christian apologetics has failed to provide a seat at the table for

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[1] Gustave Flaubert, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert: 1830-1857*, trans. Francis Steegmuller (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1980), 158.

Pride (detail)

Linnéa Gabriella Spransy

Acrylic on Canvas

2022

Courtesy of the artist

beauty. Nevertheless, in the wake of a post-industrial era, there is incredible redemptive power in beauty to reach the emerging generations. People yearn for beauty because they yearn for God, the source of all beauty. A culture that longs for beauty is a culture primed to receive the Christian gospel. For a time, it may have been prudent for Christian apologists to temporarily set aside beauty and aesthetics to follow unbelievers into their chosen arena of rationality and science. But if the apologetical mission is to be effective in the days ahead, Christians must learn to communicate a Gospel that is true, good, *and* beautiful.

A Beautiful Opportunity

In the closing words of his famous work, *On the Origin of Species,* Charles Darwin stepped outside the scientific and into the aesthetic to emphasize the beauty of the natural world: "From so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved."[2] In his follow up work, *The Descent of Man,* he uses the words "beauty" and "beautiful" 280 times.[3] Darwin was captivated by beauty, even as he labored to account for it through the narrow confines of his naturalistic worldview.

In a fascinating turn of events, in diaries written near the end of his life, Darwin lamented that he had lost a taste for the beautiful: "My mind seems to have become a kind of machine."[4] Beauty

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[2] Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), 384.

[3] Amy Maxmen, "Come Mate with Me," *Nature,* October 7, 2015, www.nature.com/articles/526S8a.

[4] Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin: 1809-1882,* ed. Nora Barlow (New York: W. W. Norton, 1958), 139.

tormented him. In a letter to a colleague, he hastily dismissed the philosophical challenge of the irreducible complexity of an eyeball, only to famously admit a few paragraphs later that the inexplicable beauty of a peacock's tail feathers "makes me feel sick."[5] In fact, Darwin's laborious attempts to account for beauty led him to create a new theory of "sexual selection" that was so far outside the framework of his original theory of natural selection that even some of his contemporaries, ironically, deemed Charles Darwin himself as a traitor to Darwinism.[6] By discarding a theistic worldview, he had removed the only firm foundation upon which a satisfying explanation for beauty could be built.

Beauty has always posed a serious philosophical challenge to an atheistic worldview. Despite this, many Christian apologists have been oddly reluctant to walk through that open door of opportunity. Not only has beauty been underutilized, in many cases it has hardly been deemed worthy of consideration at all. In Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli's influential *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, "beauty" is altogether absent from the index, and only one page is devoted to the "argument from aesthetic experience." In his blunt dismissal of the subject, atheist biologist and philosopher Richard Dawkins is equally brief, allotting only a scant page and a half to the topic in *The God Delusion*.[7]

The Christian community has ignored beauty to our own detriment,

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5 Charles Darwin, "Letter from Charles Darwin to Asa Gray, April 3, 1860," in *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin,* vol. 2, ed. Francis Darwin (London: John Murry, 1887), 296.

6 G. J. Mivart, "Review of *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relations to Sex* by Charles Darwin," *Quarterly Review* 131, no. (July) (1971): 48.

7 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008), 110.

even while the Church has been rapidly losing its cultural footprint. But the door remains open, and believers must seize the opportunity to enter it. The truth of the Gospel is unchanging, but the cultural context in which Christians are called to communicate that truth is constantly in flux. As philosopher Carl Trueman asserts: "The task of the Christian is not to whine about the moment in which he or she lives but to understand its problems and respond appropriately to them."[8] The current culture is primed to hear the truth of the Gospel communicated through the language of beauty. To effectively engage in apologetics today, Christians may do well to take a cue from Darwin himself and focus less on complex eyeballs and more on beautiful tail feathers.

Apologetics in a Shifting Cultural Terrain

The 2014 film *God's Not Dead* was a surprise Hollywood success, grossing an impressive $64.7 million at the box office. The movie provided an enlightening snapshot of the church's current mindset toward apologetics. Apologetics was presented as an academic battle, waged within university classrooms as Christians and atheists went blow-to-blow, debating conflicting truth claims through the shared language of logic, reason, and evidence.

That modern paradigm to apologetics was born largely as a reaction to the pervading cultural climate. The conception of apologetics as an exclusively rational endeavor was largely formulated in response to the emerging New Atheist movement of the early 2000s, as atheist champions like Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher

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[8] Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 30.

Hitchens, and Daniel Dennett penned best-selling books and garnered large followings of people angry at or disenfranchised with religion. In response, many intelligent Christians rose to the occasion and responded persuasively, following their opponents onto the battlefield of their choosing, which was the realm of science, reason, and empirical evidence. The obstacles standing in the way of skeptics appeared to be primarily intellectual, and so Christians targeted such questions directly. The titles of the books published during this time reflect a clear theme: *Reasonable Faith, Faith Has Its Reasons, The Reason For God, Faith and Rationality,* etc.

The devoted work of these rational-minded Christian scholars should be commended. There remains a crucial need for such thinkers in a postmodern culture that questions the very notion of objective truth. At the same time, such an approach to apologetics was never intended to be a one-size-fits-all template. The word "apologetics" derives from the Greek word *apologia* used in 1 Peter 3:15. It is often translated as "answer" or "defense." To "give an answer" presupposes a question. Christians are not just to memorize and recite arguments to an unbelieving world; they are to respond appropriately to the specific questions nonbelievers are asking. The classical cosmological argument for God's existence may be a philosophically sound argument, but it is not an effective answer if nobody is asking that question. When the pressing questions of a culture alter, Christian apologists must be willing to adapt accordingly.

In our recent publication, *Straight to the Heart: Communicating the Gospel in an Emotionally Driven Culture*, Mike Blackaby and I explore the significant ways that the apologetic context and subsequent questions have shifted in recent years. We argue that the current cultural landscape that serves as the backdrop to our apologetic encounters has changed from a "Head Culture" to a "Heart Culture." Humans have always been a mixture of head and heart (rationality

and emotions), but a Heart Culture has elevated the affections to a place of authority. Heightened passions rule the day, and shared objective standards of truth are being redefined as a more subjective sense of "my truth." One of the fastest growing religious demographics today is not atheism, but the so-called "Nones."[9] These Nones reject the major established religions, but often remain deeply spiritual. They have observed the battles between intellectual Christianity and the cold rationality of Atheism, and found neither appealing; so, they fashioned their own ambiguous, quasi-religious spirituality that more closely resonates with the desires of their hearts.

In a similar way, a growing movement called "deconstruction" has led many within the church to reevaluate their religious beliefs and experiences. The catalyst for these deconstructionist journeys is not necessarily exposure to new information, evidence, or logical argumentation, but rather they are a visceral emotional response to hurtful experiences within the church. Our book summarizes the new cultural terrain this way: "Skeptics outside the church along with those leaving the church and those merely apathetic or disengaged from the faith, are not primarily wrestling with the idea that God is *irrational* but with the notion that God is *good*. Objections of the heart, not of the head."[10] In other words, a leading impetus for contemporary skepticism is not the lack of persuasive rational arguments for God, but a lost attraction to the beauty of the Christian gospel.

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[9] Gregory A. Smith, "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated," Pew Research Center, December 14, 2021, www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/.

[10] Mike Blackaby and Daniel Blackaby, *Straight to the Heart: Communicating the Gospel in an Emotionally Driven Culture* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2024), 35.

God and Beauty

If Christians are to proclaim God to an unbelieving world, we must begin by considering how God chose to reveal himself. All throughout scripture, we see God drawing sinful people to himself by appealing to the human heart through the language of beauty. For example, God provided Moses with specific blueprints for the tabernacle (Ex. 25:9, 40), and later inspired the layout of the temple (1 Chron. 28:12, 19). The Bible provides pages of detailed descriptions of those designs and clearly portrays a God who values beauty and not just functionality. While some of the designs served practical or symbolic functions, not all did. Freestanding pillars bore artistic adornment but no structural burden, and precious stones were included "for beauty" (2 Chron. 3:6 KJV). These important religious structures were to be physical representations of God for the Israelites, and not insignificantly, aesthetics played an important role.

The Bible frequently describes God through the language of beauty. Psalm 27:4 says, "one thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the *beauty* of the LORD and to seek him in his temple." In fact, the word "heart" is used more than eight hundred times in English translations of the Bible, while "mind" appears fewer than one hundred times.[11]

The Bible contains many propositional truth statements, but truth is likewise declared largely through the aesthetic medium of stories, music, and poetry. In scripture, the beauty of God is never separated from his goodness and truth. Philosopher Peter Kreeft writes:

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[11] Blackaby and Blackaby, *Straight to the Heart,* 58.

The Bible is mercilessly silent about arguments to persuade the hopeless fool who says there is no God, but it continually reassures us that God is not immoral or amoral but good and trustable, and is working out all things for an eventually stunning consummation of beauty and justice and joy for all who dare to love and trust him.[12]

The beauty of God radiates from his truth and goodness. Without beauty, graceless fundamentalism and self-righteous judgmentalism tend to fill in the gaps in the Christian message. When God revealed himself to people, there was always an aesthetic dimension of beauty. As Christians today called to spread the good news of the Gospel to the ends of the earth, our message should emphasize beauty as well.

An Apologetic from Beauty

To tap into the apologetic power of beauty, Christians must reject prevalent philosophies that cheapen beauty as something subjective and trivial. Similarly, they should spurn any approach to beauty that reduces its power to mere pragmatic use and function. Indeed, a danger in formulating an apologetic from beauty is the temptation to try to forcefully squeeze the round peg of beauty into the square hole of a traditional reason-based apologetic approach. Beauty is far more than just an additional tool in the Christian's toolbelt. Beauty is not something that is used, it is something that *is*.

The topic is vast and philosophically rich, but a definition of beauty must begin by returning it to its theological foundation as an objective reality that we discover as the fragrance of God's truth and goodness, and when life functions in harmony with God's

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[12] Peter Kreeft, *Wisdom of the Heart: The Good, the True, and the Beautiful at the Center of Us All* (Gastonia, NC: TAN Books, 2020), 238.

intentions.[13] The author of Ecclesiastes wrote, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Dietrich von Hildebrand, arguably the most insightful Christian philosopher on the subject of theological beauty, wrote, "It contains a summons… [and] it awakens awe in us; it elevates us above that which is base; it fills our hearts with longing for the eternal beauty of God."[14] Beauty is like a spiritual homing beacon that lifts our heart's gaze toward God.

That beauty cannot be wielded like a hammer does not mean that it cannot serve an important role in the apologetical mission of the church. Christian apologist Blaise Pascal is a paradoxical figure. He was a logic-driven mathematician and philosopher whose most enduring legacy is his formation of logic-based apologetic arguments such as the famous "Pascal's Wager." But Pascal's own religious convictions were largely based on a dramatic emotional spiritual experience. Thus, while he rightly valued the importance of intellect, he also understood the role of the appeal to his affections. Describing his apologetic approach, he wrote:

Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next, make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is. Religion is worthy of reverence because it really understands human nature.

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[13] For a comprehensive exploration of the objective reality of beauty, see Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Aesthetics: Volume 1* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Project, 2016).

[14] Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Beauty in the Light of Redemption* (Steubenville, OH: Hildebrand Press, 2019), 22.

It is attractive because it promises true good.[15]

To "make it attractive" did not mean to manufacture a false appeal, but rather to reflect the beauty of God and the Gospel as they truly are. In *Straight to the Heart*, we said: "Christianity without beauty is a movie without a soundtrack. It confronts minds but leaves hearts unstirred."[16] Debates rarely see either party change their opinion, because abstract argumentation can be confronted at a distance. Beauty, however, slips through the cracks of such intellectual defenses. For the skeptic, it is easier to refute a philosophical argument than to deny the innate sense of awe that arises within their heart at the sight of a snow-capped mountain range. As Kreeft succinctly concludes, "beauty is irresistible."[17]

As demonstrated by Darwin's unsatisfactory efforts to explain it, the existence of beauty itself is a serious apologetical argument for the existence of God. Beyond incorporating beauty as the subject of a rational argument, however, there are at least three areas where beauty is relevant to the mission of Christian apologetics.

Beauty in Creation

God's creation is sublime. Darwin himself readily acknowledged that truth, even as he struggled to avoid crediting God for nature's splendor. The Bible is clear that the majesty of creation points to the existence of its Creator and reveals some of his qualities (Rom. 1:20, Ps. 19:1-4). It is perhaps not surprising that the general cultural shift away from religion toward atheism parallels the rise of

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15 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: Penguin, 1196), 4.

16 Blackaby and Blackaby, *Straight to the Heart,* 95.

17 Kreeft, *Wisdom of the Heart*, 282.

industrialization. As people have retreated from God's breathtaking creation into the concrete jungles of their own making, they have lost a sense of the divine.

One way the Christian mission can benefit from creation's beauty is to rethink the context of our apologetic and evangelistic encounters. As reflected in the movie *God's Not Dead*, in a Head Culture the favored setting for apologetic and spiritual conversations were lecture halls, university classrooms, and debate stages. Even the comfortable backdrop of a coffee shop, while conducive to conversation, transplants dialogue about the divine into a man-made consumer-based institution. These may not be the most fruitful settings to reach an emerging generation in a Heart Culture.

Christians can awaken the God-placed "eternity in the human heart" (Ecc. 3:11) in unbelievers by pointing their attention toward God's creation. Skeptics already perceive the power of beauty, even if they lack the theological framework to properly direct their reverence. Christians can help focus their gaze. Rather than conduct "outreach" events with the primary goal of drawing outsiders into the four (often unadorned) walls of our church buildings, perhaps we should intentionally immerse ourselves in enjoying and focusing on the beauty available outside our sacred buildings. In doing so, perhaps our endeavors will lead unbelievers to become enchanted by the beautiful "soundtrack" of the Gospel, thus preparing them to receive the narrative structure that puts this irresistible beauty in its proper context.

Beauty in Created Things

Beauty radiates most profoundly from God's creation, but it can also be embedded in our own man-made creations. According to the author of Hebrews, the tabernacle was "a copy and shadow of

what is in heaven" (Heb. 8:5). In a mysterious way, what we create on earth can echo the beauty of heaven.

When unbelievers enter our church, do they encounter a reflection of God's inclination toward beauty, or merely a place of pragmatic functionality? The manner in which we decorate (or don't decorate) our church buildings may reflect a belief that God is the ultimate minimalist, but in scripture's only record of God's own architectural preferences, he appears to have a penchant for the extravagant.

God revealed himself through the "special revelation" of scripture and the "general revelation" of creation. Preachers participate in the first aspect, but there remains an opportunity for the second. Artists have been aptly called the "preachers of general revelation."[18] Apologetics has traditionally been the domain of "left-brained" academics, but the creative artists skilled at proclaiming the Gospel through the language of beauty will have an important role in the Christian mission. The church, and the creatively gifted members of the community, should foster pockets of beauty that point unbelievers toward the ultimate source of all beauty.

Beauty in Life

In Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel, *The Idiot*, Prince Lev Nikolayevich Myskin declares that "beauty will save the world."[19] He is dismissed by the other characters for being naïve, but the beauty Dostoevsky had in mind was deeper than the attractiveness of the visible or auditory realms; it was the immaterial beauty of Christian virtue.

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[18] Paul Munson and Joshua Farris Drake, *Art and Music: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 39.

[19] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005), 351.

Diedrich von Hildebrand notes, "The irresistible divine beauty of Jesus not only moves our will, but it attracts our hearts."[20] Christians must proclaim the truth of Jesus, but they must not neglect the *way* of Jesus. As earlier stated, the foundational scriptural text for apologetics is 1 Peter 3:15. The instruction to be prepared to "give an answer" is followed by the additional context of proper conduct: "But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1 Peter 3:15b-16). Christian apologetics is to be done in the context of grace and beauty. If God is the source of beauty, and if the Spirit of God resides within every believer, then the Christian life should be an irresistible expression of beauty.

Conclusion

One of literature's most profound expressions of beauty is found in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings.* As Frodo and Sam, two humble Hobbits from the peaceful Shire, traverse the barren wastelands of Mordor, they begin to despair. In their most hopeless moment, Sam catches a glimpse of beauty that reignites the fire of his resolve:

> There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was a light and high beauty forever beyond its reach.[21]

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[20] Hildebrand, *Beauty in Light of Redemption*, 5.

[21] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2018), 211.

Transcendent beauty exists, even if eyes clouded by sin and godlessness obscure the sight of it. An encounter with beauty has the power to rekindle the divine within the human heart. The discipline of Christian apologetics was never intended to be about depositing theological knowledge into the minds of unbelievers, or about wielding keen logical rhetoric to win a debate. The mission, even of the most rational-minded apologetic approaches, is to help unbelievers see through the haze to catch a glimpse of the hope of the Gospel. Contrary to Gustave Flaubert's declaration, the time for beauty is not over, nor will it ever be. The human heart yearns for beauty, and Christians have the opportunity to point people to where such beauty can be found.

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Tolkien and Lewis in Defense of Imagination and Story

Louis Markos

Thanks in great part to the influence of J. R. R. Tolkien and his friend C. S. Lewis, many modern people, especially evangelicals, who would have dismissed imagination as a lesser and even unreliable faculty have been forced to take a second look at our creative abilities. The makers of Middle-earth and Narnia were apologists for Christianity, as they were for the Middle Ages and for friendship, but they were also committed and effective apologists for the power and essential goodness of the imagination. Rather than treat fantasy, myth, and story as synonyms for falsehood and error, they found in them a royal road to a deeper, more intuitive, less mediated truth with the power to reveal profound facets of God, man, and the universe not accessible to science, logic, and reason. They believed, and demonstrated in their writings, that, to alter a famous line from Pascal, the imagination hath reasons that reason knows nothing about.

Man as Sub-Creator

"Fantasy," J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*, argues in his lengthy essay *On Fairy-Stories*, "is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make…. For creative Fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears

HE LION,
THE
WITCH,
AND THE
ARDROBE

S. LEWIS

THE LION, THE WITCH
and
THE WARDROBE

A Story for Children
by

C. S. LEWIS

under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it."[1]

Imagination, Tolkien argues, is as natural to the human race as reason and need not compete with it. Indeed, Tolkien insists, the best fantasy writers—and Tolkien is one of them—use reason to construct and give coherence and consistency to the secondary worlds that are born out of their imagination. If nothing else, the fact that there are just as many, if not more, left-brained fans of *The Lord of the Rings* as there are right-brained ones should prove that Tolkien's imaginative worldbuilding appeals strongly to the scientific, logical mind. His fantasy succeeds because, not in spite, of its grounding in reason.

Imagination, when properly used, does not stand at odds with science; both call for precision and the careful use of our senses. The real difference between the two is that fantasy is not bound to facts the way science is. It can wander more freely, forging new connections and providing new perspectives from which to contemplate God, man, and the universe. Sometimes, it will even provide the intuitive leap necessary to push science forward, as with Newton's universal laws of gravitation and Einstein's theory of relativity, both of which were initiated, in part, by an imaginative, transcendent "aha moment."

Imagination is not anti-rational; neither is it anti-moral. As a committed Catholic, Tolkien knew well that many of his fellow Christians were suspicious of the imagination and its creations, thinking them more likely to turn believers away from God than draw them close. Ironically, many modern, secular, non-religious people are equally suspicious of the imagination, accusing it of bringing confusion rather than clarity

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[1] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *Tree and Leaf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 54-55.

Cover: The Lion The Witch, and The Wardrobe (1st Edition, 1950)

Pauline Baynes (illustrator)

Published 1950, Bles Books

and of deceiving the senses rather than heeding them. To both groups, Tolkien offers this carefully argued concession and critique:

> Fantasy can, of course, be carried to excess. It can be ill done. It can be put to evil uses. It may even delude the minds out of which it came. But of what human thing in this fallen world is that not true? Men have conceived not only of elves, but they have imagined gods, and worshipped them, even worshipped those most deformed by their authors' own evil. But they have made false gods out of other materials: their notions, their banners, their monies; even their sciences and their social and economic theories have demanded human sacrifice. *Abusus non tollit usum* ["abuse does not take away use"]. Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.[2]

Although Tolkien here defends fantasy in particular, he also defends, in general, the faculty of imagination out of which fantasy is born. Like everything else in our world, our imagination is broken and is thus capable of producing fantasy that deludes and harms. But then the same can be said of our reason and the things it produces.

As fallen people, we can turn anything, whether it be good, bad, or neutral, into an idol in whose name we are willing to sacrifice our friends, our beliefs, and our world. Fantasy is no less prone to leading us astray than science, technology, politics, or economics. It is wrong to judge a thing solely on the basis of the bad uses to which

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2 Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 55.

it can be put. There is nothing in this world, not even the Bible, that cannot be used for ill.

Thus does Tolkien provide a moral argument in favor of fantasy, but he does not finish on that note. The paragraph ends with an ontological argument that weaves fantasy and imagination into the very fabric of what it means to be human. We cannot help but tell stories and make up new worlds, for we were made in the image of a Maker, a God who creates and forms and takes joy in what he makes.

In order to capture that dynamic, Tolkien coined the word "Sub-creator," and used it in a poem he wrote to defend our myth-making proclivities:

> Although now long estranged,
> Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
> Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned,
> and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
> Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light
> through whom is splintered from a single White
> to many hues, and endlessly combined
> in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
> Though all the crannies of the world we filled
> with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build
> Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
> and sowed the seed of dragons, 'twas our right
> (used or misused). The right has not decayed.
> We make still by the law in which we're made.[3]

The closing line says it all. We make because we are made. As

[3] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," 54.

sub-creators, we follow in the footsteps of the Creator, making on a smaller scale, and with the potential for misuse, but in the same mode and in accordance with our original commissioning. Though dis-graced and dethroned, we continue to bear the image of the Creator and draw on him as the ultimate source of our creativity.

Our right to create fantasy remains because it is rooted, not in the fall, but in creation. Its ultimate source is the pure white light of God's creative power, which we, in our lesser, and now compromised, form, refract into shapes of great beauty and mystery. There is a variety and an abundance in our creativity that mimics the fecundity of our planet. We would see all the nooks and crannies filled with life and meaning and purpose—with a fullness that the Medievals called plenitude. We yearn to be weavers of stories, for we sense within that we are part of the weave of greater story. It should come as no surprise, then, that the same Tolkien who theorized these things in *On Fairy-Stories* incarnated them in *The Lord of the Rings*. In fact, in Book IV, chapter 8 of his epic fantasy, Tolkien offers what is to my mind the finest statement on the subject.

The Stories that Really Matter

> As Sam and Frodo make their way toward Mordor to destroy the Ring of the Enemy, Frodo first complains about the wretched land through which they are marching, and then says, with resignation, that this is the way their path has been laid. Sam agrees and meditates out loud on the true nature of stories and of the creatures who must live their lives in and through them:
>
> …we shouldn't be here at all, if we'd known more about it before we started. But I supposed it's often

> that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually—their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn't. And if they had, we shouldn't know, because they'd have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on—and not all to a good end, mind you, at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things all right, though not quite the same—like old Mr. Bilbo. But those aren't always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in! I wonder what sort of a tale we've fallen into?"[4]

The tales that really matter! How strange that sounds to our modern, egalitarian ears. Do some tales matter more than others? Is there a hierarchy of tales? I believe there is.

Children, of course, like stories that end with the phrase, "and they lived happily ever after," but that does not mean that they shy away from scarier stories where there is pain, suffering, and death. Parents may try to shield their children from scary stories, but they know better than their parents when it comes to such things. The happy

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[4] J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 696.

stories are often a small part of the larger stories where there is danger and loss, but then those stories are themselves part of an even greater narrative—a metanarrative as it is called today—whose ultimate end is hopeful.

Hardwired into our DNA is a sense of ourselves as pilgrims on the road or characters in a story. We naturally want to be part of the happy-ending ones, but we know deep down that the ones that include tragedy are more meaningful and important. In fact, our ability to hold up under suffering is strongly tied to our sense that our suffering is part of a greater story of which we are a part. This is not merely a case of wishful thinking or sour grapes. It is an insight into the way the world works, and how we function within it.

For many people, the ability to bear up under suffering is linked directly to their belief in a good God, but that belief is itself inseparable from the belief that God is the author of the metanarrative, of the greater story of which their present suffering makes up only a part. Indeed, as Frodo and Sam continue their discussion of the tales that really matter, Sam realizes, in a flash of insight, that they are themselves part of a story that has been going on for thousands of years and which is not yet complete:

> "Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?
>
> "No, they never end as tales," said Frodo. "But the people in them come and go when their part's ended. Our part will end later—or sooner."[5]

At the risk of sounding presumptuous, I am going to claim that all

[5] Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings,* 697.

readers know what Sam and Frodo are talking about, even, and especially, if they can't put it into words. We cannot shake the feeling—or, better, intuition—that we are part of a story; it doesn't matter if we are the king or the servant, the protagonist or a peripheral character. The story goes on, and we play a role in it, and that role gives shape and meaning to our lives. Even if we prove to be the villain, we can't escape playing a role.

We are, if I may alter a line from Shakespeare, such stuff as tales are made on. We may seek to flee our narrative impulse or to dismiss it as some kind of social construct, but it nevertheless persists as an essential element of our nature. To borrow again from Shakespeare: "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players; / They have their exits and their entrances, / And one man in his time plays many parts."

Our lives are all about entrances and exits, comings and goings, and we all play many parts along the way. That is something we must all learn: later—or sooner.

All Worlds Draw to an End

Despite its essentially happy ending, *The Lord of the Rings*, like *The Silmarillion*, is pervaded by an elegiac tone of melancholy and loss. Of all the Chronicles of Narnia the one whose tone most mimics that of Tolkien's legendarium is *The Last Battle*. In fact, whether or not he did so consciously, Lewis includes in it a dialogue between Jill Pole and Jewel the Unicorn that seems to echo Sam and Frodo's discussion about the stories that really matter.

> "Oh, this is nice!" said Jill. "Just walking along like this. I wish there could be more of this sort of adventure. It's a pity there's always so much happening in Narnia."

But the Unicorn explained to her that she was quite mistaken. He said that the Sons and Daughters of Adam and Eve were brought out of their own strange world into Narnia only at times when Narnia was stirred and upset, but she mustn't think it was always like that. In between their visits there were hundreds and thousands of years when peaceful King followed peaceful King till you could hardly remember their names or count their numbers, and there was really hardly anything to put into the History Books. And he went on to talk of old Queens and heroes whom she had never heard of…. He talked of whole centuries in which all Narnia was so happy that notable dances and feasts, or at most tournaments, were the only things that could be remembered, and every day and week had been better than the last. And as he went on, the picture of all those happy years, all the thousands of them, piled up in Jill's mind till it was rather like looking down from a high hill onto a rich, lovely plain full of woods and waters and cornfields, which spread away and away till it got thin and misty from distance. And she said:

"Oh, I do hope we can soon settle the Ape and get back to those good, ordinary times. And then I hope they'll go on for ever and ever and ever. Our world is going to have an end some day. Perhaps this one won't. Oh, Jewel—wouldn't it be lovely if Narnia just went on and on—like what you said it has been?"

"Nay, sister," answered Jewel, "all worlds draw to an

> end; except Aslan's own country [Heaven; the New Jerusalem]."[6]

Jill responds with an expression of hope that Narnia will go on for millions of years more, but it is not to be. A few moments later, Jill, Jewel, and their companions learn the tragic news that the great castle of Cair Paravel has fallen to the enemy and that Narnia is doomed.

Lewis's fantasy world may be slightly less dark than Tolkien's, but the maker of Narnia knew as well as the maker of Middle-earth that God's metanarrative is not all sweetness and light. Joy and hope, love and faith are everywhere in the weave, and the end will be good, but the suffering and the pain and the death are real and cannot be avoided. The modern realistic novel shows us only the dirt and the despair, the sickness and the cynicism. In contrast, too much of what passes for Christian art is overly sentimental and romanticized.

It is not so in the best fantasies, myths, and stories. Narnia and Middle-earth reveal in full what it means to live in a world that was made good and that will be restored, but that is currently broken and subjected to futility. For the scoffing pessimist, Jewel's celebration of the happy years of Narnia stands as a bold witness to the goodness that remains in every fiber of creation; for the cockeyed optimist, Jewel's sobering prophecy that all worlds end stands as a reminder that we and our world, at least in their current form, are mortal.

A full decade and a half before writing the dialogue between Jill and Jewel, Lewis expressed the same insight in *The Problem of Pain*.

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[6] C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Collier, 1970), 88-89.

> The Christian doctrine of suffering explains, I believe, a very curious fact about the world we live in. The settled happiness and security which we all desire, God withholds from us by the very nature of the world: but joy, pleasure, and merriment He has scattered broadcast. We are never safe, but we have plenty of fun and some ecstasy. It is not hard to see why. The security we crave would teach us to rest our hearts in this world and oppose an obstacle to our return to God: a few moments of happy love, a landscape, a symphony, a merry meeting with our friends, a bathe or a football match, have no such tendency. Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.[7]

The Problem of Pain is a work of non-fiction, but the power of Lewis's insight into the true nature of our world is conveyed by means of imagination rather than reason, by parable rather than logical proof. The reader feels and inhabits Lewis's point. We can almost see the landscape, hear the symphony, touch and taste and smell the hectic energy of the football match and the cool peacefulness of the bath. We understand intuitively the difference between a temporary inn and our true and permanent home.

Lewis invites us into a story about the life of mankind that is also our own story. He could have made the same abstract point by means of a rational apologetical argument, but he would have lost the visceral effect of his concrete metaphors. He might have convinced us, but he would not have engaged us. He would not have given us the power to perceive truths that are already there but which we lack eyes to see and ears to hear.

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7 C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 115.

The Organ of Meaning

Which takes us back to the imagination and why Lewis, like Tolkien, defended it so strongly in his fiction and non-fiction alike. After celebrating poets like Bunyan and Dante who showed "the tenderest care for old words and the surest instinct for the creation of new metaphors," Lewis quickly adds,

> it must not be supposed that I am in any sense putting forward the imagination as the organ of truth. We are not talking of truth, but of meaning: meaning which is the antecedent condition both of truth and falsehood, whose antithesis is not error but nonsense. I am a rationalist. For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition.[8]

Just as Tolkien argued in *On Fairy-Stories* that fantasy "does not destroy or even insult Reason," so Lewis argues here that reason and imagination are not enemies. Lewis's friendship with the imagination does not make him a foe of reason. Quite to the contrary! Just as Tolkien believed that the "keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make," so Lewis believed that truth is founded firmly in reason.

What then is the role of the imagination? As in the passage I quoted from *The Problem of Pain*, imagination takes the naked truth and embodies it in such a way that we can receive and experience it. It is the organ of meaning, for it makes the truth real and concrete, allowing us

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[8] C. S. Lewis, "Bluspels and Flalansferes," in *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 265.

to know it and so be able to evaluate and embrace it. Indeed, apart from the metaphors crafted by the imagination, truth would not be able to express itself in a way that we could fully understand.

That such is the case should come as no surprise to Christians who believe in what Lewis called the "grand miracle" of the incarnation. All Truth comes from God, but how could God fully convey that truth to fallen mortals like us? He did it by telling a story into which he himself entered physically. The two supreme sources of Truth in Christianity are the Incarnate Christ and the Bible—both of which bear the title "Word of God." But the former is the greater.

Is there any more wonderful story, more perfect fantasy, more eloquent myth than this: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14; ESV). This is the nexus of all stories, the cornerstone that gives them their shape and the reference point that gives them their meaning. The gospel story is not the creation of human mythmaking, but its ultimate origin. We did not make the Maker, but we were made in his image, and so it is natural for us to make.

"God," writes Tolkien in the Epilogue to *On Fairy-Stories*, "is the Lord, of angels, and of men—and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused.... The Evangelium [the gospel or "good news"] has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the 'happy ending.' The Christian has still to work, with mind as well as body, to suffer, hope, and die; but he may now perceive that all his bents and faculties have a purpose, which can be redeemed."[9] Stories are serious business, as is the imaginative faculty that spins them. Inasmuch as our narratives reflect and participate in God's metanarrative, they partake of a special

[9] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *Tree and Leaf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 72-73.

holiness, the holiness of the Incarnation: the Word made Flesh, God with us, the Storyteller become part of his story.

So let us take full joy in our stories and make full use of our imaginations. But let us also not forget that we live now in an inn but are destined to return to our true home—which is both the Eden we have lost and the New Jerusalem toward which we yearn. How will we know when we have reached that true home? We will know, for we will speak the words that Jewel the Unicorn does in *The Last Battle*, when he finds himself, at last, in Aslan's Country:

> "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this. Bree-hee-hee! Come further up, come further in!"[10]

Such is, or should be, the end of all our stories! Amen and amen.

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[10] C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Collier, 1970), 171.

Burying AI in the Garden of Good Work

Matt Miller

s my readers will no doubt quickly discern, in this essay I come to bury AI, not to praise it. While I might stop short of contending that there is no such thing as "faithful use of artificial intelligence," I am profoundly skeptical that Christian educators benefit our students by promoting use of such tools. The following remarks try to draw out briefly my theological and pedagogical rationale for that skepticism.[1]

With the rapid growth in popularity of Large Language Models (LLMs) and other so-called "artificial intelligence" tools has come an equally rapid growth of commentary on the subject. We could discuss LLMs and Christian education in relation to the *imago Dei;* we could examine these technologies' relationship to human beings as verbal animals and Jesus Christ as the Word of God; or we could discuss the questions of social justice and creation care that they call up. All of these are fruitful and important lines of discussion. However, the most common argument made for acceptance of LLMs and other AI tools is economic: "We have to prepare our students for the workplace, where they will be expected to know such tools." Accordingly, I want to consider LLMs and their place in Christian education in relation to the concept of *good work.*

What sorts of work should Christian educators prepare our students

[1] The following remarks were originally prepared for a panel at the 2023 College of the Ozarks faculty meetings on the topic of "faithful use of artificial intelligence." The text has been substantially revised for publication in *Faithful Lives.*

for? Work is part of God's purpose for us as human beings, and yet not all kinds of work are good work. Not all kinds of work can be baptized. To pick the most outrageous and obvious example, there's no such thing as a Christian pornographer, because the nature of the work cannot honor God, even if it meets a demand in the marketplace—even if it's legal, socially accepted, and well-compensated. As Christian educators, we aren't just preparing students for *any* compensated work, we're preparing them to work "as for the Lord, and not for men" (Col. 3:23) and so we're preparing them for good work.

If our only concern is to prepare our students for the marketplace, then we aren't serving the Triune God but another lord. His name is Mammon.

Rather than training our students to pursue wealth at all costs, we have to prepare them to work *well*, to work according to the logic of the Kingdom of Heaven rather than the Kingdom of Man. So what is good work according to the Kingdom of Heaven? A full account of such a thing goes beyond the scope of this essay, but I will here sketch some of the principles that I take to be central to the type of work suitable to the Lord's kingdom.

Good work has a beginning and an end—it's not limitless. Even God rested from his labors on the seventh day.

Good work prizes quality over quantity. God doesn't need our efforts, and doesn't rely upon us to do "big things" or to achieve endless growth—rather he honors our faithfulness in small things, and makes an abundance where we supply only a few loaves and fishes.

Good work is not easy, but involves struggle as we discipline our bodies and wills to the challenge of working hard and well. Such work can contribute to our sanctification, in keeping with the painful, disciplined labor of holiness outlined by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 9.

Good work pursues human flourishing and the common good rather than profiting off vices like greed, impatience, anger, or lust. Labor that thrives upon the spiritual destruction of ourselves and others will have no place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So if these are some of the principles of good work according to the Kingdom of God, how do we think about tools like LLMs?

I think our culture has been in rebellion against these principles of good work, which are really God's principles of Sabbath and cultural development, for a long time, and so in truth LLMs really introduce no new problem. Before AI tools boomed, much of our culture already tended toward work that was limitless, shoddy, and low-effort. Search for a children's toy on Amazon or walk into your local dollar store if you doubt this sweeping claim. Certainly, we can observe a strong market demand for crass and trashy content, flimsy plastic knick-knacks, or junk food without nutritional value. Such stuff comes about because of bad work, and serves to stoke vices like lust, sloth, and gluttony. The Kingdom of God will not see its like.

Moreover, the instantaneous production of text through the use of a chatbot or LLM contributes to the proliferation of words. As a lover of long books, I am far from opposed to the production of more language. Yet Scripture teaches us that the desire to read, see, or hear more, more, more is sinful—it's a kind of greed, a lust of the eyes. And so all of us need to think carefully about how we contribute to that endlessness of communication, which produces vice of all kinds, as well as stress, anxiety, and an inability to rest. As a writer myself, I need to continually ask myself whether I am saying something that needs to be said, or just adding to the noise because it benefits me professionally. I think reticence and caution about what we say are underappreciated Christian disciplines.

The profound problem with large language models and other automated communications tools is that they operate according to this vicious logic of the Kingdom of Man, and show no consideration for God's principles of good work.

The logic of these tools is simply more, more, more, faster, faster, faster—production of quite literally endless text and images. While the companies that produce these tools will trumpet their willingness to put ethical limits upon chatbots, just to require an LLM to avoid the most outrageously offensive speech falls far short of a Christian ethic of communication or of good work. To type a prompt and instantly generate hundreds of words is *in itself* impatient and shows a desire to avoid the hard work of producing my own words, words I can stand by.

I can find very little warrant in Scripture for the idea that it's good to produce more, more, more. Proverbs: "When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent." Ecclesiastes: "For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words." In contrast, the words Jesus speaks in the Gospels are relatively few, and as the old spiritual has it, he "never said a mumblin' word." Tools that help us to pile up endless words and images seem to present a profound occasion for sin, and little in the way of helping us ensure that our words honor God.

If large language models and image tools present an occasion for sin, some nonetheless will argue that these tools are worth the risk because they contribute to wealth generation and thus to human flourishing. I have yet to see firm evidence that LLMs have generated wealth for anyone but the founders of LLM startups, but let's take the claim on face value for the sake of argument. Material wealth, of course, does not in fact equate to flourishing. Biblically speaking, a society that possesses material wealth and technical power, but

neglects to seek the virtues of good work such as quality or the common good, is best represented by the immoral city of Babylon rather than the City of God.

Automated tools of all sorts tend to make work more productive, but also more isolating, more anxiety-inducing, and less satisfying. A materially wealthy society in which most people spend their days alone, typing into chatboxes, will be a society whose wealth thinly conceals profound human suffering and deep alienation from God's gifts.

If we seek to do good work, and to enable those who work for us to do good work as well, then our framework won't just be productivity or wealth generation, but according to the logic of the Kingdom of God, it will be holistic flourishing. And such work can be realized here and now, if not with the fullness of the New Jerusalem, at least in part. Drawing upon the four principles of good work I sketched above, I'll now offer some observations on what good work can look like.

Good work respects human limits by incorporating rest into the business plan. I'm reminded of an agricultural supply company I once found, run by the Amish, that shuts off even its online ordering system on Sundays. Such a decision is the fruit of workers who have chosen to follow God's logic rather than that of Mammon.

Good work values quality over quantity in even the smallest moments. In my life as a consumer, I remember virtually every instance when a real person answered the phone or responded to an email. Generally such interactions were more helpful to me than the automated ones, and they were always more pleasant. Companies that choose to invest real human presence in such interactions—and these aren't all mom-and-pop type operations—honor the image of God in me and in their staff more than those who subject us both to navigating an

automated system.

Good work welcomes struggle as necessary for growth. In my working life, those times when I have held jobs that I found easy to perform coincided with the times of the greatest spiritual struggles and most profound dissatisfaction with my job. I have most benefitted when I have done work that pushed me to exert myself, whether manual labor that strained my physical stamina or intellectual labor that pushed me to the limits of my intelligence.

Good work pursues the common good. If we believe in the reality of sin and the biblical picture of a coming Kingdom, then it should not be unthinkable that certain forms of work which the marketplace will compensate aren't compatible with Christian life. Beyond the obvious example of pornography and other forms of trafficking in lust, I'll contend that we can identify other forms of work that contribute to sin: payday lending, gambling, and other forms of financial exploitation serve greed; forms of mindless media, social and otherwise, stoke impatience, inattentiveness, and anger. In contrast, good work serves real needs and helps people to be virtuous rather than indulging vice.

Further automation of our economy through LLMs will will only undermine good work in the dimensions I have considered here. Accordingly, I believe I have a responsibility as a Christian educator, seeking to foster students in a love of the Kingdom of God, not to contribute even in my small way to nudging our economy and our modes of working in such a direction.

My purpose as a Christian educator is to equip my students to recognize and to seek what is good. To be free, resilient, and giving, as they were made in God's image to be. That means I have to think about whether the work I send them out to do is good work.

Students coming out of college will often just need to make a living.

They may not have the luxury to ask themselves "is this a good job? is this good for our culture?" But if we as faculty at a Christian college don't have the luxury to ask those questions, nobody will. If we would proclaim ourselves here as a light in the darkness, we can never be too busy, too fearful, or too comfortable to ask whether the work we train our students for in fact aligns with the values of the Kingdom of God. And while we can't change the viciousness of our broader economy, we can decline to endorse it, even implicitly, by training students for it or encouraging them to take a blasé attitude toward its costs.

I want to teach students to do good work, and to seek first the Kingdom of God. So I'm going to steer them away from using these automated tools as much as I can, encouraging them instead to embrace the habits and practices they need to do good work, even if that means consciously choosing to decline the speed and efficiency offered by automated language tools. Our present economy may not reward those who insist that they must work according to the logic of the Kingdom of God. But I believe another and higher reward will come for those who commit themselves to the principles of Kingdom work.

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Target #1
Richard Cummings
Polyethylene and metal leaf
2022
Courtesy of the artist

Reviews and Resources

Footed Pitcher
Laura Ashley
Salt-fired porcelain
2024
Courtesy of the artist

Art and Faith: A Theology of Making

by Makoto Fujimura

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. vii + 167 pages, hardcover. US $26.00.

Review by Laura Ashley
Assistant Professor of Art
College of the Ozarks

Art and Faith: A Theology of Making is a thoughtful meditation on the sacred vocation of an artist and how creative people can demonstrate God's redemptive promise for the world by practicing generativity in a largely degenerative culture. The author, Makoto Fujimura, an internationally reputable visual artist, writer, speaker, and arts advocate eloquently reflects on private moments of creating in his studio and meaningful experiences during his 30-year artistic career. He weaves these anecdotes with scriptural examples to offer fresh revelations of the mysterious and spiritual experience of making and appreciating art.

The book expands on ideas introduced in his 2017 work, *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life*, where he draws a comparison between the generative action of making art and the act of worship to counter destructive cultural forces. His stated goal for this new book is to "outline a path towards culture care… flowing out from a biblical model of flourishing toward the New" (5). He uses the word "New" throughout the text as shorthand for the undiscovered aspects of God that will be illuminated through artistic innovation. Where *Culture Care* was a call for restoring and nourishing culture through pursuing the "New", this book focuses on the cultivation and care of each being as "creative makers" that are "created to be creative" (p. 14).

At the core of Fujimura's thesis is the belief that every act of creation, no matter how mundane, is a form of divine participation. He writes, "The Bible is full of Making activities. I have come to believe that unless we are making something, we cannot know the depth of God's being and God's grace permeating our lives and God's Creation" (7). His arguments are meant to contrast with the skepticism and nihilism from contemporary culture that can dull artists' effectiveness at accessing the "New". Fujimura's prose is empowering and reminds creatives that their work holds meaning beyond aesthetic or commercial value. He validates and elevates the artistic process through scriptural examples like the woman who anointed Jesus with her precious nard in Mark 14:6-9. He notes that creative imagination, like this woman's spontaneous, extravagant act of devotion is necessary for God to be revealed and that those with such imagination should be an "invaluable part of church leadership" (87).

A key theme in the book is the idea that the process of making and interacting with art is a distinct way to commune with God. Fujimura suggests that before we learn language or encounter Scripture, we know God through our senses as infants. He states he came to know "God the Artist before God the Lecturer" and makes the case that this sensory dialogue with the divine should not be trivialized or abandoned as we grow older but cultivated through continuing acts of generation and reflection (7). For artists and appreciators, this concept elevates the creative process into a form of devotion that transcends the material. His poignant explication of modern artist Mark Rothko's color-field paintings is one of the most memorable and potent stories about how art can reveal deep emotions that are difficult to access through logical thought. He points out that it is one thing to read in scripture that Jesus wept with Mary over her brother Lazarus's death, but art can be a conduit to understanding

this sorrow more profoundly. If one is surrounded by Rothko's larger than life "Black" paintings at the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas, it invokes a somatic experience of sorrow that may allow for a deeper understanding of Jesus's sorrow (120-121).

Fujimura's ideas are solidly grounded in Scripture, but he does not outline a systematic theology in this book, despite the title. Instead, the book reads more like a poetic and personal exploration of the faith required to practice creativity and appreciate art. Fujimura's prose is dense and filled with metaphor, anecdotes, and philosophical observations, which may not appeal to readers looking for a straightforward, academic analysis. Rather, he offers his own reflections about understanding the divine through the creative process. Even though this is not an academic or research text, it is full of substance that could be used as a valuable springboard into discussions about the nature of creativity in the academic classroom, especially in the context of emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence. Even though AI is not explicitly mentioned in text, Fujimura's ideas become relevant as a gateway text to exploring how human creativity contrasts with machine-generated outputs, fostering dialogue on what it means to create with intention and soul in an increasingly automated world.

Art and Faith: A Theology of Making is an inspiring text for artists and anyone curious about the transformative experience of engaging with art. Fujimura beautifully expresses the deep connection with God that takes place during the creative process and presents a powerful vision of art's redemptive role in a broken world. His concise yet thoughtful language makes complex, abstract ideas easier to grasp. For those looking to merge their faith with their creative practice, Fujimura's work offers valuable insights that bridge the gap between art and spirituality.

Filterworld: How Algorithms Flattened Culture

by Kyle Chayka

New York: Doubleday, 2024. 304 pages, hardcover. US $28.00.

Review by Tom Foley
Assistant Professor of Computer Science
College of the Ozarks

Most of us, at different times throughout the day, find ourselves scrolling through various news or social media feeds on our computers or mobile devices. Such is life in today's connected society, where a large amount of information consumed on a daily basis is delivered via feeds. Have you ever stopped to think about the curation process behind those feeds? Why are some items in the feed more 'viral' than others? In *Filterworld*, Kyle Chayka walks his readers through understanding the "why?" behind the feed. Chayka, who is a journalist by trade, is no stranger to digital technology and even writing basic computer code (14). He is currently a staff writer at *The New Yorker,* where he authors pieces on digital technology, as well as the impact the internet and social media have on culture.

Filterworld starts out by introducing the "Mechanical Turk" machine that was built by Johann Wolfgang Ritter von Kempelen in 1769 in the Habsburg Empire. The Mechanical Turk machine was a mysterious machine that beat all of its human opponents in the game of chess. The machine drew in audiences from around the world, even making a tour around the United States (2). The secret of Mechanical Turk was not fully revealed until the mid-1800s when it was finally disclosed that a master chess player was sitting inside the machine playing against human opponents. Much like the Mechanical Turk, our news feeds today are being manipulated by complex algorithmic recommendation systems, what Chayka refers

to as "Filterworld." No longer can one simply scroll through a news feed in a linear fashion but rather be targeted with content that the algorithm ascertains you will be most likely to interact with. Each of these algorithms is attempting to guess what you are thinking of, seeking, and desiring before you may even be aware of the answer (3). When one stops to observe the world around them, it does not take long to see the effects of Chayka's "Filterworld." When you arrive at the office, everyone is discussing the scores from the game the night before or the latest episode of the show everyone has been watching. Chayka points out that the effects of Filterworld even permeate the physical world, affecting the decor and design choices such as those that have become so popular and prevalent in coffee shops around the world (6, 88-96). "The culture that thrives in Filterworld tends to be accessible, replicable, participatory, and ambient" (5).

The second chapter of *Filterworld* discusses the disruption of personal taste. There are, essentially, two main forces that help in forming one's tastes: first, is the independent pursuit of what one enjoys. Second, is the awareness of what it appears that most other people like. The Filterworld helps amplify the latter in such a way that we, many times, will engage with content we personally do not enjoy in order to keep relevancy with society. "The force of algorithmic pressure is not theoretical. It's not a gloomy dystopian future but, rather, a pervading force that is already influencing cultural consumers and creators" (56). Microsoft researcher Christian Sandvig stated: "Corrupt personalization is the process by which your attention is drawn to interests that are not your own" (71). Whether the recommendation algorithm is corrupt or not, what holds true in the Filterworld is that the cultural collections we maintain, such as a music or movie collection, are not wholly our own.

The internet has impacted regionalism in much the same way that the US interstate system or air travel did years ago. The internet has created "a more seamless global commercial network [which has] helped to break down global regionalism" (97). "Such interconnection has also led to a more mundane and pervasive flattening of individual experiences" (99). Not a new idea by any means, the flattening of global regions and societies is only amplified by the Filterworld. With much of the world using either Android or iOS to access the same handful of social networks, the user experience and popular content are the same whether you are in the United States, India, Brazil, or South America. One of the most prevalent examples of flattening occurred in 2012 when the South Korean rapper Psy released "Gangnam Style" on YouTube (98). Less than four months after its release, the video became the first YouTube video to pass a billion views. Both the flatness and viral potential created by the Internet paved the way for what Chayka calls the influencer economy. Virality, especially in the early days of digital media and social networks, can be described as how the recommendation algorithm promotes content that has more human interaction in the form of likes and shares. Virality paired with the ability for creators to monetize their content became the foundation of the influencer economy. As influencers became more popular and made more money, they found themselves needing to constantly create more viral content to both stay relevant and appease the algorithmic feeds, but were doing so at a cost. "Rather than encouraging original artistic achievement, algorithmic feeds create the need for content that exists to generate more content" (149).

Aside from stifling innovation and creativity, algorithmic feeds have a much darker side. Chayka highlights the case of Molly Russell who in 2017 ". . . died from an act of self-harm while suffering

from depression and the negative effects of online content" (183). Whether it is cyberbullying, not getting enough likes or interactions on a post, or in Molly's case the constant delivery of negative imagery and sad or depressing themed content, the Filterworld that we live in has a very real impact on mental health. Chayka concludes the last couple of chapters of *Filterworld* by discussing regulations enforced on digital platforms that help lessen the negative effects. He also highlights research and new ideas that are being discussed to allow for individualism, creativity, and true human collection to be promoted on digital platforms rather than stifled.

Overall, Chayka's discussion of the algorithmic feeds that are shaping society today is accessible and well-organized. Assuming most readers interact with online platforms, *Filterworld* bridges all disciplines and provides the reader with insight into both how and why algorithmic feeds deliver specific content. In a classroom setting, *Filterworld* would allow for significant discussion of global society, mental health, ethics, and local and international regulation.

Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart: What Art Teaches Us About the Wonder and Struggle of Being Alive

by Russ Ramsey

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024. 256 pages, hardcover. US $29.99.

Review by Sara Osborne
Assistant Professor of English & Director of Classical Education
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In the opening chapter of *Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart: What Art Teaches Us About the Wonder and Struggle of Being Alive*, author Russ Ramsey suggests that "In its scarcity, beauty often surprises us. . . . But it is also everywhere if we will just pay attention" (5). What follows in the subsequent pages is a master class in *attention* to beauty—particularly the kind of noticing of art that promotes empathy, insight, and growth. Ramsey reveals the goal of his project early on: "I . . . am trying to get at something utterly heartbroken, and therefore utterly heartbreaking—the wonder and struggle of being alive" (5).

For others, observation and analysis of fine art may not be the most likely conduit for examining the struggle and achievement, joy and sadness of being human. Ramsey would disagree: "Art shows us back to ourselves, and the best art doesn't flinch or look away. Rather it acknowledges the complexity of struggles like poverty, weariness, and grief while defiantly holding forth beauty. . . ." He offers ten chapters in defense of this view, highlighting various artists and their works alongside compelling insight and commentary.

Gustave Doré's *The Burial of Sarah* provides context for Ramsey's

first lesson(s): preparation for suffering, coping with the problem of evil, and learning lament. Ramsey writes that "we lean in when sad stories are told because they prepare us for what's coming. They teach us about pain and suffering when we're not necessarily going through those trials personally in that moment" (10-11). He attributes this phenomenon to the power of story, arguing that this is, in essence, what Doré is giving his viewers—a visual story. This framework of story as catalyst for understanding carries throughout the remainder of Ramsey's book. His aim is to tell stories—through artists and their art—that his readers might "develop a deeper understanding of the human experience" (12).

Ramsey is true to his aim: Chapter 2 explores the "desire to possess the unattainable" through the retelling of *Mona Lisa's* theft and recovery. Alongside supplementing the average reader's knowledge of the details surrounding the disappearance of this famous painting, Ramsey draws out a significant point of application: "We want to possess what is not meant to be owned—security, control of the future, unencumbered use of the best the world has to offer. And if we can't have those, we'll try to obtain things that give the appearance of them." (5) Witness the timeless message of Ecclesiastes.

Chapter 3 examines Rembrandt van Rijn and the contrasting works of his early and later years as an artist. These varied works serve as symbols of Rembrandt's successes and suffering, and—poignantly—how his suffering *changed* him. Ramsey's retelling of Rembrandt's story is meant to highlight the role of suffering in the human experience: "Living the Christian life is an art we spend our entire lives learning. And suffering is one of our teachers" (50).

Ramsey's fourth chapter, highlighting the person and work of Artemisia Gentileschi confronts the human struggle with justice,

using her art to explain the effects of injustice in Gentileschi's life. Of particular interest is Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting,* a work which "broke with convention." Indeed, Gentileschi "is making a bold statement. She is not just an artist; she is an artist at work. She is the container of meaning attributed to the discipline" (72). The combination of her use of her own image as the embodiment of *painting* and her life story as retold by Ramsey leave the reader pondering questions of courage, tenacity, resentment, and grief. At least, the reader learns something of Gentileschi's struggles, which may have been previously unknown; at best, he comes away from her story and works with his own self-evaluation targeting truth and endurance—a valuable experiment, indeed.

Chapter 5, highlighting artist Joseph Mallord William Turner, reflects on a career not unlike that of Rembrandt: a life lived between two poles, as it were—and the struggle of moving from technique to technique, and strength to limitation. Ramsey marks the stages of this artist's development well for the reader, calling attention to the various experiences that shaped Turner's art. Turner's later work demonstrates "a preoccupation with color" and "won over many of his critics as they not only warmed to his new style but also began to admit that his work marked a shift in English painting," (88). Yet the end of his life was plagued by health issues as well. Ramsey notes that "Turner despised his own limitations, which became more pronounced as each year passed. The idea of mortality seemed especially bothersome" (89). Still, the artist willed that his entire collection—representative of all of his life's stages, challenges, and shifts in perspective—be kept together. Such a body of work serves as a catalyst for Ramsey's question for his reader: *"What along the way should fall into the category of immutable, fundamental truths that have nothing to do with age or perspective, and what ideas or convictions are up for grabs?"* (93).

Chapter 6 presents the reader with art from Albert Bierstadt and the Hudson River School. Ramsey focuses on Bierstadt's *A Storm in the Rocky Mountains* as illustrative of his art showcasing the beauty and wonder of nature, as well as the terror of its limits and extremes. Ramsey highlights Bierstadt's acknowledgement of native peoples in his art, and the experience of nature that he shared with them in the lands of the West. Ramsey writes, "What [Bierstadt] saw spoke to the nature of this world—a dangerous world, a world where we all have trouble. And it spoke to the nature of the one who made it—magnificent and dangerous, overwhelming and vast, beautiful and sublime" (112). The reader is left to contemplate the implications of these truths; Ramsey himself responds with wonder and worship.

As seems fitting for the namesake of Ramsey's book, Chapter 7 highlighting Vincent Van Gogh is among the most arresting of its stories. Ramsey begins from a place of commonality with his readers who have likely heard the story of Van Gogh chopping off his ear. That story has worked its way into countless trinkets and marketing ploys—even a coffee mug showcasing Vincent's "disappearing ear," according to Ramsey. Yet the story behind the incident is far from humorous. Instead, "What happened there—undoubtedly one of the lowest points in an already tortured soul's life—helps us see not just [Van Gogh's] shame but also the hope that surrounds it" (115). The following pages carry the reader into Van Gogh's genius, suffering, longings, and relationships. The dark thread of pain is woven throughout. Yet Ramsey offers his readers a fitting response: "We can refuse to allow [the pain of a loved one] to be the only thing, or even the main thing we know them by. We can honor the truth that it is only the visibility of their suffering, not its presence, that sets them apart from anyone else" (133). Aside from the obvious lesson in empathy, coming face to face with Van Gogh's story provokes the

reader to be kind to herself as well.

Chapter 8 examines an artist many of us are familiar with—Norman Rockwell—and augments our view of his life and work. Ramsey refers to Rockwell as "a visual bard, a historian, and an observer" (138). This is the Rockwell we know, remembering his character sketches of everyday Americana in *The Saturday Evening Post.* Yet it's likely that most readers associate Rockwell's work with the happy varnish and sentimentality that his critics sometimes voiced. Ramsey corrects this assessment by pointing towards Rockwell's works that illustrate the tides of change—and the pain that often accompanies it. He highlights Rockwell's paintings *Golden Rule* and *The Problem We All Live With* as case studies and draws the conclusion that Rockwell served as a trusted storyteller, regardless of the social or professional criticisms he endured. Ramsey writes, "[Rockwell] never committed to any one historical moment; rather, his was a story that changed over time, and that was the story he tried to tell" (151). Ramsey encourages his readers to cultivate this same freedom.

Chapter 9 considers two artists, Jimmy Abegg and Edgar Degas, who both suffered from macular degeneration, a condition that limits sight. The multi-faceted idea of "seeing" is examined with care throughout this chapter, with Ramsey acting as both artistic and spiritual guide. The art of both Degas and Abegg illustrates their change in sight, yet Ramsey's goal is not simply to show the contrast. In the end, Ramsey calls his reader to notice that "the art changes, but not necessary in a negative way. Often when affliction and compulsion collide, something deeper, truer, and more lasting is born" (166). Indeed, "affliction stirs us awake to things we might not have seen otherwise" (166).

In Ramsey's final chapter, he reminds the reader of the connection between art and life, suggesting that we will all develop a collection

of "favorites" if we take the time to *pay attention*—a phrase which in and of itself suggests that the work of noticing entails a cost. Ramsey contends that this "art you carry with you" is worth the cost: "It will work in you, and it will work on you. Go find it" (174). The final pages of his book serve to illustrate this phenomenon in Ramsey's own life, examining Rembrandt's *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem* through the lens of a visit to the Rijksmuseum with his daughter Kate. An interesting takeaway from Ramsey's storytelling is the impression that Rembrandt's painting made on Kate as a copy of it hung in her living room her entire life. The reader is reminded that it is not only our own lives that are shaped by our encounters with art, but the lives of our children as well.

In addition to Ramsey's ten chapters highlighting artists, their masterpieces, and the many varied connections that exist between art and life, he provides the reader with three enlightening appendixes: a short piece acknowledging the legitimacy of not resonating with a particular artist or genre, a "beginner's guide to symbols in art", and a compilation of "lost, stolen, and recovered art," including important names, dates, and current status.

As a work aimed at delivering knowledge about, increasing awareness of, and prompting reflection on great works of art and their makers, Ramsey's book is a grand success. Its pages contain insight and fuel for contemplation for the seasoned art critic and the curious novice alike. Ramsey's text is disarming in its tone and compels his readers towards the view that there is something to be gained for all of us in examining the connections between art and life, particularly for the Christian—a potentially life-changing realization.

However, the book itself—its pages, images, and organization—do not reflect the beauty that Ramsey emphasizes and explores. The book's introduction does not instruct the reader as to how to

search for the color images contained in its middle, an omission that only emphasizes to the novice that he may have just cause not to attempt his entry into the world of art analysis. The quality of the paper and grainy black-and-white images included throughout the chapters add to this feeling. In addition, in at least one section, the color images provided in the middle of the book are not laid out in the same order as they are discussed in the text itself, confusing the reader further. Addressing these somewhat minor issues would serve the reader—and complement the author's intent.

Still, Ramsey has given readers a true gift in *Van Gogh Has a Broken Heart.* In his closing paragraphs, Ramsey writes, "[Artists] provide high-relief compositions of the ordinary and matter-of-fact portrayals of the transcendent. They help us see the wonder of being alive and the inevitability of having to die. They read our story back to us, and we in turn, ask to see the pictures" (186). In his book, Ramsey offers an open invitation to anyone desiring to be shaped by the stories of great artists and their art. I heartily recommend that you accept.

Garden City: Work, Rest, and the Art of Being Human

by John Mark Comer

Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 288 pages, softcover. US $19.99.

Review by Colleen Hardy
Professor of Education
College of the Ozarks

Imagine sitting in a local coffee shop, looking through a large window at the bustling fall day. Water droplets left over from the morning mist form communal rivers that chase each other down to the peeling paint of the sage green window ledge. Your best friend ambles forward while gesturing with his mug and nestles into a well-worn chair. Over a perfectly brewed cup of coffee, you launch into a deep, comfortable conversation about what it means to be human. This leads to additional questions: "Why do we exist?" and "What are we here for?"

John Mark Comer, former pastor in Portland, Oregon and current leader of a nonprofit resource hub for Practicing the Way, uses a casual voice to engage the reader into a deep and meaningful discussion of work, rest and the art of being human. Comer divides his work into three sections, work, rest, and the Garden City. More than half of the text is dedicated to an analysis of work as a core element of the human endeavor. The book begins and ends with bold, oversized print, first sharing Genesis 1-2 and concluding with Revelation 21-22. He divides the text, like many good teaching sermons, into three clear sections: work, rest, and the Garden City. Each section is preceded by a two-page, symbolic line drawing. The text responds to three major questions. What does it mean to be human? Why do we exist? What are we here for?

During the first section of the text, Comer walks through Genesis and quickly answers, with the support of Scripture, the major questions of the book. We were designed to work and commanded to rule the earth. He later defines work as "whatever you fill your schedule with and give your heart to" (p. 34). This definition allows for a large-scale view of work that is not relegated to paid endeavors.

We exist and are here to work. Work is an act of partnering with God to bring order to the chaos of the world. Chaos does not have a negative connotation throughout the book, rather it is ripe with possibility. Chaos is viewed as the raw materials needed for designing, creating, and shaping; plants that can be propagated to create a beautiful landscape, water that is used to generate power, and buildings arranged to form a city center. Ruling, as outlined in the Cultural Mandate, is about partnering with God to subdue these raw materials and create things that make the best use of what God has provided for us on earth. Comer reflects much of the work of Timothy Keller and includes the statement, "creation was a project, not a product" (60). The act of taking the raw materials and shaping furniture, art, cities, and communities transforms what was once a garden described in Genesis to a Garden City described in Revelation. Throughout his explanation of work, the author provides practical, step by step processes for determining how to unearth God's calling as it relates to work and how to bring glory to God by being great at the work we choose to do. The section on work concludes by addressing the reality of work often being both a joy and a frustration. He attributes this to the original curse born out of disobedience in the Garden of Eden. He is careful to point out that work is not the curse, but rather work is cursed; it will always include the parallel path of joy and frustration because we exist in a fallen world.

Comer begins the second half of the book with a simple, yet effective

visual representation of Genesis. He mirrors the need for work with the need for rest because we are made in the image of God, and we strive to follow the same rhythm and life pattens as our Creator. He instructs the reader to create Sabbath for rest and worship. "When we Sabbath, we tap into God's rhythm for human flourishing" (196). Comer contends that Sabbath is a form of resistance to a fast-paced, achievement-oriented mindset. The weekly practice allows us to stop, embrace contentment and refocus on what we truly desire. He outlines ideas for how to Sabbath bordered by the question, "Is what I am doing life-giving?" The reader is instructed to design rules for the Sabbath to create a disciplined and sacred practice. Comer hesitantly provides an outline of his personal Sabbath guidelines and itinerary for finding rest.

The third and final section of the book begins with recounting the New Testament writers looking forward to what is to come; the hope of restoration to the Edenic existence described in Genesis. Comer follows this with a dissection of the Western concept of heaven. He presents an alternative view of a reimagined and redesigned earth completed by the work we do now serving through eternity. In this section, the book loses some of its momentum. Although the idea of Revelation mirroring Genesis is clear, the details of how that is to come about and the role of believers in the new city are not convincing. The bridge between what is in the Scripture and how Comer views our eternal work is not supported as well as the earlier ideas of work and rest.

Garden City outlines and supports a robust view of work and practical ideas for how to create a practice of Sabbath within the regular rhythm of life. It is an ideal resource for, but certainly not limited to, young adults preparing for and launching into a first career. The author repeatedly references additional reading to support his line of thought and provides palatable vocabulary instruction of Hebrew

word meanings. The notes are worth reading for their additional information and often clarified humor. The formatting of the book in small sips of texts, short paragraphs and relevant examples allows the reader to enjoy the full flavor of John Mark Comer's ideas and scriptural interpretation. It is a book made for rainy day coffee shop conversations with friends seeking a better understanding of the meaning of work and the weekly rhythm of life.

Why God Makes Sense in a World that Doesn't: The Beauty of Christian Theism.

by Gavin Ortlund

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. 240 pages, softcover. US $23.99.

Review by Jeff Elliot
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In *Why God Makes Sense in a World that Doesn't,* Gavin Ortlund sets forth to present a narrative apologetic. Ortlund is a scholar, pastor, and writer, whose works have put him at the forefront of today's Christian apologists. Ortlund explains why he has written this book using a narrative framework: 1) It appeals more naturally to the heart, will, and imagination; 2) it can be less confrontational and more inviting; 3) it is better able to furnish meaning and convey beauty; 4) it conveys truth more concretely; 5) it has greater ability to break through cynicism and apathy; 6) it has greater explanatory reach; 7) it is better positioned to address the problem of evil (9-10).

Instead of presenting arguments from a variety of competing worldviews, he chooses to contrast only theism (and in particular Christian theism) and naturalism. The question that he poses to the thoughtful reader is, "which is telling us a better story—a story that better accounts for the strangeness, the incompleteness, the brokenness, and the beauty of our world?" (11) Ortlund further chooses to present his case using abductive arguments, which allow the reader to ask which explanation is best based on the evidence presented—its plausibility and its ability to connect to what makes us fully human.

After framing how he is going to approach his apologetic discussion, Ortlund designs it like a good story. Chapter one covers the cause of the world. Isn't it more plausible to believe that our world came from something (in this case, Someone) rather than to believe it came from nothing? In chapter two, he tackles the psychological component of meaningfulness and asserts that "not only is the possibility of transcendent meaning behind the world reasonable, but it also enriches our experience of the world" (57) Ortlund's third chapter highlights the basic conflict between good and evil. There he draws attention to "two aspects of moral experience: 1) our intuitive sense of the objective reality of moral values and obligations (conscience); 2) our longing for moral justice and moral hopes" (113) (desire for happy ending). He concludes the book with a more usual Christian apologetic that points out that only a theistic worldview, in particular Christian theism, offers a hopeful conclusion. He presents evidence for the historicity of the biblical Jesus, as well as making a strong case for the veracity of His resurrection.

Ortlund brings his abductive approach first to the origins of the universe. He addresses the Big Bang theory and the difficulty it has explaining how something (the universe) can come from nothing. Here he also deals with the naturalist's rebuttal of the theist's argument that God is the ultimate cause, by asking "then what caused God." Ortlund points out how that very question shows they do not understand a transcendent other who is the "unique, uncaused, necessary, Self-existent Being" (25).

Drawing from both of these points, if we were to aim to restrict ourselves to the most modest conclusion possible, we might simply say that *it seems more likely than not that our physical world (universe/ multiverse) has a cause, and therefore it seems a distinct possibility that our physical world is not all that exists (since whatever caused it would exist independently of it, as its cause)* (43).

Ortlund then leads his readers to reason "it looks more like the universe has a cause than not; such a probability produces some exciting metaphysical implications" (54). From there, he reminds us that even a child knows someone must have written her books, and that someone is different from (transcendent to) the book's characters.

In chapter two, he tackles the meaningfulness of this world and life in general. First, he uses Mathematics, by comparing the work of mathematicians to that of archaeologists, not that of architects. By this Ortlund asserts that in math we are more discovering what lies below the surface (design and order), rather than inventing or imposing our reasoning or will on nature.

From math, he moves to music. "Music feels important–it feels meaningful, grand, and palatial-as though it were conveying to us something too poignant for words, some haunting beauty from another world," (89). The contrast between naturalism's view of music and that of theism could not be more stark. In theism, music is a consequence of the love and joy pulsating between the persons of the Triune God. Naturalism sees music as an accidental product of nature, just a fleeting illusion.

Finally, Ortlund uses love to demonstrate how a theistic worldview paints a richer, more intricate picture of the human experience. Naturalism describes love as an evolutionary by-product of natural selection that helped our ancestors survive. For the theist, love is at the very core of our reality-eternally shared among the Godhead and the sole motive for the creation of the world.

Ortlund draws attention to two aspects of moral experience with his abductive narrative in chapter three. First, he discusses our intuitive sense of what he calls "the objective reality of moral values and

obligations (conscience)," (113). We just know that some things are right to do, and other things are wrong. He also states that humankind has a "longing for moral justice and moral hope," (113). Theism offers a plausible and richer explanation for both these natural human desires. Feelings of right and wrong, good and evil have a kind of transcendent importance and authority associated with them.

In chapter four, Ortlund turns to a more familiar apologetic as he argues for the historicity of the biblical Jesus and reviews the evidence of His resurrection. He begins by confronting those who would lump all religions together, arguing that blaming all for the excesses of a few is inherently unfair. He calls out the "cultural elitism" that would castigate all who have been "poisoned by the ignorance and backwardness" that is religion, while only the few in the modern West have managed to attain a higher knowledge and understanding (naturalists and atheists).

Ortlund presents sound arguments for the veracity of the Gospels and reminds his readers that if we throw them out, then we must similarly question all of our understanding of history. As he asserts, "why couldn't Jesus really be the Creator God's point of entry into our world?" (189). So, that leaves us with two possible endings to this story of humanity. Naturalism is a philosophy that believes what is, is all there is – no hope beyond this realm. Theism offers the message of "infinite happiness and the everlasting good" (214).

Gavin Ortlund has done a great job in showing clearly and coherently how a theistic worldview offers just as plausible a framework for understanding our world and ourselves as does naturalism. However, he also has shown that the story theism tells is richer and more appealing to our basic human desires for meaning and hope. Not only has Ortlund given us an academically sound apologetic; he has given us one that resonates with our human experience of emotion and morality.

The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness

by Jonathan Haidt

New York: Penguin Press, 2024. 385 pages, hardcover. US $30.00.

Review by Andrew Bolger
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The Anxious Generation was not the book Jonathan Haidt (pronounced "height") set out to write. His original idea was to explore how social media consumption has impacted American democracy. However, a different book emerged as he engaged with the literature, research, and data—one much more personal because it impacted his family and children. It's obvious throughout the book that the foil for Haidt's research is his own parenting experience. An experience of trying to care for his children in a new digital world—a world very different than the world he grew up in and few could have expected before 2007.

Presently serving as the Thomas Cooley Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University's Stern School of Business, Haidt not only pursues this subject with the intensity of a parent whose children are under threat, he also employs the depth of an experienced researcher. However, these academic credentials are not the most striking aspects of Haidt's book. His writing has the spirit of a grassroots parent meeting with a tenured Ivy League professor's research agenda. This synergy makes the book persuasive and incisive. It easily communicates to parents and researchers alike.

The thrust of the book centers on three simultaneous interlocking

phenomena Haidt has observed that reshaped the sociological and psychological geography of childhood and adolescence since 2007. The first phenomenon is the rise of "safetyism." Haidt and Lukianoff introduced the concept of safetyism in their 2018 book *The Coddling of the American Mind.* Safetyism, as defined in that book, is "a culture or belief system in which safety has become a sacred value, which means that people become unwilling to make tradeoffs demanded by other practical and moral concerns. 'Safety' trumps everything else, no matter how unlikely or trivial the potential danger" (30).

Modern parents express this reality through ubiquitous parenting metaphors, such as helicopter or lawnmower parenting. The basic premise is that the current parenting philosophy and practice differs from earlier generations in that modern parents see their primary role as bull-dozing obstacles—physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual—threatening their children, regardless of the level of threat or danger. Haidt uses several anecdotes from his personal life to explain these generational differences around cultural rites of passage. For instance, the age at which parents might trust a child to stay at home by themselves, go to a movie by themselves, or take public transit by themselves. According to Haidt, parents have increasingly allowed these experiences to drift to higher and higher ages over the last forty years. So, what might have been expected for a six-year-old in the 1970s or 80s begins at 13 or 14 in the 2020s (107).

This transition did not happen in a vacuum but occurred as American families increasingly moved away from neighbors who they grew up with and hyperbolized news on sexual predators and abuse during the 1990s and 2000s increased. Interestingly, Haidt convincingly demonstrates from the data that sexual abuse and predation have diminished during this same period, making sexual predators and abuse less, rather than more, pervasive in American

society (85). Haidt argues that Safetyism, unfortunately, stunts healthy development patterns in children and limits their ability to take appropriate risks, learn, and develop resilience.

The second phenomenon interlocks with the first: the rise of social media use among children and teens. This phenomenon Haidt defines as a "phone-based childhood." Haidt parallels these interlocking phenomena, safetyism and a phone-based childhood, by explaining high parental controls in the physical world (safetyism) and apathy in the technological world (a phone-based childhood). He writes:

> We decided that the real world was so full of dangers that children should not be allowed to explore it without adult supervision. . . . At the same time, it seemed too much of a bother to design and require age-appropriate guardrails for kids online, so we left children free to wander through the Wild West of the virtual world, where threats to children abound (67).

These choices devastated childhood and adolescence, allowing children to become increasingly fragile, depressed, and addicted.

The third phenomenon, which Haidt argues is the direct consequence of the first two, is the consistent rise of mental health issues and suicide in Western countries among children and teens in the years since 2007. Haidt goes so far as to suggest that social media use among teens is "a cause" of the pervasive "anxiety, depression, and other ailments, not just a correlate," (148). This causal relationship, Haidt posits, impacts teen girls exponentially more than boys because social media use lures girls with the "promise of connection and communion" and "twisted incentive structures" (170).

In response to these phenomena, Haidt makes both spiritual and

policy recommendations for how families, schools, and society should move forward with the consequences of safetyism, phone-based childhood, and mental health issues among America's youth. His spiritual recommendations include embracing physical practices, rituals, meditation, and prayer. Although an atheist, Haidt's explanation of these practices and their power to reshape those impacted by phone-based childhood, remain convincing and encouraging. Beyond the spiritual practices listed above, Haidt also recommends that individuals, families, and communities engage in practices that help ground them in the transcendent beauty around them by mobilizing observation and awe as a lens for the natural world.

Societally, Haidt makes four recommendations for how we can move forward as a nation: 1) no smartphones before high school; 2) no social media before age 16; 3) phone-free schools, and 4) far more unsupervised play and childhood independence. Notice that these recommendations engage parents and policy in the conversation for reshaping and restoring childhood and adolescence post-2007.

The Anxious Generation has sparked many conversations with members at my church and parents about our children's future. The thick research and grassroots-parent-meeting-feel led me to become an evangelist (lower-case "e") for this book among my parenting peers. Although it is hard to identify a weakness in this book, I think the depth of research, use of academic language and methodologies, and overall breadth of academic disciplines Haidt's argument employs, will make it inaccessible in its whole form to many American parents.

Despite this reality, many individual ideas in the book are persuasive, sticky, and substantive—meaningful to chew on with friends at church, a small group, or at a sporting event. For that reason, I'd

recommend it for either group.

Throughout my reading of this book, I have consistently tried to find a place to locate this book in the cadres of parents at my church, in my daughters' school, and amongst my colleagues at work. I think it especially resonates with: 1) millennial parents who emerged into adulthood during and after 2007 and can remember a pre-iPhone reality, and 2) parents who are hyper-conscientious to differentiate their technological parenting from their experience. We have also seen the depths of destructive behaviors the internet perpetuates through social media and smartphone use.

Those who would benefit most from this book would also include educators and administrators in K-12 and higher education institutions, parents, pastors, and policymakers—an exciting mix of people to shape children's lives for the better. It would also be an excellent book to use in the classroom with college and university students. Overall, I'd rate *The Anxious Generation* a must-read for anyone who works closely with children, adolescents, college students, or parents of those groups. Choose a section or chapter if you can't make it through the whole book. The book is dense enough that you'll walk away with something that informs your life, work, and parenting.

Faithful Lives: Christian Reflections on the World is an annual journal produced by College of the Ozarks. The goal of the publication is to foster deep and substantive Christian thought in all areas of life by publishing articles that assume and explore the truthfulness of the Christian worldview perspective. Frequently composed of writing produced by the fine faculty and administration of the College, past issues have also included essays by thoughtful scholars and researchers outside the college community, such as: John Lennox, Steven Garber, Amy Black, Louis Markos, Sedrick Huckaby, and others. Previous issues of the journal can be freely accessed on the College's website at: www.cofo.edu/Academics/Faithful-lives.

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