

Beauty, The Arts, and Church Planting as an Act of Creating Beauty

By Bill Drake



The triune God of the Bible timelessly exists in perfect love, perfect unity, and in perfect community. He reveals Himself to man through His word, His prophets, His son, and His creation, and His glory is shown throughout the universe. God's glory is the manifestation of His presence, the majestic expression of His divine person and character. That He is "Beautiful" is without dispute. As Bob Kauflin states in his seminal work on worship:

It's always wise to use biblical words to describe God, or words that help us better understand biblical words. While we don't hear God described as "beautiful" very often in Scripture, beauty is an attribute assigned to God, His holiness, and His dwelling place. Beauty has to do with that which is appealing, attractive, and delightful. (Psalm 27:4; Psalm 96:6; 1 Chronicles 16:29; Psalm 50:2) ... God is the essence of perfection and the most beautiful being in the universe. All beauty is defined by and has its source in God himself. Wayne Grudem defines God's beauty as "that attribute of God whereby He is the sum of all desirable qualities." (Systematic Theology, p. 219). Beauty is sometimes used as a synonym for goodness, splendor, glory, or majesty.¹

God's Beauty in Creation

Beauty then, is the reflection of this beautiful God in His creation. He is the author of it, the arbiter of it, and ultimately the definer of it. (Psalm 19, Philippians 4:8, Song of Solomon 4:7, Psalm 27:4). He spoke creation into being, but He did more than that—He universally and majestically decorated it, and after thousands of years and billions of words, the human race has still not run out of ways to describe it.

Beauty finds its roots in order ... man and God's creative work involves forming order from what

would otherwise be unorganized and chaotic. The same happens to art when beauty emerges from what was previously unformed. "Beauty brings order out of anarchy, harmony out of cacophony. — Leland Ryken" ²

God's Beauty in the Incarnation

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ embodied the Godhead in human form; the Word and the Image of the invisible God (John 1:1, Colossians 1:15). The Incarnation of Jesus Christ was the ultimate creative work of the Divine; His humanity being the pinnacle of God's creation.³ This verifiable truth has far-reaching theological and practical implications for the Church, as "His Body" on earth. It also directly validates incarnational ministry such as the arts.

God's Beauty Reflected in Human Beings and Culture

As "image-bearers" made in *imago dei*, human beings have been given the intrinsic ability to create and make beauty, not *ex nihilo* like God, but certainly as reflections of that original Creator and creation. In the Cultural Mandate, human beings are given the 'authority' by God to create. The aesthetic value of art finds its roots in both the image of God and the cultural mandate.⁴

What is important about the link between art and the cultural mandate is that it establishes the fact that human creative activity is an act of obedience in response to a command of God and not just a superfluous pursuit that stands apart from man's purpose on earth. Without finding its origin in this biblical command, art can be reduced to a mere luxury, hobby, or unnecessary element of life. Identifying how art comes from the image of God in man gives a clue to why man has the desire to create and the cultural mandate brings to light art's legitimacy, worth, and necessity in the world.⁵

It could therefore be said that human beings are given the task of bringing beauty to a fallen world within every facet of culture, be it justice, worship, or art. Art is the reflection of the heart of a culture. Art is worldview incarnate. If you want to see where a culture is at, just look at its art forms. And nowhere has beauty been a greater casualty to fallen culture, than to the ugliness of modern, progressive, secular humanism, which perpetuates the myth that there is no God, spiritual pluralism is the global norm, and the oxymoron that there is no absolute truth, and that all truth is relative.

For the Christian, nothing could be further from the truth, especially when it comes to the intrinsic value of each and every human being made in the image of God. And while it is true as well that God has the final say on beauty, He has given the human race the ability and the authority to create and define "what is beautiful" by varying standards.

If we are to effectively reach our world for Christ, the leadership of the global church must regain a biblically based understanding of the role of the arts and the imagination in the proclamation of truth, and the discipleship of nations. World missions can no longer ignore or marginalize the place of the arts and the imagination in God's world, the central role they play in the shaping of ideas and worldviews, and in culture formation and transformation. This is a pivotal moment in history.⁶

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God's Beauty Reflected in Redeemed-Community Worship

All cultures worship, precisely because man was created to worship. Indigenous art forms are employed in the worship of every religious system on the planet, and in this sense, they are the universal human language of devotional expression. And while disparate cultures ascribe the use of sounds, visuals, and movement differently, all have the intrinsic impetus to express their response to 'truth' creatively: all cultures of the world employ the arts to express their worship.

For the body of Christ, one need look no farther than the scriptures and church history to see that the people of God have throughout time employed song, lyrics, instruments, poetry, sculpture, weaving, engraving, painting, drama, and dance as a vehicle for worship. They worship the Lord as 'beautiful', and as such, have created and employed 'beauty' as best they know it to house, express, and widely proclaim His worship and glory. They have also continued to pour enormous resources into reflecting it back to Him.

But there is also the beauty of the Church. The expression, the diversity, the ultimate manifestation on earth of the beauty of God, is His bride: unified, justified, sanctified, glorified. The beauty of the wedding story: the bridegroom who passionately loves His bride to the death through to the beautiful expressions of gratitude that pour from the heart of the redeemed, beauty pervades ecclesiology—theologically, and aesthetically.

God's Beauty Reflected in Church Planting

Having established that our God is a God of beauty and the author of the arts, that He gives direction in His word for the use of the arts in the worshipping of Himself, that He has blessed human beings with that part of His image that inspires us to create, and has placed eternity in our hearts and the divine mandate to worship as part of our being, it is not a leap of logic to say that employing the arts in the planting of a fellowship of worshipping followers of Jesus is a "no-brainer." In fact, to not do so, may be robbing worshippers of the Lord the employment of arguably some of the most powerful tools God has ever given for human expression in the purpose of gathering them together to worship and adore Him.

As an expression of the heart through the aesthetic of picture or song, as a prophetic signpost to the deeper implications of truth having transformed a life, or as a meditative aid to focusing one's mind and heart on God's revelation, the arts are indispensable when it

comes to worship. We can therefore say that the arts are necessary for the Church, because our God is a beautiful God.

But we go farther: Being engaged in planting vibrant communities of Jesus followers is also an act of proliferating beauty in a world bereft of it on so many levels. The birthing of the body and bride of Christ into areas of the world where it is not, is an act of creating beauty on many levels of life and culture, not just aesthetically, but also in virtue, in order, in compassion, and in justice.

The church needs artists, not only to have arts in the church, but to influence the church to exercise creativity and the imagination in every realm of life and ministry. I have experienced this first-hand as I have interacted with the precious artists I know. OM Arts has gone beyond convincing me of the value of The Arts. You have pushed me to realize the value of creativity and imagination and how my being made in the image of God releases me, even compels me, to dream, to imagine, to innovate for the sake of the Kingdom. You have helped me appreciate the craft of those who take care of the grounds, not only by keeping the grass cut, but also by making the campus more beautiful with flowers, landscaping, You have helped me appreciate the ingenuity/ creativity of a mechanic who can keep a fleet of autos repaired and maintained. And you have helped me become not only comfortable in speaking of God as beautiful, but in seeking the beauty of God. So, the church needs artists, not just for art in the church, but for the wider principle of engendering creativity, imagination, innovation in the Body of Christ, and in His world.⁷ ☐

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Notes

1. Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters*, <https://worshipmatters.com/2007/07/20/qa-fridays-shou-2/>
2. Sam Sinns, "Art as Originating in the image of God, in man, and the Cultural Mandate" (Masters Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2012), 45.
3. Bill Drake, *Art in the Bible*, <https://www.billdrake.com>
4. Sinns, "Art as Originating in the Image of God," 43.
5. Sinns, "Art as Originating in the Image of God," 27.
6. Colin Harbinson, "*The Arts & Missions—The Recovery of the Arts & the Imagination*" (unpublished article) Bellhaven University, 2013.
7. Quote by Rev. Terre Haas, Pastor, Speaker, & Associate for Church Connections, OM USA.

