

Doctrine of Art and Beauty

Part 2

A Sense of the Sacred

1. The Reformation produced a reaction among Christians against formalism, rationalism, and ritualism.
2. The prophets of Israel also railed against these things, but they were not iconoclasts. They did not try to get rid of the rituals and external forms of worship, and for this reason. Art and beauty, as forms of worship, were ordained by God.
3. What God ordained, He ordained for beauty. The robes of the priests were designed for beauty.
 - *Exodus 28:2 And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty.*
4. The problem is not ritual, or forms, or external acts of worship, but what people do with them.
5. The Lord's Prayer can be recited from memory, and the content of the prayer yet remain meaningless. Or, the Lord's Prayer can be expressed in worship with sincerity, and deep appreciation of its content.
6. Any religious ritual may lose its richness by meaningless repetition.
7. The cure for ritualism is reformation. There is no need to totally discard religious rituals.
8. Throughout redemptive history, God has added sacrament to His word. There is a visual aid, or an audial aid to enhance His word.
 - A bow was set in the sky after the Lord gave His word not to destroy the world by flood.
 - An animal was divided, and the Lord passed through the pieces, after Abraham was promised a blessing.
 - The New Covenant is expressed by water baptism, and the Lord's Supper.
9. There was another reason why the prophets did not, and the Reformers should not have tried to get rid of art and beauty in the church, and that is, it cannot be done.
10. There is no escape from art, music, or literature in corporate worship. Corporate worship simply cannot take place without the external forms of religion. Corporate worship has to take place somewhere. Form takes place on some level, even if it is plain.

11. Every form is an art form, and every art form communicates something no matter how unattractive it may be, or how utilitarian, or functional it may be.
12. If a church building is unattractive and plain, that art form is communicating something.
13. In American culture, there is a conscious undertaking to remove all religious symbols and forms from the building in order to make the church neutral, and thus appealing to the world and the alleged religious seeker. There is a cultural understanding that the modern person does not want to attend the old, outdated, outmoded houses of worship.
14. The chancel, or area around the altar, has become a stage, in modern thinking, because a stage conjures up the idea of entertainment, and that is what the modern worshipper wants in church. People want to be entertained.
15. The sanctuary is now called the worship center. To enter the worship center there is no call for a holy hush. Rather, there is the beat of the drum, and the strum of the band as people meet and greet one another in a loud and jocular manner.
16. The pulpit has given way to a Plexiglas portable lectern that can be rolled about for the drama skit, and other activities.
17. Many modern Christians have never enjoyed the cultural experience of walking in a Cathedral to experience the spiritual sensation of being awed by beauty and art, with a sense of the divine enveloping the soul. There is a wonder to medieval cathedrals that is lost to this generation, who view the God of Glory and Majesty as their “Good Buddy”, or, “the Man in the Sky”, or some other unworthy concept.
18. The architects who built the cathedrals thought through the desired effect they wanted to have on people who entered into the holy churches. They wanted to elicit humility in the heart of those who came into the presence of God, and a sense of the sacred. There is a form that draws the spirit heavenly, and the architects developed that form.
19. The cathedrals were designed in the form of a crucifix, to remember the cross of Calvary, and the redemptive work of Christ.
20. The entryway was darker than the nave, where light was allowed into the sanctuary. The message was communicated that the soul was walking out of darkness into the light of the glory and presence of God.
21. Even people who did not fully comprehend the symbolism, felt it. That is a different feeling than walking into a town hall, or civil meeting building, or a modern worship center.

Special Note.

The worship center is patterned after the community center model with multi-faceted usages, such as turning the sanctuary into a basketball court, or an assembly room for a convention. The main idea is to make people feel comfortable. The worship center is to be a place where people can come without fear. The Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but that concept is lost in worship. In the modern worship center there is no threat. There is no fear of a transcendent and holy God. Therefore, all the symbols of holiness, all the symbols of a divine threat, are removed to make room for creature comfort. Is there any reason to wonder why the idea of the greatness of God is eclipsed in the modern church?

22. A question arises. "Since God desires that people worship Him in spirit and in truth, does it matter whether He is worshipped in a tent, a drive in theater parking lot, a shack, or a informal worship center?" "What difference does it make?"
23. The answer is that it does not matter if God is being worshipped in spirit and in truth. However, when a tent is pitched, when a drive in worship center is entered, when the worship center is used, a message is going to be communicated about worship, about God, about the heart of the congregante. There are symbols, and symbolic associations being expressed.
24. The larger point is that however a Christian choses to worship, they are choosing an art form. That art form is communicating something to self, and to others who visit.
25. Even the smell of the place of worship can communicate a message. There are church buildings that literally smell musky, dark, and old. It is the smell of death. Something as simple as changing the smell of the sanctuary, and the classrooms, can be helpful in attracting people, for individuals are attracted to, or repulsed by smells.
26. Art should not be considered worldly, by Christians. Rather, religious art should be fully embraced for the good of the congregation, and for the glory of God. All of the senses are involved in the worship of God.
 - Sight. What the church looks like is important.
 - Smell. What the church smells like is important.
 - Hear. What message and music the church hears is important.
 - Taste. What foods the church eats is important.
 - Touch. What furnishing the church has is important.
27. All of our sensory perceptions are used in the worship of God, and so they should not be neglected in corporate worship.
28. The final question is not, "Will there be art in church?" You cannot have church without art.
29. The final question is, "What form will our art take?" Christians should desire good forms, true forms that please God.

30. God is pleased when the truth of His Word is enhanced. God is most pleased with beauty, and not the bizarre. God is pleased with cacophony and harmony, and not sycophant music. God is pleased with order and cosmos, and not chaos.
31. God is concerned with these things because He Himself is orderly. God is beautiful. God is harmonious. God is the Author of art. God is the One who inspires art because, in creation, we see that He Himself is an artist. God expresses Himself in the sunset. He is the Artist without a brush, says Dr. R. C. Sproul. By the power of His word, God creates worlds of beauty, and fills empty voids with real things. He triumphs over the unformed abyss of creation. There is a reason why people sing about the glories of God in creation.

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!"

32. God has clothed creation with beauty and diversity. He is the preeminent Artist, and we bow in wonder.