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Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. But does Beauty Still Transcend?

Introduction

Sydney is self-assuredly beautiful. From the curve of Bondi beach to the shell-coloured sails of the Opera House, from the squiggly gums down to the glittering harbour, here in Sydney, beauty surrounds us.

In fact, there is nothing like a showy Sunday afternoon in Sydney, all bathed in sunshine, to give meaning to the word ‘hedonism,’ wrote the British author, Jan Morris¹.

While the experience of beauty can be effortless – bathing in Sunday afternoon sunshine, for example – it can be difficult to understand. ‘Beauty’ seems to slip through our fingers with greater regularity than the sand through our fingers on Bondi beach. For some, thinking on beauty is negligible. Notably, some Christians have largely ‘neglected theological inquiry into the nature of beauty and aesthetics.’² Otherwise, we may appeal to beauty as something important, but we may not entirely know why. Dostoyevsky wrote in *The Brothers Karamazov* that ‘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.’³

¹ Jan Morris, *Sydney*, Viking, New York, 1982

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-reasons-christians-neglect-beauty-in-theology>

³ Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Not only that, but we seem to have a problematic relationship with beauty. In Sydney, we crave beauty, but we also destroy it. We pollute the beaches, we augment bodies, we opt for the kitsch. We stuff our wardrobes with clothes that are made to be disposable, but that we'll never wear, and we diminish genuine artisanship by buying accessories that have that 'look,' but are, in fact, mass produced.

I should say at this point that there is an entire lecture that could be given on the role of the media and advertising in constructing and projecting a deformed sense of beauty. This is especially destructive for women, but also for men. That won't be the focus of my lecture, but I do acknowledge the importance of the issue.

And so we are faced with two dynamics: first, we're not quite sure what we mean by 'the beautiful', whether, indeed, it has substantive meaning at all; and second, we are also faced with the sense that our relationship to beauty, whatever it is, is deformed.

Thus, last year in the Sydney Morning Herald, Elizabeth Farelly wrote, 'We don't talk about beauty any more'. She said 'beauty doesn't figure in public debate.' It is 'wholly absent from our politics,' and rarely 'championed by those professionals for whom it is core business.'⁴ (She was speaking of the artists and architects.) Perhaps worse, when beauty does appear in public discourse, she noted, it does so 'in Trump terms', as in 'a beautiful southern border wall'.

⁴ <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/beauty-should-be-a-necessity-not-an-after-thought-20161201-gt1t9d.html>

I have reflected on the significance of beauty and our deformed relationship with it, not as a philosopher, but as someone who has grappled with its practical significance. I have always had a desire for the world to be put to rights – for justice – and I’ve had a sense that the beauty in the world is both important and mysterious. It took me years to understand something of the significance of that.

In kindergarten, I called a class meeting to seek reconciliation between the half of the class that went to ‘art,’ in term 3, and the other half of the class that went to ‘craft.’ I printed off a meeting notice and agenda on the gestetner at my parents’ work, and handed them out at the school gate in the morning. I held the meeting in the cubby house in the playground. My parents’ work place was Blacktown TAFE. My Mum taught Shakespeare and Patrick White, and my Dad, Plato and Thucydides (and Seamus Heaney when he could squeeze it in), to mature age students preparing to do the HSC. Mum and Dad were there because they believed in the value of a classical education for disadvantaged students. There was nothing glamorous about it, but it was deeply satisfying: there was great beauty in their vocation. At home, in Northmead, we enjoyed the leafy bush reserve across the road, and at Christmas, Mum and Dad would get out the Georg Jensen silver cutlery they had bought, piece by piece, in the mid 1970s.

Whenever Mum and Dad took me to TAFE, when I wasn’t printing meetings agendas, I’d explore, with a carton of Strawberry Oak milk in hand, the miniature houses in the basement that the apprentice tradies made to practice their joinery. The miniaturised staircases and windows, in perfect proportion, were fascinating to me as a 5 year old. And I have no doubt that seeing these models and their blueprints on the noticeboards,

along with some heavy doses of Roald Dahl, inspired me to draft plans for a chocolate factory that I planned to build just off State Circle in Canberra. This included plans for housing within the factory grounds for the chocolate factory employees, and a school for their children.

Many years later while at law school, I went to East Timor to make a documentary about internally displaced people, and stayed with an Australian UN official and his family in Dili. The climate was tense in the lead up to the elections, with gang violence on the streets simmering in the background. On our first night in Dili, we ate dinner in their front room, overlooking a playground on the opposite side of the street. The space was newly cultivated, and our host explained how his vision for this playground was to create a place of beauty for the children who had only experienced the ugliness of violence and injustice. He believed that an experience of beauty could teach the young people gently what goodness could look like, and care for each other. It made so much sense. Yet, in the practices of aid work internationally, beauty never seemed to be valued in this way.

After doing my PhD research in Ethiopia, near the border and conflict with Eritrea, and seeing copies of their artisan made goods - such as their traditional hand woven scarves - in chain stores, I founded a digital storytelling platform to 'tell the story behind the good.' Our aim was to form customers' desires for goods that were truly beautiful - those made fairly. In founding this tech start-up, I was confronted by the reality that while consumer preferences, in many parts of the world, are being formed

in favour of responsibly made goods, we are more interested in consuming “peace of mind,” rather than making a real moral commitment. Our contradictions are multiple.⁵

Tonight, I want to explore these problems – our understanding of beauty’s significance and our deformed relationship to beauty – and suggest two lines of thought as fruitful. The first is housed within the Christian tradition: beauty is a transcendental, meaning where we find it or create it, we are participating in God’s own self. On this account, beauty has real, substantive meaning. It is not merely ephemeral – as in the passing subjective taste of an individual, or the fleeting feeling evoked by a sunset. Rather, each moment or instance of beauty points to further beauty to be found; it stands for something about our reality. The second line of inquiry draws from Elaine Scarry, the Cabot Professor of Aesthetics at Harvard. In a short but significant treatise, *On Beauty and Being Just*, Scarry describes beauty as ‘distributive.’⁶ By this, she means it distributes our attention away from ourselves, and towards others. We are, in the words of Iris Murdoch, ‘radically decentred.’⁷ Beauty is consequently tied to justice in an intimate way. Scarry does not write from a religious perspective, but her arguments easily resonate with Christian thought.

If these two lines of thought are correct, then we cannot be apathetic towards beauty, let alone destructive. We must take beauty seriously.

⁵ Keith R. Brown, *Buying Into Fair Trade*, New York University Press, New York, 2013.

⁶ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1999.

⁷ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good*, Routledge Classics Edition, Routledge, Oxford, (1970), 2001.

This evening, I understand that we will have a time for questions at the end. I'd love to hear your questions, but also your comments – whether you think beauty is indeed a serious subject.

Our Difficulty Understanding Beauty

We may casually invoke beauty in our daily lives, but still not be entirely sure what it is. We know that the cry 'you beauty' is probably, here in Australia, saying something about taking a wicket in cricket, but we otherwise may have different views on what we mean by 'the beautiful'. Is beauty intelligible? What is the nature of beauty, and in what does it subsist?

The theologian Edward Farley argued that our understanding of the beautiful was lost, or at least hindered, in the eighteenth century. Here, Farley argues, beauty came to be viewed as a mere passion and sensibility.⁸ Beauty was no longer understood as corresponding with a reality beyond itself; rather, the claim that something was beautiful merely reflected a subjective sensibility.

To translate this into our terms, we may say that beauty was associated with mere taste. You like Mozart, while I like the flavour-of-the-week pop star. You like Monet, while I like stock photography of happy smiling families. Beauty is 'in the eye of the beholder' only. Alternatively, we may say it is *merely* cultural – beauty is only the label we give to constructed Australian tastes, for example. Beauty on these accounts is divorced from truth. That is to say, beauty does not disclose any greater

⁸ Edward Farley, *Faith and Beauty: A Theological Aesthetic*, Ashgate, Hants, 2001, 43

truth than my own subjective sensibility. This is, of course, compounded by doubt over the category of truth at all. For some, what is true is what we can verifiably establish, through clear material evidence, notably. Truth is limited to scientific reason; beauty as perceptual and experiential is not written into the physical laws of the universe.

But it is not possible to establish, in this way, what Alister McGrath has described as ‘deeper truths’.⁹ What amounts to goodness cannot simply be a matter of biological explanation. So too with beauty – is it merely a trick of the eye, or can it disclose something true?

To be sure, modern thinking on beauty has not been uniform. Reacting against rationalism, Romantic writers pointed to the ‘sublime’ in an attempt to name a distinctive experience that elevated and transported earthly experience into something transcendental. This experience could not be controlled, nor fully understood by the individual who was seized in a moment of mystery.

But modern attitudes to beauty have often displayed a common deficiency: an inability to engage with this felt experience of beauty. Because it is uncoupled from truth, we potentially distrust our own perception of beauty – the beauty our eyes see, or our ears hear, and what we then experience is not seen as disclosing anything beyond the individual person.

⁹ Alister McGrath, ‘Is God a Figment of our Imagination? On Certainty, Scepticism and the Limits of Proof,’ *ABC Religion and Ethics*, 25 September, 2017
<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2017/09/25/4739706.htm>

Alison Milbank discusses this in the work of Kant. She writes: ‘Kant argued strongly for a transcendent spiritual reality, but we have no access to it by means of our perceptions. ... [He] comes to the conclusion that since spirit can only be penetrable, it can occupy no space and, even if real, is unavailable to our senses. We are cut off, therefore from the noumenal spiritual world ... This does not just mean we have no perceptual access to God but no access, indeed, to anything as it truly is in itself: the material objects of our perception such as flowers and tables also hide their depths of reality from us.’¹⁰

But experiencing something as beautiful may actually reflect something quite extraordinary. No matter how often we may glance the harbour, or revisit a favourite spot on the foreshore, when we see the glitter of the sun on the harbour, or those squiggly gums on a sandstone outcrop, with the green water lapping over the rocks below, we can feel that this visual event existed before us, and that it has some kind of priority over us. By this I mean that we are attracted to it and it changes us; or even, as David Bentley Hart suggests, it has precedence – our experience of beauty seems to come before other experiences of reality. Moreover, beauty appears to then be causative: it prompts the generation of new things. We hear beautiful poetry and new ideas and new poems are born. We hear great music and we are stirred to future creative acts. We see beauty in the beloved, and are compelled to participate in creating life.

¹⁰ Alison Milbank, ‘Apologetics and the Imagination: Making Strange’ in Andrew Davison (ed), *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy, and the Catholic Tradition*, SCM Press, 2011, 31-32. With thanks to Joel Harrison for this point.

Beauty may then be considered objective – something we experience that is independent of an individual’s subjective tastes; something that, when encountered, raises our eyes above the horizon of the material world.

The Christian Argument

Modern Christian thinking itself has not provided wonderful expositions and meditations on beauty. In Protestant theology especially, beauty has been marginal to practice, interpretation and doctrine. Indeed, within this tradition the significance of beauty has been overshadowed by speech about something different: suffering. Some here tonight may know the passage in CS Lewis’ *The Problem of Pain*: ‘Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.’¹¹ We have found solace in the possibility that God shouts in our pains, but have we ever considered what it might mean that God ‘whispers to us in our pleasures?’

This lack is arguably being rectified. Quite aside from Catholic voices, theologians like Edward Farley and Archie Spencer, as well as the Orthodox David Bentley Hart are potentially reinvigorating talk of aesthetics in theology.

At its heart is thinking again about what is referred to as the analogy of being. I am not a philosopher; nevertheless, I think unpacking something of this thought is important – certainly I find it fruitful in understanding and meditating on beauty. So, bear with me.

¹¹ CS Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, Harper Collins, New York, (1940), 2015, 92.

In Christian thought, God is the transcendent creator. What this means is that God is distinct from his creation; he is not created, but rather is always present to his creation that he continually sustains. For this reason the Apostle Paul declares, ‘for in him we live and move and have our being’.¹²

Christians then had to grapple with finding a way to speak about this transcendent God. We are creatures, who live on this earth and speak about created things – what of a transcendent God? Being able to speak about God then raises another question: what can we know about this God, so radically other to us?¹³

But the belief that creation participates in God – that is, that it is continually sustained by and has its very being formed by God – points to the possibility that God can be understood through his creation. The Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians writes, ‘for now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.’¹⁴ We glimpse God, if darkly, through his creation. Thomas Aquinas developed this thought into an analogical argument. We declare that ‘God is good’, as he is truth and beauty. For Aquinas, when we then say ‘this person is good’ or ‘this sunset is beautiful’, we do so analogically – the goodness of the person is a reflection of God’s goodness; indeed, more than a reflection it shares in something of the source of all goodness – God.

¹² Acts 17:28.

¹³ On the problem of God’s speakability and analogy, see Archie Spencer, *The Analogy of Faith: The Quest for God’s Speakability*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, 2015, 19- 21.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:12

This follows from understanding creation *as creation*, related always to a transcendent creator. Of course, accepting this requires stepping into the ‘light of faith.’¹⁵ Again, for some, every statement of goodness or beauty may simply be a matter of individual taste. And without faith in a transcendent creator, this may be true: beauty may simply be the fleeting reaction of an individual.

But this analogical thought – the sunset is beautiful because it shares in God’s beauty – gives added meaning to beauty. It may be a matter of faith, but it secures the understanding or that sense that beauty has an objective meaning – that it is directed towards something. In this sense it is quite rational; it reflects our felt experience that beauty is real and has meaning beyond ourselves. All our acts of goodness, of beauty, are attributable to a good Creator. But this Creator is inexhaustible, meaning all our explorations of beauty are an ascent, deeper or higher, into understanding God himself, a God who nevertheless can only be seen ‘darkly’. Alison Milbank writes of the imagination being awakened to a kind of ‘homesickness’ for the truth – we see and contemplate beauty and think of eternal vistas.¹⁶

We may think of this from another angle, emphasised in Christian thought – the logic of the icon.

When we handle an object of beauty, we handle an icon. The icon is a symbol that points us to a transcendent horizon. These icons may be objects of beauty or even persons. These exist in contrast to things that refer only to themselves and have no significance beyond themselves. Things that we consume.

¹⁵ John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, Routledge, London, 2001, 23

¹⁶ Alison Milbank, 33.

Consider consumption, for a moment, and the impact that this has on our experience of beauty. If consumption is the end of a thing, if it has no further significance, then all that matters is acquiring the experience of consumption. And it is not just products we consume, but also people. An act of consumption may offer promises of more – the sleek car elevating you to new heights, sexual commerce fulfilling desire – but if it has no further significance, if it does not participate in an economy of what is good and true, then the goal is most likely simply to repeat this fleeting experience.¹⁷

Theologian James K. A. Smith argues that images ‘function as a sacrament’ that ‘points us to God.’¹⁸ The word, ‘icon’ derives from the greek, *eikon*, from which we also get our word image. The Bible teaches that in the Christmas event, God’s son comes in the flesh as a human, in the image or *eikon* of the invisible God.¹⁹ For Christians, God’s enfleshment in the son as this ‘image (*eikon*) of the invisible God’ redeems a creation made in God’s image.²⁰ This points to the person himself or herself being an icon, a symbol of God. Our lives should, therefore, be decorous or beautiful, reflecting this God.

Christians refer to the company of believers as ‘the body of Christ’. Each member – and each potential member – is crucial, fundamentally irreplaceable. They reflect God’s own personhood, seen in Christ. Their beauty does not simply belong to themselves, but points others to God.

¹⁷ On this idea about sexual commerce, see Scott Stephens and Waleed Aly, *The Minefield*, ABC Radio National, 11 October 2017 <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/theminefield/is-hollywood%E2%80%99s-fashionable-politics-just-a-screen-for-its-lack/9031498>

¹⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2009, 228

¹⁹ See James K. A. Smith, 228-29; Col 1:15.

²⁰ Gen 1:27

Understanding ourselves as symbols, pointing to the infinite beauty of God, arguably affords personhood greater integrity. We are not simply fleeting persons; rather, God's own personhood is manifested in us in some way. We are persons bestowed with talents, gifted by God to share with one another. Paul writes of different people being an ear, an eye, a nose, as metaphors for complementary talents in this one body.²¹ The *beauty* of a person includes (or is even found in) their unique importance to the whole. Even when we are broken jars of clay, we shine forth God's own radiance.

Elaine Scarry – Beauty and Distribution

Although not writing from within the Christian tradition, the philosopher Elaine Scarry arguably echoes some of these arguments, while also providing additional insight. For Scarry, what is significant is the *encounter* with beauty. She begins her treatise by asking, 'what is the felt cognition at the moment one stands in the presence of a beautiful boy or flower or bird?'²² When we encounter beauty, 'there is an overwhelming sense of "given-ness."²³ We perceive something that is self-evidently beautiful.

After reflecting on palm trees and Matisse paintings, Scarry ponders the significance of the vision of beauty that they provide. She writes, '[I]t's as though beautiful things

²¹ 1 Corinthians 12.

²² Scarry, 3.

²³ Scarry

have been placed here and there throughout the world to serve as small wake-up calls to perception, spurring lapsed alertness back to its most acute level.²⁴ As though.

Scarry argues that this perception of beauty transports us beyond ourselves and leads us deeper into a concern for justice.

She notes that, for the Greeks, beauty consisted in harmonious proportion. This meant a right relation between each detail and the design of the whole. We can think, for example of the *The Nautilus*, depicted in materials promoting this evening. For the Greeks, the *Nautilus*, with its spiral form, displaying proportions that were close to the golden ratio, was an exemplar of beauty in harmonious proportion.

Scarry then draws on the connection that the Greeks made between the mathematical proportions of beauty and the distributive ideals of justice. Notably, Aristotle thought of justice as a perfect cube, with each corner equally distributed from the other: the cube distributes our attention to the far corners, and attunes us to proportionality, to an equality of distance and to mutual reinforcement.

As I understand her, Scarry is pointing to two connected ideas. First, beauty draws us out of ourselves; it directs our attention towards other things and people; it trains us to consider the world and those around us. Second, beauty has been associated with right proportions – the harmony of parts and the whole. This harmony gives rise to pleasure, which, in itself, draws us deeper into appreciating and experiencing other things and people.

²⁴ Scarry

But I suggest these ideas are strongly echoed in the Christian tradition.

Christians claim that God is not simply beauty; he is also truth and goodness. Beauty should consequently be married with, overlapping or simultaneous with, justice.

Christians have always affirmed right distribution. As I have discussed, the body of Christ consists in persons, each sharing in talents bestowed by God, talents that reflect their creator. We are decorated, beautifully shining with a life that extends beyond us.

But this draws us into justice – each person has their right place, their integrity, their beauty, that needs to be supported and cultivated. Christianity claims that, in some way, I need you – for without you, I am missing part of the body, missing an opportunity to see God’s beauty manifest in this world. This is due proportionality, or right distribution, between the parts and the whole. To see it causes pleasure.

We are consequently pressed to consider other persons, through distribution of attention away from oneself. And this takes on divine significance – pointing to God. As Christians understand it, God’s own person is a life of charity – what John Milbank calls a life of ‘self-forgetting conviviality.’²⁵

What can we say of Sydney?

²⁵ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Blackwell, Oxford, (1990), 2006, 394

So far tonight, I have been thinking about two ideas. First, the analogical view, in which beauty is a category of creation, tied to its creator God. Second, beauty and distribution, in which identifying beauty leads us outside of ourselves to others.

In short, beauty is real, participating in the beauty that is God. But this then means that beauty is necessarily linked to right distribution, or justice. A thing is not beautiful if it is not just.

These ideas, I hope, resonate within a city ostentatiously concerned with beauty.

According to Saint Augustine in his *City of God*, the people of Rome sought ‘an infinite variety of pleasure with a crazy extravagance.’²⁶ He writes, in particular, of the Colosseum. He writes of eyes being drawn to the spectacle and ears being piqued by the roars of the crowd. Surely there was beauty here. The athleticism of the gladiator or the splendour of the animal? And yet it was beauty deformed. The gladiators were locked in combat; the animals were slaughtered for the pleasure of seeing blood.

What might Augustine have said about Sydney?

Well, we may say the eye is drawn to the waterfront, where the water meets the sun ... but also where our eyes drift towards the penthouse apartment, perhaps a second investment property. Or perhaps the eye is drawn to the more quotidian SUV. And the ear may share in the voices of our choirs, or a good conversation but perhaps,

²⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, Book 1.30, 42.

more likely, it is tuned into the crass airwaves of the radio shock jock or talk back host.

In some cases, what could have been genuinely beautiful is deformed; that is, beauty is not matched with justice.

The personal nature of a home, a place for real personality and security, shifts to speculative investment. This can potentially defeat care for one's own communal neighbour. The neighbour is potentially excluded from sharing in the experience of a secure home, in which they may invest real personality. Perhaps even more problematic, the more beautiful parts of our common home are limited to those who can pay – social housing gives way to new high-value housing, and an aspect that allows enjoyment of natural beauty is privatised. As one of our team at ADM commented to me today, in Sydney, we almost expect that this will be the outcome of a DA process, replacing the forms of nature that were once enjoyed with poorly designed constructions.

Returning to cars, the sleekness of the car points again to genuine craftsmanship, but also to the costs of aspiration: danger for other drivers because of one's own high ANCAP rating; and significant carbon footprints.

In our common life, the symbols of civilisation (from policies to whole cities) also have the potential to act as icons, representing a transcendental horizon. This, of course, was the purpose of the Gothic cathedral with its heights orienting us to heaven. However, contemporary cities, as images and material realities or landscapes

to be experienced, can also orientate also towards what is beautiful and good, or draw us away from this.²⁷ Can we build cities, suburbs, and local precincts that participate in a transcendental horizon, and distributes our attention to a care for others?

Public debate about this very building, voiced such concerns. Would “the Toaster” carve up and capitalise on what was a public foreshore? Would it block the Opera House and Bennelong Point from our line of sight? Would it segment the horizon and the Botanic Gardens beyond? In short, by placing apartment buildings here, a small group of people are able to buy this good and consume the beauty of the harbour. But their consumption would arguably be at others’ expense.

Of course, this is even clearer when it comes to Barangaroo. The monstrosity – dealing in a vice that consumes people and hinders their God-given talents – becomes the cultural “icon.”

Conclusion

Tonight, I have spoken about two core ideas. The first concerned the way that beauty speaks analogically: beauty has reality, pointing to hidden infinite depths. The second concerned distribution, that beauty draws our attention outside of ourselves. In the Christian tradition, beauty exists with goodness and truth. Right distribution points us to the image of the body of Christ – all persons valued for their place in the whole; attendant care to our common life.

²⁷ See Graham Ward, *Cities of God*, Routledge, New York, 2000, 2.

What are we to make of these ideas? What I hope I have done this evening is speak to those who have held out hope that beauty would be accorded a more significant role in our common life, even if we have not been sure of our own relationship to beauty. These are the deeper truths of life. So while it is not possible to prove this with scientific reason, on the basis of material evidence, I have also sought to show how an understanding of beauty within the Christian tradition offers something that brings life to our most cherished beliefs. Christianity, ‘offers an explanatory capaciousness which helps us make sense of our world and our place within it,’²⁸ in rational, moral and aesthetic terms.

I want to finish by laying down three challenges, to those interested. If this evening you feel like you have seen something a little more clearly, although still through a glass darkly, then these challenges may well be for you as you seek to grapple with ‘what is already happening’ and ‘how you are already placed.’²⁹

The first challenge is for us to understand the time we are in. In our contemporary world, ‘we are all at the mercy of global economic forces, distant decisions and the seductive glare of the market,’³⁰ Every incentive is for us to be diminished in our perceptual care for one another. Who is my neighbor, when the food I eat has more air miles than a corporate executive, when the person who is President of the United States arguably has greater influence over my children’s future than the Prime Minister of our own country, and people have been reduced to bundles of rights, interacting in acts of commerce.

²⁸ <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2017/09/25/4739706.htm>

²⁹ Oliver O’Donovan, *Self, World and Time: Ethics as Theology*, Volume 1, Eerdmans, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, 2.

³⁰ Alison Milbank, 35

The second challenge is for us to understand the self. We are people with extraordinary creative capacity. Our primary task is to be tutored in our imagination, to awaken one another to our own 'creative capacity.' Beauty is something to be cultivated in our ordinary lives as well. Alison Milbank has suggested that if we do so, we will 'naturally awaken' our 'religious sense,' the sense that there is further and further depth to be had in life. Do you sense that call to depth?

The third challenge is to understand what God offers to each of us. If beauty gives us pleasure in its pleasing sense of proportion, beauty speaks in whispers because it relies on an inference being made by the observer. Beauty still transcends. Beauty demonstrates a correspondence between the human and the divine, but it does not scream it.

In his obituary for Bruce, Peter Jensen concluded with this: 'in the end, [Bruce's] greatest work was no different from any other Christian's: it was to point away from himself to the Saviour whom he loved so well.'³¹ That is the beauty of the good life. The Christian tradition invites each of us to have this depth and fullness in life by participating in the life of God himself, through his son Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

³¹ <https://smithlecture.org/sites/default/files/downloads/national/smith/obituary-by-peter-jensen.pdf>