

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY: CHARLOTTE

CONFESSING THE DIVINE BEAUTY

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# Confessing the Divine Beauty

## Introduction

Humanity seemingly possesses both an unquenchable and omnivorous hunger for beauty. And yet, even the most rapturous experiences of it, do not seem (at least in the most part) able to generate anything more than a flickering felicity which is so quickly extinguished. The human thirst for beauty can be titillated for a time, but true and lasting satisfaction and enjoyment of “the beautiful” is illusive.

True beauty cannot be found in those places where it is most often sought. Beauty is not ultimately discovered or unveiled in: the physical aesthetic of any man or women, the sonnets of Shakespeare, or the symphonies of Beethoven; neither can it be found in the mountains of Peru, the highlands of Scotland, or the stars of the night sky. All these things, although truly beautiful in their own way, do not possess or reveal the true substance of beauty; rather, their beauty only serves to point us to a greater beauty, and even to the very essence, origin, nature, and fountain of all true beauty. C.S. Lewis argued that all creaturely things in which beauty can be found, “are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself, they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never visited.”<sup>1</sup>

True beauty is only found in God, for God *is* beauty. In the now illustrious words of Augustine: “For thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they find rest in

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 30-31

Thee”<sup>2</sup>; true and perpetual satisfaction of our thirst for beauty can only be truly quenched in beholding and knowing the one in whom all our desires and longings are fulfilled. The one true and living God in whom we find rest for our souls (Matt. 11:27-30). The people of God must know these truths, delight in them, embody and live them. And, not only this, but communicate the truth of the beautiful God to a world fumbling around in the darkness, seeking but for a taste and glimpse of that which is the substance and fulness of all truth, goodness and beauty.<sup>3</sup>

## Thesis

*The triune God is in and of himself ontologically beautiful; he is the essence and fountain of all beauty. Although God’s beauty is evidenced in his works of creation and redemption, it is most exhaustively known and revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. It is in the person and work of Christ that the beauty of the triune God shines forth most radiantly. It is only by the Spirit of God that the Church comes to both see and delight in the beauty of the Son. Likewise, it is only through the sanctifying work of the Spirit that the people of God are made beautiful and thus able to confess the beauty of Son in both word and deed, to the glory and praise of God the Father.*

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<sup>2</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions (Second Edition)*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), I. 1. 1

<sup>3</sup> The Scriptures are clear that sinful humanity does not seek after God (Rom. 3:9-18); however, although sinful people do not seek him - to love and worship him - they nonetheless seek those benefits which only come in knowing and communing with him. The tragedy is that they seek these benefits *apart from him*, when in reality they can only be found *in him*. Such is the case with beauty. Only God can satisfy our desires for beauty, and yet the deception and lie of sin is the promise that our desires for it can be fulfilled elsewhere. Augustine writes that there is a “false show or shadow of beauty by which sin tempts us” – Ibid. II.6.12. Without question he is right; we even see this deception in Eden when Eve looks upon the fruit of the tree and sees that ‘it was a delight to the eyes’ (Gen. 3:7). Surely the church must proclaim with Augustine, “O sinners, return to your own heart and abide in Him that made you. Stand with Him and you shall stand, rest in Him and you shall be at peace. Where are you going? The good that you love is from Him: and insofar as it is likewise *for* Him it is good and lovely; but it will rightly be turned into bitterness, if it is unrightly loved and He deserted by whom it is. What goal are you making for, wandering around and about by ways so hard and laborious? Rest is not where you seek it. Seek what you seek, but it is not where you seek it. You seek happiness in life in the land of death, and it is not there. For how shall there be happiness of life where there is no life? – Ibid, IV.12.18

# I

*The triune God is in and of himself ontologically beautiful; he is the essence and fountain of all beauty.*

Let us first define our terms. What is beauty? There has certainly been much argle-bargle and fierce unhappy chuntering as to how exactly one should define beauty. This is perhaps due to the rather pervasive idea that beauty is not an objective reality but one which only exists in the “eye of the beholder”. This floccinaucinihilipilification of beauty - the subjunctivising of its reality - is lamentable; however, arguments and evidences supporting the objective reality of beauty will simply be presupposed throughout this paper.<sup>4</sup> In regards to a terse but helpful definition of beauty, Jonathan King writes: “*Beauty is an intrinsic quality of things that, when perceived, pleases the mind by displaying a certain kind of fittingness. That is to say, beauty is discerned via objective properties such as proportion, unity, variety, symmetry, harmony, intricacy, delicacy, simplicity, or suggestiveness.*”<sup>5</sup>

Beauty is an intrinsic quality of any given thing which when perceived is instantly recognized by both its fittingness and objective properties<sup>6</sup>. It is worth noting that this definition nonetheless still leaves room for a healthy subjectivism. Beauty is identified when it is experienced. The essential characteristic of an experience with beauty is delight; von Balthasar writes: “...the delight it arouses in us is founded upon the fact that in it, the truth and goodness of

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the limitations of this paper (and its writer) I deemed it unnecessary to cover many of the complex philosophical arguments pertaining to beauty as being either an objective or subjective reality, or indeed some combination of the two.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan King, *The Beauty of the Lord: Theology as Aesthetics* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2018), 50

<sup>6</sup> The concept of “fittingness” is pretty central to King’s definition of beauty, he writes: “fittingness functions as an overarching term expressive of the full range of aesthetic properties that identify any and all objective characteristics of beauty.” *Ibid*, 9-10.

the depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed, and this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and in-exhaustively valuable and fascinating.”<sup>7</sup> The intrinsic properties and objective reality of beauty must be subjectively perceived and experienced:<sup>8</sup> “...a realist view of beauty is postulated in which the unique nature of beauty implies objective properties – with such properties themselves able to serve as objective aesthetic criteria – and involves the effect beauty has of eliciting a subjective response of aesthetic pleasure as we perceive it.”<sup>9</sup>

Although attestation to the reality of the divine beauty is not legion in Scripture, there are nonetheless a number of very clear references to it: Ps. 27:4; 96:6; 145:5, 12; Is. 28:5; 33:17.<sup>10</sup> What is noteworthy about these verses are the connections made in them (and the connections made in context) between God’s beauty and glory. King argues that given the connections made between the “images of a crown, a diadem, kingdom, and the sanctuary of the Lord to God’s beauty” in these verses, “a connection is evident between divine beauty and the majesty and glory, the kingship and sovereignty of God.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, as quoted by Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology: Volume 1* (Fearn: Mentor - Christian Focus, 2008), 331

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas also argued for the position that beauty is both an objective reality, but one which must also be subjectively experienced in order to be perceived and affirmed. This quotation is taken up from Aquinas’s discourse on the relationship between goodness and beauty: “A good thing is also a beautiful thing, for goodness and beauty have the same basis in reality, namely, form; and this is why ‘we praise the good as beautiful’. Yet the words ‘good’ and ‘beautiful’ are not synonymous. For good (‘what all things desire’) has properly to do with desire, and therefore involves the idea of end (since desire is a kind of movement toward something). Beauty, on the other hand, has to do with cognition, for we call something beautiful when it pleases the eye of the beholder. So, beauty is a matter of right proportion, for the senses delight in rightly proportioned things as similar to themselves (the sense-faculty being itself a sort of proportion, like all other knowing faculties). Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas: Summa Theologiae, Questions on God*, ed. Brian Leftow and Brian Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 58

<sup>9</sup> King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 50

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 39

Although Ps 27:4 is without question the most striking reference in Scripture to divine beauty, it is perhaps Ex. 28:2, 40 and Ps. 96 where we see evidenced the most striking connections made between the relationship of God's beauty (*tipharah*) and His glory (*kabod*). In Ex. 28:2 we read that the holy garments of Aaron are to be made 'for glory and for beauty'.<sup>12</sup> Commenting upon the significance of this connection John-Mark Hart writes,

the tabernacle and priesthood of Israel are the channels that God has chosen for his presence to break into the fallen world, the aesthetic beauty of the tabernacle and priestly garments are meant to signify the sacredness of God's in-breaking glory. Thus, in this text, the concepts of glory and beauty are closely parallel, and they are both related to the perceptible manifestation of God's transcendent presence.<sup>13</sup>

Another robust example of the relationship in Scripture between beauty and glory can be found in Ps. 96. Here we find the aesthetic language not only of 'beauty' (v.6), but of 'splendor' (*hod*) and 'majesty' (*hadar*), interplayed with the language of 'glory' (*kabod*) and 'strength' (*oz*). Hart observes that the "terms glory, beauty, splendor, majesty, and strength all signify the manifestation of God's transcendent goodness as it becomes apparent in his works of love and justice".<sup>14</sup> John Webster defines the glory of God as "God's manifest presence" and "God's self-presentation"<sup>15</sup>; whenever the presence of God is made manifest and his perfections revealed, we

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid. King goes on to highlight that there exists in Scripture an equal association between aesthetic language and the theophanies and prophetic visions of the Lord, that there exists between God's beauty and glory: "In many instances the imagery describing theophanies and prophetic visions conveys the same kind of association in language charged with aesthetic overtones. Isaiah's vision of the Lord enthroned in majestic glory (Isa. 6:1-4; John 21:1), Ezekiel's vision of God's glory (Ezek. 1), and John's apocalyptic vision of Christ (Rev. 1:13-18; 4:2-3) are striking examples." Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all quotation of Scriptures will be taken from the ESV

<sup>13</sup> John-Mark Hart, "Triune Beauty and the Ugly Cross: Towards a Theological Aesthetic," *Tyndale Bulletin* 66, no. 2 (2015): 295

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Hart then concludes that, "the concepts of glory and beauty in Psalm 96 involve the manifestation of God's transcendent greatness through his mighty acts, and this manifest greatness calls for exuberant worship and witness from humanity" Ibid, 295-296

are to both understand and expect such a revealing of God to be an occasion wherein the divine beauty is also on display.

As evidenced above, there seems to exist a kind of symbiotic relationship in Scripture between divine beauty and glory. The question now arises, to what extent should we correlate the one with the other. For Jonathan Edwards, divine beauty seems to envelope, or at least most comprehensively illuminates, what is meant by God's glory: "...beauty is as it were the sum and comprehension of all existence and excellence: much more than the sun is the fountain and summary comprehension of all the light and brightness of the day."<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, for Herman Bavinck, divine beauty has a tendency to be subsumed under the umbrella of God's glory: "Speaking of creatures, we call them pretty, beautiful, or splendid; but for the beauty of God Scripture has a special word: glory. For that reason, it is not advisable to speak-with the church fathers, scholastics, and Catholic theologians-of God's beauty."<sup>17</sup> If Edwards was prone to overemphasizing the relationship between glory and beauty, and Bavinck underplaying it, it was perhaps Karl Barth who got the balance just right: "We speak of God's beauty only in

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<sup>15</sup> John Webster, *Confronted by Grace: Pastoral Meditations from a Systematic Theologian* (Lexham Press, 2015), 44

<sup>16</sup> WJE, 8:551; For an extended discourse on the importance of beauty in the theology of Jonathan Edwards, see: Dane C. Ortlund, *Edwards on the Christian Life: Alive to the Beauty of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 23-37. Ortlund writes: "Edwards has given us the beauty of the Christian life-first, the beauty of God, beauty that comes to tangible expression in Christ, and second, the beauty of the Christian, who participates in the triune life of divine love ... Sinners are beautified as they behold the beauty of God in Christ. That is Edward's theology of the Christian life in a simple sentence." Ibid, 23-24

<sup>17</sup> Herman Bavinck, *RD*, 2:212; However, despite Bavinck's seeming reluctance to develop a developed theology of aesthetics, he nonetheless affirmed that: "The pinnacle of beauty, the beauty to which all creatures point, is God. He is the supreme being, supreme truth, supreme goodness, and also the apex of unchanging beauty ... God is the highest beauty, because in his being is absolute oneness, measure, and order." Ibid.

explanation of His glory. It is, therefore, a subordinate idea, auxiliary idea which enables us to achieve a specific clarification and emphasis.”<sup>18</sup>

What is meant by the beauty of the Lord is not parsed out for us in Scripture in such a way as for it to be easily defined. King therefore argues that it is important for us to understand and articulate the reality of God’s triune beauty alongside the classical doctrine of divine simplicity.<sup>19</sup> James E. Dolezal states: “God’s existence (act of being) and essence (quiddity) cannot be constituent components in Him, each supplying what the other lacks. Rather, God must be identical with His existence and essence, and they must be identical with each other.”<sup>20</sup> God is not beautiful because he possesses beauty, but rather because he *is* God<sup>21</sup>. Because God *is* God, he *is* beauty; “...if all that is in God is God, then each of His attributes is identical with its essence.”<sup>22</sup> This also implies that all God’s works are beautiful, for he cannot deny himself. While we must say that God’s works are more than beautiful, it cannot be said that his works are ever less than beautiful. King concludes: “...the countless form of the glory of God *ad extra*,

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume 2 - The Doctrine of God*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 653. When taken as a whole, Barth’s system can leave much to be desired, especially for those committed to Biblical inerrancy, infallibility and the Reformed tradition. However, on the theme of theological aesthetics he possesses many helpful insights.

<sup>19</sup> Aware of the difficulties inherent in seeking to articulate the subtleties of how it is that divine beauty relates to the other divine attributes, King argues that: “In consideration of beauty an attribute, the doctrine of divine simplicity provides a systematic-theological approach to disambiguate how beauty relates to the other attributes”. King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 40-44

<sup>20</sup> James E. Dolezal, *All that is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), 41

<sup>21</sup> Dolezal: “God’s essence is not simply a bundle of contiguous properties or attributes, each existing alongside the others as an integrated whole. His divinity is not a sublime set of great-making properties all splendidly arranged together in Him. In His essence, it is not one thing to be good, another to be wise, another to be powerful, and so on. Rather, the reality in virtue of which all these things are truly said of God is nothing but His own simple divinity. Properly speaking, God is God by virtue of God, not goodness. He is wise by virtue of God, not wisdom. He is powerful by virtue of God, not power.” Ibid, 43

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 42

down to their most infinitesimal features, are inherently imbued with the full compass of his communicable attributes, one of which is beauty with the untold array of aesthetic characteristics it entails.”<sup>23</sup>

Christian believers must excogitate upon these truths to possess a developed, balanced, and nuanced theology of divine beauty. Theology which emphasizes the truth and goodness of God without embracing the aesthetic nature of both God’s truth and goodness is always in jeopardy of becoming crusty, dry, and lifeless - it is possible to perceive the truth and goodness of God without such a knowledge producing a wellspring of joy in the believer. However, it is impossible to behold the beauty of God’s truth and goodness without experiencing the beauty inducing experience of delight. Barth connects the realities of divine beauty, glory and joy. For Barth, the beauty of the glory of God is both joy begetting and apathy destroying,

...the glory of God is not only great and sublime or holy and gracious, the overflowing of the sovereignty in which God is love. In all this it is a glory which awakens joy, and is itself joyful. It is not merely a glory which is solemn and good and true, and which, in its perfection and sublimity might be gloomy or at least joyless. Joy in and before God – in its particular nature, distinct from what we mean by awe, gratitude and the rest – has an objective basis. It is something in God, the God of all the perfections, which justifies, obliges, summons and attracts us to do this. That which attracts us to joy in Him, and our consequent attraction, is the inalienable form of His glory and the indispensable form of the knowledge of His glory.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 51

<sup>24</sup> Barth, *CD*, 2:622; If we lose sight of divine beauty, we are in terrible danger of losing that which fuels our joy. Pursuit of theological knowledge must always go hand in hand with the express desire for our theological study to be experiential – we must not only know things about God but experience delightful communion with Him. In the epistle of James, we read: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” (Jas. 2:19). Those who know much truth about God, and indeed grow in their knowledge of his truth, but who know no joy of communion with him, and have no awareness of his infinite excellency and beauty, and no better off than the demons destined for destruction.

## II

*Although God's beauty is evidenced in his works of creation and redemption, it is most exhaustively known and revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. It is in the person and work of Christ that the beauty of the triune God shines forth most radiantly.*

What does it mean to behold the beauty of the invisible God? The divine beauty *ad intra* is not perceived with the physical eye, for God is both spirit and invisible (John 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17). Rather, the divine beauty is beheld with eyes of faith: "...the eye of the soul is vastly nobler than the eye of the body."<sup>25</sup> We must also agree with Edwards that to behold the divine beauty is more than the "...apprehension of God merely by speculative reasoning"<sup>26</sup>. The divine beauty, as seen in the manifestation of the glory of God, in the works of God *ad extra*, serve as pointers to the divine beauty and glory (or blessedness) *ad intra*. When the beauty and glory of the works of God *ad extra* are beheld, they enable us to both know and delight in the very reality of God. Such a knowing and delighting, then better equips us to both rightly and joyfully share communion with him.

Creation declares the glory of God (Ps. 19:1-6), and serves to attest to the infinite goodness, truth and beauty of the Lord. Creation is the very stage, the 'beautiful theater',<sup>27</sup> as Calvin puts it, on which the great drama of redemption is enacted and accomplished – the stage is without question one adorned with beauty. However, despite the unquestionable majesty and beauty of creation, creation is ultimately inadequate in its ability to reveal the true substance and radiance of divine beauty. Edwards argued that a true sight of God is one: "...that must give the

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<sup>25</sup> WJE, 17:63

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:14:20.

mind a real sense of the excellency and beauty of God. He that sees God, he has an immediate view of God's great and awful majesty, of his pure and beauteous holiness, of his wonderful and enduring grace and mercy.”<sup>28</sup> The work of creation, although beautiful, is nonetheless *unable* to give us such a sight of God.<sup>29</sup> This is both because of its own intrinsic inability to do so - creation is limited in its powers to reveal the myriad of divine perfections - and also because of the noetic effects of sin which short-circuits our own mental capabilities to perceive the manner in which creation serves its creator in pointing to his excellencies<sup>30</sup>. Calvin writes, “It is therefore in vain that so many burning lamps shine for us in the workmanship of the universe to show forth the glory of its Author. Although they bathe us wholly in their radiance, yet they can of themselves in no way lead us into the right path.”<sup>31</sup> Divine beauty is not most powerfully and incontestably witnessed to by God's work of creation, but rather, in the person and work of Jesus Christ. John Owen writes: “The revelation made of Christ in the blessed gospel is far more

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<sup>28</sup> WJE, 17:64

<sup>29</sup> Augustine also acknowledged this truth, saying: “It was you Lord, who made them: for You are beautiful, and they are beautiful: You are good, and they are good: You are, and they are. But they neither are beautiful nor are good nor simply are as You their creator: compared with You they are not beautiful and are not good and are not. Their truths, thanks to you, we know; and our knowledge compared with your knowledge is ignorance.” Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.4.6.

<sup>30</sup> The Westminster Confession provides a further insight into the limitations of creation, particularly in regards to its ability to reveal the way of salvation: Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased. - *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 1:

<sup>31</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:5:14

excellent, more glorious, and more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness, than the whole creation and the just comprehension of it, if attainable, can contain or afford.”<sup>32</sup>

Christ is the ‘radiance of the glory of God’ (Heb. 1:3), ‘the image of the invisible God’ (Col.1:15), and the one in whom ‘the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily’ (Col. 2:9); ‘...no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him’ (Matt. 11:27), and indeed, whoever has seen the Son, has seen the Father (John 14:9). If we long for a sight of the divine beauty, we must turn to Christ. And, it is ultimately in the gospel that the ‘light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus’ (2 Cor 4:4-6) is revealed; for, it is in the gospel that the radiance and perfections of the person of Christ shines forth from his great redemptive works. It is in the gospel that the transcendent beauty of Christ’s excellencies is revealed. Barth states,

“The beauty of Jesus Christ is not just any beauty. It is the beauty of God. Or, more concretely, it is the beauty of what God is and does in Him. We must not fail at this point to see the substance or model of the unity of God’s majesty and condescension; His utter sublimity and holiness, and the complete mercy and patience in which this high and holy One not only turns towards man but stoops down to him; the unity of faithfulness to Himself and faithfulness to the creature with which He acts.<sup>33</sup>

Barth draws special attention to the beauty of Christ as revealed and evidenced in the great contrasts of the gospel: transcendence and imminence, meekness and majesty, holiness and mercy, etc.<sup>34</sup> Of all the many jewels in the crown of Christ’s beauty, it is perhaps the beauty

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<sup>32</sup> John Owen, *The Glory of Christ: Works of John Owen, Volume 1* (Banner of Truth, 1965), 275

<sup>33</sup> Barth, *CD*, 2:665

<sup>34</sup> Similarly to Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar also highlights the humiliation of Christ as *the* place that the divine beauty shines forth most clearly: “insofar as the veil over the face of Christ’s mystery is drawn aside, and insofar as the economy of grace allows, Christian contemplation can marvel, in the self-emptying of divine love, at the exceeding wisdom, truth and beauty inherent there. But it is only in this self-emptying that they can be contemplated, for it is the source whence the glory contemplated by the angels and the saints radiated into eternal life ... The humiliation of the servant only makes the concealed glory shine more

of Christ revealed in the contrasts of his glory and sufferings for the redemption of his people, that draws out from us the greatest wonder and joy. For, where else does the beauty of God's goodness, compassion, mercy, grace, and love so brightly shine forth as in the redemptive sufferings of Christ; all of which culminating in the horror and glory of the cross. However, if as Aquinas stated, "we call something beautiful when it pleases the eye of the beholder",<sup>35</sup> How can we therefore legitimately consider the death of Christ a display of the divine beauty? Again, here we must confess with Edwards that: "...the eye of the soul is vastly nobler than the eye of the body."<sup>36</sup> Only those with eyes to see (2 Cor 4:4-6), will see how the ugliest event in all history – the rejection and murder of Christ – is also the very place wherein God has most abundantly and principally revealed his beauty to us.

### III

*It is only by the Spirit of God that the Church comes to both see and delight in the beauty of the Son. Likewise, it is only through the sanctifying work of the Spirit that the people of God are made beautiful and thus able to confess the beauty of Son in both word and deed to the glory and praise of God the Father.*

The Church cannot behold and confess the beauty of the Lord apart from the work of the Spirit; only those who have been given eyes to see can *truly* see (Jn. 9; 2 Cor. 4:4-6). And, only those in whom the Spirit of God dwells are being conformed into the image of Christ to the glory of God the Father; 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

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resplendently, and the decent into the ordinary and commonplace brings out the uniqueness of him who so abased himself' Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Revelation and the Beautiful*, 113-114 as quoted by Aidan O. Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 21

<sup>35</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 58

<sup>36</sup> WJE, 17:63

faithfulness, gentleness, self-control' (Gal. 5:22-33) is not the fruit of the Church, but of the Spirit who sanctifies the Church. The Church can neither behold, be sanctified, or confess the beauty of the Lord apart from the work of God who elects, redeems and reconciles his people to himself. Webster writes, "The history of the Church's holiness includes as a first and primary movement the condescension of the holy God who mercifully elects, assembles and consecrates the *communio sanctorum*. And it includes as a secondary and derivative movement the congregation of the saints, evoked by God's mercy, among whom and by whom the holiness of Father, Son, and Spirit is confessed."<sup>37</sup> To be transformed by the power of the Spirit, into the image of the Son, to the glory of the Father is an essential work of God in both the Church corporately and individually. King writes,

The beauty of our formation as Christian disciples is that vital part of God's work in this present age of forming and making beautiful his children, which is all about their being conformed to the image of his Son. The work of spiritual formation involves Christians living out fittingly their identity in Christ, which is part and parcel of the progressive work of spiritual transformation that God through Christ by the Spirit does in us.<sup>38</sup>

Because of this sanctifying work of the Spirit, the Church is thus able to not only to behold and delight in the beauty of the Lord, but also enabled to communicate this same beauty by virtue of its confession – both in word and deed. Webster writes: "As the fellowship of the saints, the Church declares 'the wonderful deeds' of the one who has called the Church out of darkness into light, and so consecrated it for his service."<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the Church must be quick to speak of God's 'wonderful deeds', and given the theme of our discussion, be

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<sup>37</sup> John Webster, *Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 67

<sup>38</sup> King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, 24

<sup>39</sup> Webster, *Holiness*, 74

quick to speak of how the divine beauty is perceived in them; this confession must be both internal (within the Church) and external (to the world). However, we should not limit this profession and confession to mere words. Speaking of the Church's holiness Webster writes: "Holiness is visible as testimony, as good works which are transparent to and declare the wonderful deeds of the holy God."<sup>40</sup> Beauty is not something to only be spoken about, but something to be imbibed, experienced and lived out within the context of the Church.

The reason why words and deeds of beauty, which point the wonderful deeds of God, and in turn the very nature of God *ad intra*, must be communicated within the context of the family of faith is that the Church is always in danger of imbibing the fallen world's distorted understanding and practice of beauty. Hart states,

discipleship involves resisting the ways in which perverse forms of earthly beauty can draw us towards evil and falsehood or (more subtly) towards lesser goods masquerading as God. Thus, Christians need minds that have been renewed by the Spirit through meditation on the Word so that we can see the beauty of God manifested in his world even as we learn to see through the alluring beauty of false gods.<sup>41</sup>

However, the Church must not only internally reveal within itself the reality of the divine beauty, by virtue of its confession, but also, by virtue of the same confession in word and deed, reveal the reality of the divine beauty to the world at large. As the Church lives out the gospel, the beauty of the triune God is made known to the world. For example, as Christians humble and serve one another, as Christ humbled and served them, the beauty of majesty and meekness is declared to the world, expelling its lies as to what constitutes the true nature and substance of beauty.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 75

<sup>41</sup> Hart, *Triune Beauty and the Ugly Cross*, 306

## **Conclusion**

The triune God *is* beauty, and all that He does is beautiful. We must not forsake a seeking after and delighting in the divine beauty of the Lord. The whole universe reveals His beauty, but redemption more so. In the gospel, the Father sends forth both His Son and the Spirit for our salvation. The person and work of Christ is the ultimate revelation of divine beauty, but we cannot perceive it unless there is an illuminating work of the Spirit. What is more, we can neither confess the truth of divine beauty apart from the grace of God. Our confession of divine beauty must be one of both word *and* deed – again, something not accomplishable apart from work of the Spirit. All our thoughts, feelings, and actions must give testimony to the beauty of our triune God - for the glory of God. Confessing the divine beauty is part and parcel of the Christian life.

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