

17.03.2012 GOD AS ARTIST

One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple. Psalm 27:4

To behold God with spiritual vision is to recognise His beauty. The beauty of the LORD is His holiness. He dwells in a place of beauty (Psalm 48:1, 2, Psalm 50:2) and is surrounded by beauty (Rev 4: 1-8).

But God is also creative. He is the Creator and Designer of perfect beauty; the standard of perfection with regard to aesthetics and art. His creation and the works of His hands are things of beauty. Even marred by sin, the earth is a thing of beauty. Whose heart has not been moved by sunsets and sunrise, waterfalls and rivers, the amazing colours of the birds and butterflies, the power of the oceans? And then there is the music of nature – the sound of babbling brooks, the wind rustling through the leaves of trees, the song of the birds, the roar of the thunder and the waves of the ocean?

God as Potter

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. Genesis 2:7

In the original Hebrew, this means ‘to form, to fashion as a Potter’. The work of the heavenly Potter is perfect. Even though man has sinned, God still desires to re-fashion him in God’s image.

The following passages use the same word found in Genesis 2:7, 8:

From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; He fashions their hearts individually...Psalm 33:15

He who planted the ear, shall He not hear? He who formed the eye, shall He not see? Psalm 94:9

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvellous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. Psalm 139:13-16 (NLT)

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. Isaiah 43:1

This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise. Isaiah 43:21

Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you: ‘Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring; Isaiah 44:2, 3

‘Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant; I have formed you, you are My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me! Isaiah 44:21

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: 'I am the LORD, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself...' Isaiah 44:24

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you..." Jeremiah 1:5

Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!" Jeremiah 18:3-6

Thus says the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him...Zechariah 12:2

But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand. Isaiah 64:8

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

God as Architect

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering... And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it. Exodus 25:1, 2, 8, 9

From Exodus 25-31, we find the mind of God as Architect. The wilderness sanctuary was a glorious building made of the finest materials; it assailed the people's senses as they drew near to it – the colour, the sound, the smell of incense. And the white-robed priests, their dress itself proclaiming the holiness and righteousness of God.

God is a God of beauty. There is proportion, symmetry, form and perfect harmony in the aesthetics that are inspired by God. All who have the gifts of the artist can, like Bezalel and Aholiab, be filled with the spirit of God and produce art and music, architecture and craftsmanship that reflects the creativity of God and gives glory to Him.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. "And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle—the table and its utensils, the pure gold lampstand with all

its utensils, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base— the garments of ministry, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests, and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy place. According to all that I have commanded you they shall do.” Exodus 31:1-11.

God as Musician

The music ministry of the sanctuary was inspired by God. Later, King David expanded the music ministry of the sanctuary (this continued until the final destruction of the temple in AD 70). King David appointed 4000 musicians for the worship of God (1 Chron 23:5).

There were trumpets to call the people to worship and for the prostration of the congregation during the presentation of the burnt offering and the performance of the choral service (Num 10:10; 2 Chron 29:27-28).

Strings and harps - were called “the instruments of song” (2 Chron 5:13) or “the instruments of God’s song” (1 Chron 16:42). As indicated by their descriptive name, their function was to accompany the songs of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord (1 Chron 23:5; 2 Chron 5:13).

The music ministry was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. 1 Chr 25:1.

The ministry was a continual ministry (1 Chr 9:33, 34) of thanks and praise (1 Chr 16:4).

From the example of the Old Testament, we see that God is intimately involved in the music ministry of the church.

*And he (King Hezekiah) stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; **for thus was the commandment of the LORD by His prophets.** 2 Chron 29:25*

If any of us are blessed with the talent of musicianship, our testimony must be the same as that of David, the sweet psalmist of Israel:

Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel:

‘The Spirit of the LORD spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.’ 2 Samuel 23: 1, 2

God as Author

The Bible is still the most read book in the world. Many read it merely for its literary beauty. No matter what language it is translated into, even the translated versions are written in beautiful language that has entered into common usage among the people of that land. The best known example is the King James Version of the English Bibles. The German translation of Luther is another example of how the language of the Bible became an integral part of German culture and language.

In India, when All India Radio began transmitting in Hindi – they used the literal words from the Hindi Bible; ‘this is the voice from heaven...’.

How privileged we are who can appreciate not only the language but the revelation of God that it contains. Every book of the Bible is a revelation of God: God the Creator, the beginning of all things; God the Redeemer, who delivers us from the bondage of Egypt (sin) and redeems with a strong hand and outstretched arms at Calvary. The God who has given us the books of the Law, Poetry, Wisdom, the Love songs, the prophetic visions. The God who has revealed Himself through the coming of His Son. The 4 gospels tell us the story. Did you know that the gospels are written in a literary form of story-telling that was not known at the time and in Western Europe a similar style began only in the 18th century with the stories now called novels? Paul the great Apostle, is the theologian of the New Testament; some of the earliest hymns of the church come from his letters. John the beloved takes us back to the very beginning in His gospel; and in his letters reminds us that we shall never fail, if we hold fast to the knowledge that God is Love and God is Light. His Love is revealed to us as grace and His light is revealed to us as truth. And finally, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, with its panoramic vision of the heavenly Sanctuary and the corresponding developments on earth, with the final consummation of salvation history ‘I saw a new heaven and a new earth...and there was no more curse’.

We need to teach our children the message and the language of the Bible. We need to read the Bible often to them so that they become familiar with its language and becomes to them a source of inspiration and comfort.

God as Sculptor

We need to have a heavenly vision. All too often, we continue to think of ourselves as sons of Adam, and forget that we are sons of God. He has translated us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His Son. In the Kingdom of His Son, we become His workmanship.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

If we are God’s workmanship, will His work not be a perfect work? Do we live by faith, presenting ourselves daily to Him, offering our redeemed lives as a living sacrifice that He may work His perfect work in us?

Here is a simple illustration:

Michelangelo, the great Italian sculptor, produced a masterpiece of sculpture which he called ‘David’. It is probably the most famous sculpture in the world.

He started with a piece of marble – just a block of stone. But day by day, from this shapeless block, began to appear a thing of beauty, with form, symmetry, simplicity and austerity. The world sat up and took notice and ever since, the Michelangelo has been revered by men as probably the greatest

sculptor the world has ever seen. People flock to Florence to see David's beauty, but Michelangelo gets the glory.

Do you see what God wants to do for us? If we will but let Him, we too will become things of beauty, but He will get all the glory.

You shall also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. Isaiah 62:3

Additional Note:

The Christian and the Arts

Let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands. Psalm 90:17

The lesson this week shows us very clearly that God loves the arts – He is the author of all creativity and has given to human beings on planet earth, the gift of creativity. This gift He has given to no other creatures on this earth (procreation is also a gift, but creativity is essentially a gift given only to humans).

It follows therefore that Christian who is particularly talented in the arts, must recognise that this is God's gift and therefore to be consecrated for His use and to be carried out by the inspiration of His Spirit.

This is particularly important in the times we live in. For the arts have always reflected the world view of the artist, and all too often the artist is influenced by the culture of his or her society. **But the Christian is not of this world and therefore, his talent must not be a reflection of the principles of the world.**

It is not possible to cover this topic exhaustively, but here are a few thoughts for reflection:

Arts and Mankind Today: the Results of Denying God

Today, because man denies God, he has no absolutes to live by. God is the Source of absolute truth and absolute beauty. So all things are 'relative'. So we get the phrase 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. Art in its many forms (painting, sculpture, music, and writing) cannot be judged, for there are no principles that underlie Art.

This is an untruth. Nature itself reveals to us what art is like – it is beautiful, it has form, it has proportion and it has harmony. (Harmony is what some older writers called 'consents'. They meant that entities or parts when joined together harmonise to form a pleasing whole).

With the 18th century philosophies that denied God (how ironic that it is called the Age of Enlightenment, when God describes such people as being blinded by the god of this world) became part of mainstream thinking, it profoundly affected the arts.

Whereas Reformation artists like Bach wrote every piece of music ‘to the glory of God’, and painters such as Rembrandt painted self-portraits that revealed to the world that he considered himself a sinner redeemed by grace, the artists who accepted the philosophy that God did not exist, had lost the purpose of all true art – to give glory to God. They then denied that art has rules of form and harmony and proportion. They could do what they liked, because man is the master of his soul and since everything is ‘relative’, beauty now is in the eye of the beholder. (At the same time, morality was also deemed ‘relative’; ‘I can do what I like as long as I think it is right’).

The changing of moral values has resulted in the fragmentation of society. The attitude to the arts has resulted in the fragmentation of the arts. It is no coincidence that music and art became more and more fragmented and chaotic, to the point where it became ‘abstract art’, without form and void of beauty, harmony and symmetry – a perfect description of earth before the entrance of the Spirit of God.

This does not mean that all their art was untalented; no, some of these musicians and artists were greatly talented men and women. Their tragedy was that they had lost sight of the purpose of their gift.

We live in a world and a society that is full of this thinking about art and beauty. We are told to believe that ugliness and chaos is beautiful. It saturates our media. It is essential therefore that we teach and educate ourselves and our children about the principles of beauty and art. There are perhaps 3 outstanding things about true art, whether it be music, art, sculpture or writing – it is simple, it is beautiful (a beauty of structure, form and proportions) and it is austere or pure.

It is essential that we follow the advice of Paul in Philippians 4:8 ‘to think on that which is lovely and that which is pure’ in this age when the god of this world is filling the airwaves, the galleries, the concert halls, and sometimes even the churches with his art rather than the art of God.

The Christian artist must communicate to the world through his art, the voice of God. The artist must portray through his art, the beauty of the created world. The musician must portray through his music, the fact that God is a God who touches our hearts through Spirit-inspired music and the speaker/writer must communicate to man the purpose of all living: to live for the glory of God.

Above all, the Christian artist must ask God to fill his heart with the Spirit of God that all his work may only be the out-working of the Spirit of God as in the time of Moses and David.
