

# Classical Lutheran Education Journal

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## Consortium *for* Classical Lutheran Education

The CLASSICAL LUTHERAN EDUCATION JOURNAL is dedicated to providing helpful resources for Lutheran educators and parents who labor in the noble endeavor of nurturing and educating God's children.

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## In This Issue

In this issue, we explore the CCLE XV conference theme “Classical Lutheran Education: A Pedagogy of Beauty.” Hosted by Messiah Lutheran School in Keller, Texas in July, 2015, this conference began a three-summer trilogy of conferences to explore truth, goodness, and beauty from a distinctly biblical perspective.

**We invite all readers to save the dates for next year's conference, CCLE XVI, Classical Lutheran Education: A Pedagogy of Goodness, to be held at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana, July 16-18, 2016.**

Our first article, written by CCLE XV Plenary Speaker Dr. Kenneth Calvert, provides thoughts from Dr. Calvert's much-appreciated three-day plenary sessions entitled “Beauty in the Liberal Arts.”

Our next article delves even more deeply into theological matters, as Rev. R. W. Paul shares “The Place of Beauty in Lutheran Theology: An Exegetical and Historical Approach.”

We then shift to Abigail Clevenger's “Beauty in the Classroom” drawn from her thought-provoking and highly practical break-out session.

We conclude with words from CCLE XV Banquet Speaker, Dr. E. Christian Kopff, as he shares “Salvation by Grace Alone in Dante.”

***The CLEJ Editors***

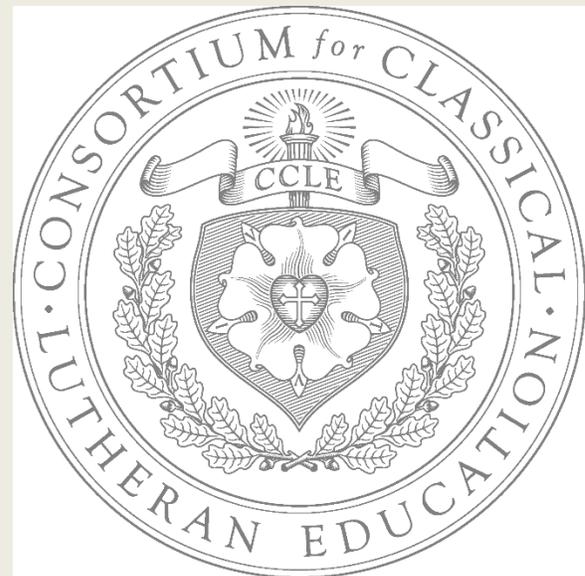
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***Reformation 2015***

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## Beauty in the Liberal Arts by Dr. Kenneth Calvert

### Introduction

In the classical school the purpose of educating young people is not to prepare them for any of these: “the workplace of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” “college,” “proper socialization,” or merely “citizenship.” While these may be excellent, utilitarian, and secondary results of a classical education, the efforts of Christian, and in our case Lutheran, classical educators is more properly focused on the strengthening of that which makes human beings unique in all of God’s creation. In His act of creating man, God created Adam and Eve in His image, and He declared the creation of man “very good” (Genesis 1:27, 31). While man is now corrupt and fallen, he nevertheless has an excellence all his own which includes an ability to have a knowledge of God and, once restored in Christ, a relationship with God.

Each human being has an intellect that, with the teaching of right habits, can discern God’s work in creation and can be used to praise Him for it in thought, word and deed. Lutheran education turns the gaze of the student from worldly concerns towards a greater

ability to stand in awe of God’s creation. In Christian hands the liberal arts are, therefore, not simply the means by which we create intelligent young men and women, although this is how, in ancient times, the liberal arts functioned in non-Christian hands. For us their highest and most profound task is to raise up young Christians to become instruments of praise and proclamation.

Martin Luther expressed the idea that “where schools flourish, all flourish.” Melancthon noted that “with the Spirit as leader, and the (liberal) arts as ally, we may approach the holy.” And so schools have the great potential of serving as a wonderful, essential institution of society and of the church’s work in the world. But Luther also said “I am afraid that the schools will prove the very gates of hell, unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures and engraving them in the heart of the youth.” Christian classical education is nothing if it is not, from beginning to end, about loving God, knowing Christ, and bowing before divine truth rather than human understanding alone. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern

what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2).

The cover photograph that accompanies this lecture shows a group of students focused on their phones and gadgets rather than upon the beautiful masterwork by Rembrandt entitled “The Night Watch” which hangs in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. This might be seen as an excellent example of man’s fallen nature; our gaze is not upon beauty, but upon the selfish and upon the temporal. In our case, it also serves as an introduction to what is needed in our understanding of “Beauty in the Liberal Arts.” Christian classical educators turn the student’s gaze towards God’s creation; towards that which is good, true, and beautiful. These, after all, surround us because of God’s love for us. He loves His creation, and so all of creation proclaims His glory. It is for the Christian educator to draw the attention of his students towards the good, true, and beautiful and to teach his students to begin – through faith and reason – their search for an understanding of them.

Simply put, the seven liberal arts give us the structure as well as the language to explore and discuss the good, the

true, and the beautiful. These arts – Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Mathematics, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music – were established in the ancient Greek and Roman world through the wisdom of such greats as Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian (among many others) and were completed by Christians such as the Cappadocian Fathers in the East as well as Boethius, Cassiodorus, and Aquinas in the west. The Reformers (Erasmus, Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, and others) were recipients and proponents of these studies.

Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers understood that education can take us to a position of understanding something about goodness, truth, and beauty; something about that which is good as well as that which is evil. Plato wrote in the Republic,

By education then I mean goodness in the form in which it is first acquired by a child . . . the rightly disciplined state of pleasures and pains whereby a man from his first beginnings on will abhor what he should abhor and relish what he should relish.”

Our task in Lutheran classical education is to pursue goodness, truth and beauty – all for the good of the mind and soul of the young one – and to ultimately bring students to a greater, stronger understanding of who they are before God and in His created order. The Apostle Peter writes,

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love (2 Peter 1:3-8).

## The Beautiful

It is my assigned task to focus on the beautiful as it is found and expressed through the liberal arts. It is not my intention here to give an absolute definition of beauty, as we each find beauty in different aspects of creation. We perceive beauty in nature, in one another, in art, in delicious food, in a great novel, or poem or – even – in a particularly ingenious bit of humor. What I will reject, however, is the idea that there is no definition of beauty with which we can work. Beauty, like truth and goodness, exists in creation. Every culture on earth and in human history has acknowledged the existence of the beautiful, just as every culture has sought truth and goodness. And not, as some modern philosophers would say, only in the nature of the thing's utility or function. Rather, we seek beauty as the ancients sought beauty; for beauty itself. In the Symposium, Plato asserts, The true order of going, or being led by another,

is to use the beauties of the earth as steps along which to mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty: from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions until he

arrives at the idea of absolute beauty.

And here the idea is that earthly beauty leads us to a higher understanding of the beautiful – of the “absolute” beauty.

In the modern age, John Keats in his famous *Ode on a Grecian Urn* wrote, “Beauty is truth, truth is beauty – that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” Keats was a Romantic and so was drawn to the truth that could be sensed in emotion and through the senses. The weakness of the Romantic position is found in leaning away from reason, although it can be said (and I will argue it here) that of all that philosophers call the transcendentals (truth, goodness, and beauty – among the properties of being), *beauty* is that which is most sensible or, perhaps, relies most on the power of the senses. We might argue that the search for truth is more of an intellectual endeavor, and the search for goodness is a search for good action. Beauty, then, might be considered the sensation of truth and of goodness as it reaches our eyes, ears, fingers, nose, and tongue. Indeed, when we say that something is “beautiful,” it is most often that “wow” response to something that has deeply touched our

senses, something that takes us beyond the point at which we now stand and moves us forward or, for Plato, moves us upward.

For the Christian, these transcendentals can help us to understand the nature of the fallen world and to begin to comprehend our sinfulness as well as God’s grace, His salvific work, and His creation. In the midst of all this, beauty is a wonderful gift of God to us. Beauty is evidence of His grace present even in creation. Solomon wrote,

He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man. (Ecclesiastes 3).

In expressing his thoughts on beauty Luther wrote, “Our Lord had written the promise of resurrection not in books alone, but in all the leaves of springtime.” For Luther transcendent beauty was in the written word and was

evident, too, in God's creation. In the incarnation of Christ this biblical truth is most clearly made manifest in that Christ, who is the Truth, became man (material substance) and lived among us whom He created. The Truth was and is present in Jesus, who is not a mere idea but an objective reality.

And so it is for the Christian teacher to help his students understand that not only can beauty in creation be perceived, but that it is objective. Mrs. Jennifer Lehman, the art teacher at Hillsdale Academy, writes that "Beauty is that which manifests the goodness and the truth of what is. When we see beautiful things, we are led to think upon the order and majesty of our Creator and His creation. Beauty is objective; it is not merely in 'the eye of the beholder.'" Just as my philosophy professor at Wheaton College, Dr. Arthur Holmes, used to say, "All truth is God's truth," so we ought to affirm, "All beauty is God's beauty." Taking this position helps us to establish a definition of that which is beautiful; that whatever is in the "eye of THE Beholder (the Creator)" is that which is beautiful, and so that which is not beautiful, or that which is ugly, is that which is in clear rebellion against the order and majesty of our Creator and His creation. It might not

be a philosophically or theologically nuanced position – but as a useful answer to the question, "Is it beautiful?" we ought simply to answer with another question, "Does it honor God and His Creation?" The answer to this question, then, helps us to define and comprehend beauty.

### **Beauty in the Liberal Arts: The Trivium**

Beauty is present throughout God's creation. In my mind, one of the most powerful arguments against atheism is that beauty and order exist everywhere. If God does not exist – if there is no Divine – how do we explain the existence of beauty and order in the universe as well as the search for beauty in all cultures? How do we explain the search for goodness and truth in all cultures? And this great appreciation, this desire even among the pagans to worship nature, tells us that there is something about the creation that points us to God. The creation praises Him. As human beings, our spiritual nature and our reason give us the ability to perceive this order as well as the beautiful. And those who know God – those who have the eyes of faith – can perceive more fully what God has created and what the Beholder wants us to know and to

communicate about Him and His creation. And so, education does not exist simply to meet worldly, utilitarian ends alone. The liberal arts introduce us to the most essential areas of study and language that allow us to know things about creation with the end that we praise Him who brought it into being.

This good study begins with the acquisition of language. The Trivium teaches us to read, to construct words, to construct sentences and arguments, to write well, and to speak well. We, of course, can study nothing without the ability to read. Learning to read early and well establishes the foundations that open windows to all serious inquiry. In ancient Mesopotamia a famous story, “The Sumerian Schoolboy,” described the often torturous efforts which accompanied the education of young scribes. To be literate was so immensely valuable that the schoolboy was given corporal punishment at school, with the approval of his parents, in order to push him towards higher and better literacy. In Medieval European artwork, grammar personified is always illustrated as the beginning of study – sometimes illustrated with a whip and often with a key. Grammar is shown opening the

door to all other areas of study. Luther wrote that “The art of grammar teaches and shows what words imply and signify, but we must first learn and know what the things are and what the matters mean.” In the Trivium young people are given the tools to communicate with greater depth of meaning and with profound self-expression. This, after all, is what all human beings desire, to have the tools to express a wide range of thought. The Trivium gives us the tools to do just that. It has been suggested that if young people are given the proper tools of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, if they are given the tools for communicating their thoughts in meaningful and profound ways, then young people will be less prone to turn to superficial means of self-expression such as “piercing” and “tattooing” themselves. Indeed, think of how nice it would be if, rather than hearing a boy say “she’s hot!,” he might quote Shakespeare using the words that Romeo said of Juliet, “O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 1, Scene 5).

But the Trivium provides tools for so much more than self-expression. Through it we introduce students to great literature, to philosophy, and to noble and honorable stories of old. For

Christians, it is the very word of God that is opened for study. Philipp Melancthon wrote this:

Knowledge of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric would help every believer to read, interpret and explain the Bible. Memory work, musical skills, and logical thinking would help the student to learn the value of control, self-discipline, and orderliness. Furthermore, the students would learn, as a group, the tenets of the Christian faith, and so form a generation of like-minded believers.

The study of Scripture opens the revelation of God to His people. One example, of so many, is Psalm 139:

- 1 You have searched me, Lord,  
and you know me.
- 2 You know when I sit and when I rise;  
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- 3 You discern my going out and my lying down;  
you are familiar with all my ways.
- 4 Before a word is on my tongue  
you, Lord, know it completely.
- 5 You hem me in behind and before,  
and you lay your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
too lofty for me to attain.

It is nearly impossible to describe beauty without language, without the ability to verbalize thought in a clear and reasonable manner. Without language, how do you describe a newborn baby? A flower, a tree, a sunset? How do you explain this beauty? A profound understanding of language and its use in spelling, grammar, syntax, logic, and rhetoric gives us the ability to express beauty – in so many beautiful ways – in the words of any language.

The writing of the words themselves is also part of this expression of beauty. Currently, in most schools across the nation, there is a movement away from the teaching of cursive. The idea is that students need only to learn to type, or they need only to learn to print, so that their writing is more legible and standardized. This is a remarkable contrast to the societal norms of the present day that profess to support individuality. And so there is, in this process of taking cursive out of the schools, a decided turn towards a standardization of writing that eliminates self-expression and, important to our topic, the beauty that

can be so evident in the handwritten word. Plato wrote that “calligraphy is a geometry of the soul which manifests itself physically.” He understood that the writing of the words themselves is part of the communication of the words. Just as in rhetoric, students are taught to apply persuasion and beauty to the spoken word, so cursive allows a person to express beauty in both the message and in the medium of that message. In a recent renovation of a school in Oklahoma City, old blackboards were found dating to November of 1917, and these gave evidence of the beauty of cursive. Those who had covered the older chalkboards did so with the intention of creating a “time capsule.” And that time capsule illustrates for us that it was just as important to write the words beautifully as it was to write a clear, concise, and beautiful sentence. We think that “journaling” – or asking students to write a great deal – somehow teaches young people how to write, when in fact it is in the writing of brief, well-communicated, and beautifully written sentences that our students learn to write in such a way as to produce beautiful writing in every aspect of the art. Why not teach young people to write beautifully – slow down, think about what they are writing, and to express it beautifully –

not only in the words and structure but in the appearance of it, in the letters themselves? Without “Spell Check” or the magic of hundreds of fonts within the machine, students must themselves pursue the expression of beauty in writing. It is a tragedy not to teach young people to write beautifully, because they are robbed of a means of beautiful self-expression.

As a challenge to the modern mentality of seeking the easy route, it takes a great deal of time and hard work to teach a young person how to write well and to speak well. It takes a great deal of correction. An excellent way to teach young people to speak and to write is to introduce them to great and beautiful literature or oratory. By providing them with examples for comparison, we help them understand that which is a good idea or bad idea. We help them distinguish between the well-reasoned, well-written, or well-spoken message and that which is none of these things. It is a difficult process and can hurt people’s feelings. But holding the bar high in every way, especially in writing, helps young people understand the communication of thoughts and ideas in profound and beautiful ways. If we tell students that this is always the goal, they can be led to produce their best work. It is

amazing what students will attain if they seek to please their teachers. It is my experience that children want to be taken seriously. And so, if you expect great things children will seek to meet the mark. The result will be persons who can write and speak with beauty and clarity.

### **Beauty in the Liberal Arts: The Quadrivium**

Christians should not be afraid of the Quadrivium; of science and of mathematics. Rather, it is my opinion that Christians should be quite at home in the sciences. The Christian should stand in awe of the order and beauty of the universe, since the Gospel of John teaches us that not only had the incarnate Word come into the world but had been present at the very creation of all things. Our Creator showed his love of His creation by becoming part of it and so, if we understand this love of God for His creation, we know that it is part of our work as Christians to understand the universe and all that God has brought into being. Science teaches us that there are laws by which the physical universe operates. As rational created beings, we humans are able to look in wonder at our own world as well as out into a vast, unlimited space. After all,

this is one of the reasons we were created. We were made to love God and praise Him for His glorious works.

I recently saw a tee shirt that said “Another Day without Algebra.” The clear message here was that algebra is unnecessary in daily life. It is not practical. Apart from the obvious fact that algebra is all around us in problem-solving, the construction of roads and bridges, as well as in most everything else we do, this sentiment rejects the idea that human beings should have a profound training in the language of the Quadrivium. Just as we cannot hope to begin to study a subject without the Trivium, so in the Quadrivium it is mathematics that opens the doors of understanding geometry, physics, astronomy, and music. One crucial function of the liberal arts is that they supply us with a set of languages. Hence, mathematics is as important a language to learn as English, Latin, or Greek. By teaching students mathematics, we teach them a language by which they can analyze, measure, and talk about God’s creation. The mind and reason are shaped at a more profound level. We ought to learn from Pythagoras and Plato who knew that “number” was essential to an understanding of the material world. Pythagoras understood

the beauty and order of mathematics. He was obsessed with mathematics and with measurement, and he believed that number is the element that unifies all things. Plato wrote that you cannot begin to practice philosophy without mathematics. In the learning of this language we are given another tool to study and express the good, the true, and the beautiful. Mathematics is itself a beautiful language that opens up new worlds for young minds in their understanding of our Creator and of creation.

Of course, there is much about mathematics that is hard to grasp. In the 5<sup>th</sup> grade I hit the wall with fractions – and made it past. This was the simple stuff! But students who are taught to memorize their multiplication tables, adding speed to their knowledge of the language, are prepared to move into ever-higher mathematics with as little use of the calculator as possible. Students who are taught the language of mathematics have minds trained for logic, for reasoning beyond the simplistic. There is much that is philosophical about the language, such as coming to terms with a symbol that stands for nothing (zero), the invention of which served to transform mathematics. Or one might return to fractions and ask what the

smallest fraction might be, only to find that there is no such thing. Fractions can be forever divided. Or, we might ask to cite the largest possible number. This, too, is impossible. There is an infinity in both directions. And somewhere in between the smallest and the greatest, we human beings operate on a daily basis where numbers are comprehensible to our limited minds. As with other languages, mathematics offers us a great tool for understanding, as well as an opportunity to be challenged and humbled, in the face of that which is beyond our understanding. Beyond this we stand in awe of our Creator who alone understands the whole of mathematics and the language of the Quadrivium.

Within the Quadrivium both physics and astronomy take crucial positions. Mathematics and geometry open the doors to these studies which, in turn, introduce us to the nature of both the most minute as well as the furthest extents of the material creation. In the ancient world Hellenistic scholars calculated the circumference of the earth – using observation and mathematics – and landed at conclusions that were very close, within 1.6% accuracy. They calculated the distance to the sun and moon. In the

modern world we have gone well beyond those relatively simple calculations. We now wonder how far does space extend? We wonder how small is the smallest particle or smallest part of a particle? These fields of study challenge us not to be too arrogant as we live and operate somewhere in between these expanses – between the immensely large and the infinitesimally small. As Christians we recall, too, that our Lord became flesh and met us here. The infinite joined that which is finite to show His love for His people; for His creation.

The Quadrivium also teach us about order and beauty in elements, in light, in color, in all of the creation. The physics teacher at my school, Mr. Michael Nikkila, writes,

There are many who would agree that there are countless things in nature, whether physics related or otherwise, that could be considered beautiful: a sunset, a Hubble Space Telescope photo of a distant galaxy, a butterfly's wings, a rainbow, etc. The beauty of these things can be recognized without the study of physics or math, but once you begin to study the sunrise, the galaxy, the butterfly, and the

rainbow you become aware of something just as beautiful. Its order. . . . All of these things, and so much more, seem beyond comprehension at first glance but through experimentation (with the aid of mathematics) you see that the way the earth moves around the sun, and the light refracts and scatters in the atmosphere, and the cause of starlight and black holes, and the cause of the color of the butterfly's wings are all determined by fairly simple relationships and patterns. Even two seemingly unrelated things (iridescent color of a soap bubble and the butterfly's wings) are caused by the same relationships. . . . The study of physics opens up to us the simplicity and organization of a universe that seems complex and chaotic.”

We look out on creation and marvel at that which we can understand as well as that which we cannot hope to grasp. In his work, *Privileged Planet*, the astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez points out that the earth is perfectly positioned in our solar system and in the galaxy to support life. Slight variations would eliminate all life on

earth. He also notes that we are in a perfect position for beings with the power of reason to observe the solar system, our galaxy, and the universe. This remarkable position in the universe, making our planet privileged with great possibilities, makes him ask if this is not by design? Indeed, it is reasonable to ask such a question. In a universe that has discernable laws, could all of this be simply chalked up to chance? It is a beautiful, biblical truth that God has placed you and me – even in our fallen state – in such a place in the universe so as to study, wonder, and marvel in the beauty of creation. Math, physics and astronomy challenge us to never ignore this beauty.

It is often asserted that Martin Luther was anti-intellectual, that he was against the study of the sciences, but this is far from the truth. Rather, Luther wrote,

We are new in the morning-dawn of a better life; for we are beginning again to recover that knowledge of the creation which we lost through Adam's fall. By God's grace we are beginning to recognize, even in the structure of the humblest flower, his wondrous glory, his goodness, and his omnipotence. In the

creation we can appreciate in some measure the power of Him who spoke and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast.

And so, it was not that he was anti-science, nor was he dismissive of science. Rather, he was skeptical of the claims of science, as everyone ought to be, and he was dedicated to the truth of Scripture, as every Christian ought to be. We must always remember that such scientists as Kepler, Copernicus, and even Galileo were men of faith. All of these men lived in a time when the Aristotelian paradigms of the ancient world were being questioned. Luther was no more anti-science than other skeptics of the era.

Luther's generation followed upon the lives and works of many Renaissance greats, such as Leonardo Da Vinci, a contemporary of Michaelangelo. In Michaelangelo's depiction of the creation of man, God reaches out to enliven his new creation. Adam is depicted in weakness, able only to reach out his hand toward God who is reaching toward Adam from within what appears to be an opening in the heavens. Within that opening are angels as well as Eve and the infant Christ. But of great interest to art historians is the shape of that opening

which looks very much like the shape of a brain, complete with portions of the brain structure and spinal cord. While dissection had long been considered evil among Christians – due to the desire to preserve life, as well as because of the dissections of live slaves in Alexandrian medical experiments – there was now a resurgence of interest in, and growing acceptance of, the dissection of dead bodies for medical studies. With the Renaissance came a renewed study of the body and the brain not seen since Hellenistic times. It is clear from his sculptures that Michaelangelo had benefitted from these studies and here, in his depiction of the creation of Adam, he used this knowledge to illustrate salvific history as it already existed in the mind of God at Creation. Further speculation regarding this great artist suggests that he might also have favored reformation efforts within the Catholic Church. Whatever the case may be, Michaelangelo was a Christian determined to praise God through his art and through beautiful depictions of the human body as it was coming to be better understood during this period.

What is most troubling in our current era is the fact that, even as we understand more fully the creation and

its intricacies, we human beings seem more impressed with our own ability to explore and to manipulate various aspects of the creation, rather than to glory in the beauty of the creation itself. Where we should be most impressed by God’s handiwork, we raise ourselves to a greater belief in the Edenic lie that we can be like gods. That some physicians and scientists see themselves as godlike is common in the present day. This is not new to human thought and in recent history, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century what was once called natural philosophy came to be called “science” (from the Latin word for “knowledge”) implying that this area of study alone contained all knowledge. This was an arrogant breaking apart of the liberal arts – a body of study best understood as a unity. Now the Quadrivium was drawn apart from and above the others to be understood as the only area of study where knowledge might be found. In spite of the fact that scientific paradigms change and are corrected, it is now common to believe that only that which is able to be studied in an empirical way, in an objective manner, will be considered knowledge. And so in those areas where we should be most impressed with the beauty of God’s creation, we are actually more likely to believe that we are gods and that there

is no God at all. This, in spite of the fact that science humbles us, as we come to understand that our knowledge is only now beginning to scratch away at the secrets of creation. While there is much that humans have discovered, there is yet much more that is not known. While we understand much, how can we consider ourselves gods in the face of so much that is unknown? This struggle with the Quadrivium returns us to Luther's warning that if schools are devoid of the study of Scripture and if Christ is not central to education, then a school can be as much a gateway to hell as it can be a useful tool for an understanding of the created order.

## **Music**

In this study of beauty in the liberal arts I have set music aside for its own treatment, because it often seems not to fit, in peoples' minds, with the other arts. But not only does it fit, music is that study to which all others point. And so why has music always, since ancient times, been listed among the seven liberal arts? First of all, music is yet another language among these arts. Along with the Trivium and mathematics, music is a language used to express beauty. This was understood by the pagan philosophers, such as

Pythagoras, who understood that it was in music that grammar, logic, reason, physics, mathematics and, even, astronomy might be best expressed. The celestial bodies, according to this ancient Greek, moved in musical harmony – the harmony of the spheres – and so music is where the beauty of these studies can be best perceived.

Recall that beauty, we have said, is the most tangible and most sensible of the three transcendentals: goodness, truth, and beauty. Music (and the fine arts as a whole) can be seen as that place where the physical (that which can be touched and felt and measured) is able to bring us near to the metaphysical, that which the physical points – to goodness, truth and beauty. A human voice box or a chunk of wood with some strings stretched across it can be used to play well, to sing well, to make beautiful, almost miraculous, music. Physical materials – whether flesh or wood – can be made to elevate us through music. The philosopher Plato talked about the power of music on the soul. Bad music will drag down the person. Beautiful music will improve a person's morals. Even a state (polis), a community, is determined by the kind of music it produces. Plato understood the impact of music. And I would argue that music and art have the ability of taking everyday things

(wood, stone, paint, the human voice) and raising us to a higher level in a way that rational argument can never do. This is why music is one of the seven liberal arts and perhaps the highest of these arts.

It is important to note here that Luther is often depicted in 19<sup>th</sup>-century art with his guitar, singing with his family and his closest friends. These depictions are accurate reflections of Luther's love of Christian music. He wrote,

Music is one of the best of the arts. The notes breathe life into the words. . . . It makes men gentler and milder and more mannerly and more rational. . . . Music is a fair, glorious gift of God; and it lies very near to theology. We should practice the young continually in this art, for it will make able and polished men of them.

And, very much like the Luther we know and love, he also said,

A person who gives this some thought and yet does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear

nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs.”

Luther regarded music as a beautiful gift of God. He understood its importance among the arts as a way of bringing praise to our Creator.

## Conclusion

As teachers it is our duty to redirect the gaze of our students away from the mundane and toward the beautiful. We should teach them that God made His creation, including us, to bring glory to Himself. It is our calling to raise these young people for the purpose of praising Him for what He has created, and to do so in beautiful words, sentences, thoughts, and music. The purpose of education is not to prepare young people simply for work. It is to help shape them into all that the Lord would want them to be as human beings. The liberal arts are a set of tools, used over thousands of years and proven worthy of use, in the preparation of our young students. Within these arts there is beauty to be found everywhere.

Finally, I would argue that in the worship that God's people offer to him we can see the beauty of the liberal arts on full display. We gather in churches

built using mathematics, geometry, and physics. We hear the Word read and preached. We recite creeds, well-written and full of essential biblical truths. We worship according to a church year defined by the movement of sun, moon, earth, and stars. And we sing a doxology – full of truth and beauty – that proclaims our common faith. Together we join in the beautiful worship of all the saints whom we will join at the great feast in the final day, as the new heaven and the new earth are established. In his Apocalypse, the apostle John writes,

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed

away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”

Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (Revelation 21).

Imagine how beautiful that day will be. All things made new. A beautiful truth.

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# The Place of Beauty in Lutheran Theology: An Exegetical and Historical Approach

by the Rev. R. W. Paul

## Introduction

Solomon writes that “[God] has made everything beautiful in its time” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Indeed, the Lord is “the author of beauty.” (Wisdom 13:3). Our purpose here is to examine the place of beauty in Lutheran theology. Our approach will be, as our title indicates, exegetical: looking at the texts of the Scriptures, and historical: attempting to gain insight from our Lutheran forebears.

Lutherans have written on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Veith’s works, including *State of the Arts* and *Postmodern Times*, provide a foray into establishing a Lutheran approach to

aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Some entries exist in the index of Pieper’s *Dogmatics* on “Beauty,” although these are comments made in passing. *Concordia Journal* included a few articles some years ago on the topic of aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> Rather than recount these past efforts, we will look first at how the Scriptures use terms in our semantic realm of the word “beauty” and examine the theological implications.

Equipped with definitions and insight from the terms of the Scriptures we might discern a Lutheran theological understanding of beauty. We will provide here an overview of the Old Testament terms for beauty with some insight from the New Testament, as we look at three sets of passages: Psalm 45:2, Isaiah 53:2, and Romans 10:15/Isaiah 52:7. Following this we will conclude with thoughts on the concept of “the theology of beauty.”

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<sup>1</sup> Weslie Odom details some Lutheran discussion in the field of Aesthetics in his short paper, “For Joy of Beauty Not our Own: The Loveliness and Beauty of the Love of God in Christ.” Marion Hendrickson, Miikka Anttila, Oswald Bayer, John Betz, as well as Gene Veith are all cited as recent examples.

<sup>2</sup> Veith, Gene *State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Mapplethorpe* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991) and *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to*

*Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Arand, Charles and Erik Herrmann, “Attending to the Beauty of the Creation and the New Creation,” *Concordia Journal* Fall 2012, 313-331; Groth, Terrence, “Toward a Biblical Theory of Aesthetics,” *Concordia Journal* Fall 2012, 332-346; Rosebrock, Matthew, “The Heidelberg Disputation and Aesthetics,” *Concordia Journal* Fall 2012, 347-360.

## Definition of Terms

“Beauty” in the English language is defined somewhat vaguely by Merriam-Webster: “the quality of being physically attractive, the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit (loveliness), something beautiful, graceful, ornamental or of excellent quality.”<sup>4</sup> Often beauty is thought of as physical. Yet even the above definitions leave many nuances and points unanswered. The Old and New Testaments were not written in English, and even if we use equivocating terms, “beauty” in English, with all of its nuanced ambiguity, is simply not an identical term to those used in Hebrew or even Greek. Nevertheless, we can explore some elements of the English definitions.

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<sup>4</sup> “Beauty.” Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed July 12, 2015. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/beauty>.

<sup>5</sup> William A Dyrness, “Aesthetics in the Old Testament: Beauty in Context.” *JETS* 28: 4 (December 1985), 422.

Many of the terms of the Old Testament address the physical quality of beauty. William Dyrness, who assembled several word groupings of Old Testament terms for beauty, began with physical beauty, as “the visibly pleasing or luminous.”<sup>5</sup> Yet the English word for beauty represents something complicated. Even the images of a beautiful woman or a beautiful painting can evoke contemplation and reflection. Beauty is nuanced in English, and the Hebrew offers several separate terms for each of the nuances.

The terms of the Old Testament each have nuanced semantic realms which assist our understanding. For example, David Konstan argues that the Biblical description of beauty is corporeal and real, as opposed to an abstract notion.<sup>6</sup> In his examination of the terms for beauty, both the Greek *καλλος* and its Hebrew counterpart *יָפֵה* serve to illustrate this. *καλλος* is the noun related to

<sup>6</sup> David Konstan, “Biblical beauty: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin.” In *one who sows bountifully: essays in honor of Stanley K. Stowers*, 129-140. Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2013. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed July 7, 2015).

the adjective *καλος*, good or noble. It means beauty and, as Konstan argues, this beauty is a very physical one. *καλλος* is used distinctly by Homer in the *Iliad* to describe Bellerophon as particularly handsome (6.156). Paris possesses beauty sufficient to cause Helen to leave Menelaus (3.391-92). The consummate image of Beauty is seen in the goddess Aphrodite (9.389).<sup>7</sup>

Instances of *יפה* in the Old Testament begin with many examples of physical beauty. These include Gen. 12:14 regarding Sarah, Genesis 29:17 regarding Rachel, in 2 Samuel 13:1 of Tamar; and 1 Kings 1:3, 4 of Abishag the Shunammite. In the Song of Songs 7:6, we read, “How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights.” Beauty and fairness are not limited to the women of the Scriptures, however. Joseph (Genesis 39:6), Absalom (2 Samuel 14:25), and David (1 Samuel 17:42) are all described as handsome by *יפה*. Cities are called beautiful.<sup>8</sup> Cows and other objects too can be beautiful.<sup>9</sup> Two

passages of noted Messianic import, Psalm 45:2 and Isaiah 33:17, describe the Messianic king as beautiful. The Psalmist writes, “You are the most handsome of the sons of men,” and Isaiah writes, “Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty.”

Note that some scholars view the beauty of Christ is one that some scholars view as conflicted, since Isaiah also writes, “He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him.” How can the Christ be the most handsome and have an appearance that seems to reflect the opposite? Our upcoming treatment of both verses should qualify concerns as well as perhaps guide us in our understanding of what true Christological beauty is.

Dyrness identifies seven word groups in the Old Testament that describe physical beauty. *צבי* describes a beauty that “sparks admiration,” a beauty of splendor,

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<sup>7</sup> Konstan, 133.

<sup>8</sup> Jerusalem, Ps. 48:2, Ezekiel 16:13, 14, 15, 25; Tyre, Ezekiel 27:3; Egypt, Jeremiah 46:20.

<sup>9</sup>, Genesis 41:2, 4, 18, cows; Jer 11:16 and Ezk 31:3, trees; Song 7:2, feet; and 1 Sam 16:12, eyes.

glory, and honor.<sup>10</sup> פָּאָר is a verb that means to glorify, to crown, to beautify, or to make something an object of admiration.<sup>11</sup> It describes an outward splendor, like Aaron's robes (Ex 28:2) or the crown God puts on Israel in Ezekiel 16:12. The חָמַד family of words expresses desire and delight with the purpose of possession.<sup>12</sup> This is used positively and negatively in the Scriptures, whereas the noun forms refer to the pleasant, lovely and precious.<sup>13</sup> This too also can lead to negative consequences (harlotry, Ezekiel 23:6, 12, 23).<sup>14</sup>

יָפָה as discussed above concerns outward beauty. Dyrness posits that this group "indicates the highest natural perfection that God's ordered creation can reach" when used in Wisdom literature.<sup>15</sup> נָאֵה describes a beauty of appropriateness, describing that

which is fitting. נָאֵה can mean a physical beauty (Song 1:1; 6:4), but it often means "pleasing, in the sense of what is perfectly suitable to the situation."<sup>16</sup> As Dyrness notes, "Praise suits the righteous (Ps 33:1; BDB "is seemly" also in 147:1), holiness "belongs" in God's house (93:5; *NEB* "holiness is the beauty of thy house"), and the feet of the evangelist are "lovely" (Isa 52:7)."<sup>17</sup> נָאֵה means "to be pleasant/lovely." This family describes all forms of objects as well as persons (most likely in character rather than appearance) and also God.<sup>18</sup> Finally חָדַר expresses honor and glory which is recognized by others.<sup>19</sup> Thus Dyrness gives us seven different families: צְבִי, a beauty of splendor, honor and glory; פָּאָר, a beauty which inspires admiration, carrying with it also the weight of glory, crowning, and being made beautiful; חָמַד,

<sup>10</sup> Dyrness, 423; 2 Samuel 1:19, Isaiah 13:19, Jeremiah 3:19; Ezra 10:6, 15; Daniel 11:45; Isaiah 28:5 and Isaiah 4:5.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid; Ezra 7:27; Judges 7:2; Isaiah 44:23, 49:3; Psalm 149:4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 424; Genesis 2:9; Song 2:3; Ps 68:16; Gen. 3:6; Josh 7:21; Deut. 7:25; Mic 2:2, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Ps 106:24; Is 32:13; 2 Chr 32:27, 36:10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 425.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Gen. 49:15; Ps 81:2; Prov 16:24; 23:8; Ps 16:2; Prov 9:17; 2 Sam 1:26; Ps 133:1; Psal 90:17; 135:3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

things which are beauty and cause a desire to be possessed; **נָאֵם**, to be pleasant or lovely in character; **קָדָר**, a beauty of honor and glory seen by others; and then **יָפָה** which describes an outward beauty and perhaps one of the highest levels of beauty, and **נָאֵה**, a beauty which is fitting, appropriate and seemly.

As discussed above, some Greek terms mirror those in Hebrew. *καλλος* corresponds to **יָפָה**, and *ὠραῖος* (timely, beautiful, fair) corresponds with **נָאֵה**. *ὠραῖος* in Greek literature seems to expressly deal with timeliness and seasonable times. Prior to the New Testament however, *ὠραῖος* is not connected to beauty. Its association with beauty seems to be a particularly New Testament usage, perhaps resulting from Hebrew's multiple word groups that express the concept of beauty. It is likely that earlier Greek lacked a specific word to match this sort of beauty. Other Greek terms are employed in the New Testament for beauty including *καλλος*, *ὠραῖος*, *καλος*, *ἀστεῖος* (which is a beauty like the city), and St. Paul's term of Philippians 4:8 usually translated as

“lovely,” *προσφιλή*. In the Apocrypha (Sirach 4:7 and 20:13) *προσφιλή* has the concept of beloved “as the state which one possesses in the eyes of those whom he has served, as opposed to an inherent quality.”<sup>20</sup>

Even from this brief introduction to the Hebrew and Greek terms, it should be clear that “beauty” is a multifaceted concept as far as language is concerned. Beautiful things are people, cities, objects, animals, and the Messiah. All of the terms from Hebrew and those also in Greek do describe and observable beauty. Mostly it, too, is a physical beauty; but it seems that Hebrew and the Greek of the Scriptures witness to an observable beauty and not so much an inherent quality or abstract concept.

Since our purpose is to establish a Lutheran theological use of beauty, let us further narrow our scope beyond the many different vocables and nuances of beauty. We will focus on **יָפָה** and **נָאֵה**, since they are the word families used in the passages that seem to fit a Christological pattern and relate to justification,

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<sup>20</sup> Odom, 3.

the chief doctrine of the Lutheran church.

While it is certainly true that each passage of the Scriptures has theological import, our isolation of the three passages below is necessary in order to determine perhaps a base level of theological beauty from which we can analyze and compare all of the other beautiful things in the Scriptures. Thus we turn to Psalm 45.

### Theological Elements of Beauty

#### Psalm 45

Psalm 45 is a psalm of the Sons of Korah. As Luther rightly notes, it is an allegory of Christ and the Church with the figures of the King and His Bride. The language is of superlative richness. The Holy Spirit spared no expense in clothing the church in the most elaborate of bridal outfits. The king too, is more lovely than any king ever has been or will be. Therefore when we look at verse 3 in the

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<sup>21</sup> Luther does not discount that he can also have physical beauty, but the point here is in the figurative use of the phrase, WA 40<sup>ll</sup>: 484; AE 12:206.

Hebrew it reads, “You are more beautiful than the sons of men.” This beauty is not merely a physical beauty. The form of the Hebrew word **יפה** describes fairness that can only be truly spoken of *spiritual* beauty.<sup>21</sup> Here is clearly an example as mentioned before, of **יפה** in Wisdom literature, which points to a beauty higher than any physical beauty. This beauty is chiefly descriptive of the two natures of Christ, one of the quintessential Christological doctrines. The King is not defiled as any man would be; he is pure. When called the most beautiful, this references his Divine nature. The Messiah is without sin and thus he is God. But he is not the most handsome of the sons of God, he is the most handsome of the sons of men, pointing to the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He is also Man.<sup>22</sup> The question does arise in discussion of the Messiah’s superlative beauty, could there be someone physically fairer than Christ? In his commentary on Psalm 45, Luther quotes Isaiah 53 to show

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

that even though wondrous things are said of the King, “they are enveloped and overshadowed by the external form of the cross.”<sup>23</sup> So the beauty of Christ, the King, is in Spirit and grasped by faith, and this beauty also describes the love and compassion Christ has for humanity in showing mercy. He is without sin and possessing perfect righteousness, full of grace and truth.<sup>24</sup>

Selnecker and Bugenhagen collaborate here with Luther. Nicholas Selnecker writes in his commentary on the Psalter that this beauty, *יפיפות* in Hebrew, is the beauty of sinlessness and perfection of humanity.<sup>25</sup> Johannes Bugenhagen reiterates that the beauty of the Messiah is his sinlessness, as such a beauty can only describe God.<sup>26</sup> Therefore to be the most handsome of the son of men is predominately a spiritual quality in the eyes of our Lutheran forebears. This does not discount physical beauty, but of course points

us to faith which grasps that which is not always seen and observable. More beautiful than Rachel, Sarah, Abishag, and more handsome than David, Absalom, is that man who is the consummation of all mankind, the God Man Christ Jesus, from whom all humanity receives true beauty: sinlessness, righteousness, and purity.

### Isaiah 53

With such a focus on the spiritual beauty of the Christ it then follows that we should discuss that supposed contradiction found in the Song of the Suffering Servant from Isaiah, the latter portion of chapter 52 & the beginning of chapter 53. This familiar passage is the traditional reading for Good Friday. Isaiah writes,

“Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted. As many were astonished at you—his appearance

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<sup>23</sup> WA 40<sup>II</sup>: 485; AE 12:207 and “sed quae involuta sint et obumbrata externa facie crucis,” WA 40<sup>II</sup>: 487.32–33; AE 12:209.

<sup>24</sup> AE 12:206.

<sup>25</sup> Nikolaus Selnecker, *Der gantze Psalter des Königlichen Propheten Davids außgelegt, und in dez Bücher getheylt*, (Nürnberg, 1569), 121.

<sup>26</sup> Johannes Bugenhagen, *In librum Psalmorum Interpretatio*, (Strassburg, 1524), *Psalm 44*.

was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; *he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no appearance that we should desire him.* He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

The passage continues is the best description of Good Friday, even though written centuries earlier by the prophet Isaiah and the Holy Spirit. The context of our passage, Isaiah 53:2, provides some background as to what sort of disfigurement and ugliness could be seen when gazing upon the Messiah.

Anyone who has seen Mel Gibson’s *Passion of the Christ* knows

visually how the verses of Isaiah can be played out. Jim Caviezel played a marred and scourged Jesus. In fact the graphic nature of those scenes makes us want to hide our faces. Yet this Christ who was scourged, and who had no desirable form or majesty, is still the most handsome of the sons of men.

The ESV translates “no appearance that we should desire him” as “no beauty.” One of our terms for beauty is found in the Hebrew of this verse. And that is the word for “majesty,” **דָּבָר**, the kind of beauty which is described as majesty or glory. Where the ESV has “beauty,” they derive this understanding from the Greek Septuagint. The Hebrew “appearance” is translated as **כָּלֹס**, our Greek stand in for **καλλος**. From the commentary of Johannes Brenz, it is clear that when the Messiah is describe as having “no form or appearance that we should desire him,” this is spoken concerning those who lack faith. Johann Wigand, a professor and author of Lutheran orthodoxy, contributes to the same sense of this as Brenz. Since the taking on of human flesh is essential to the humiliation of the Messiah, so too is

his being despised by those who look upon him. Those who see him mock him and jeer at him as he bears their sins. There is disregard from those who ought rather to look upon him, whom they have pierced, with awe and repentance.<sup>27</sup> Without the eyes of faith they cannot comprehend that he who is the Messiah, the Son of God, the “most handsome of the sons of men” would take it upon himself to be arrested, scourged, and hanged upon a tree.<sup>28</sup>

Thus we see that beauty takes on additional meaning in the works of God. Of course there is beauty preserved and observed in nature. But the highest beauty is that which comes from the Word Made Flesh, the Son of God whom the prophets foretold as beautiful in his righteousness as God. Although ugly to the eyes of the world in his passive righteousness, the crucifixion shows true beauty.

## Romans 10 and Isaiah 52

Finally we come to the last of our examples. Just as Article V on the

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<sup>27</sup> Johann Wigand, *In Esaiam prophetam explicationes breves*, (Mechler, 1581), 301.

Ministry and the Means of Grace follows Article IV on Justification in the Augsburg Confession. So too should a discussion on preaching in Romans and Isaiah follow that of the crucifixion and exaltation of Christ. Both of our previous examples dealt with occurrences or translational substitutes of the Hebrew word יפה, “beautiful/beauty.” This final example deals with the beauty that is fitting or appropriate, נאה in Hebrew and ὠραῖος in Greek. Isaiah writes, “How *beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news*, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” How timely, how appropriate, how *beautiful* are these feet? Or rather we should ask *why* are they timely, appropriate, and beautiful? St. Paul uses this verse from Isaiah in Romans 10 when he speaks about the necessity of faith coming through hearing.

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not

<sup>28</sup> Johannes Brenz, *Commentarius Isaiae*, 801-802.

believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.”

Why are the feet beautiful? Are they sleek and handsome, hairy and smelly? They are beautiful because of what they bring. Their beauty is wrapped up in their purpose. The feet of the prophets, the apostles, and the pastors are beautiful because they bring the news of the beautiful one. The Scriptures and the sermons that are preached from them are vessels of beauty. They bear Christ and deliver Christ, and thus they deliver justification, forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Luther says as much, “In the first place they are called “beautiful” because of their purity, since they do not preach the Gospel for personal advantage or empty glory, as is the now the case everywhere, but only

out of obedience to God as well for the salvation of the hearers.”<sup>29</sup> He also writes this, as he expounds upon the term beautiful:

In the second place, the term “beautiful” according to the Hebrew idiom has more the meaning of something desirable or hoped for, something favored or worthy of love and affection, in German *lieblich und genehm*. And thus the meaning is that the preaching of the Gospel is something lovable and desirable for those who are under the Law. For the Law shows us nothing but our sin, makes us guilty, and thus produces an anguished conscience; but the Gospel supplies a longed for remedy to people in anguish.<sup>30</sup>

Now based upon our earlier discussion of terms, is Luther right? Does this word for beautiful capture this nuance? It seems that he is doing what we are wont to do in English; he combines nuances to suit his teaching. Perhaps not, as “pleasing” certainly fits under נאה.

We work together with Luther here. His explication is this: the Gospel is desirable for those who are under

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<sup>29</sup> AE 25:415-416.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 416.

the Law. It is the only remedy for anguish. But if our word means pleasing, seemly, fitting, and appropriate, could we not combine the two? The beauty of the preaching is appropriate and pleasing because it brings exactly what is needed. It supplies the medicine of immortality to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. Thus preaching truly is beautiful for Isaiah, Paul, and Luther because preaching conveys the Gospel and the Gospel saves.

Friedrich Balduin and Johannes Brenz follow the authors of the Scriptures and Luther in their understanding of the beautiful feet. Balduin writes, "The feet of the apostles are beautiful, that is handsome and joyful, not like the feet of the Roman Pontiff with gems and ornamented with gold;" rather, they are like those with a light conscience. Their hearers too ought to be joyful with an exhilarated conscience because of the good news they bring.<sup>31</sup> Brenz sees this preaching as the continuation of the work of all of the prophets and

apostles, as Jesus sent forth the disciples from the mount of the Ascension.<sup>32</sup> Thus the good news upon the mountain continues to be the message of the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation that Christ gives to the world. How timely, how appropriate, how pleasing that God would deign to give such beautiful news, such peace to the world that deserves no beauty, no peace and no salvation.

## Conclusion

Hence we arrive at the end. Beauty adorns the Scriptures. God created all that exists and by the Word and the Spirit he inscribes much of what has existed into the written word. Beautiful people, creation, ideas: the author of beauty has made them all. This beauty certainly reflects the creative perfection of God's declaration of very good, but as we have seen through the Scriptures' terms for beauty, our Creator has endowed us with the breadth of

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<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Balduin, *Commentarius in Omnes Epistolas Pauli*, (Frankfurt: Balthasar-Christopher Wustius, 1692), 201.

<sup>32</sup> Johannes Brenz, *Commentarius Isaiae*, 788.

language to clarify what sort of beauty we discuss.

What is the place of beauty in Lutheran theology? It certainly deserves more than passing comments in Pieper's *Dogmatics*, and many theologians and authors endeavor to do just that. In fact, this conference confirms that there is an important place for beauty in Lutheran theology, not just in classical Lutheran education. But, as Dr. Calvert has reminded us throughout his plenary lectures, and as we have also been reminded throughout the services this week and the sermons we have heard, that which is beautiful in creation ultimately only receives its beauty because of the cross. God gives us every good thing through the cross and resurrection of Christ. Not a singular geometric proof or historical narrative or work of art or piece of music would be beautiful apart from salvation in Christ. Frankly, none of these things would exist.

Sin separates us from God and deserves the removal of all beauty. But he who is fairer than the sons of men defeated the ugliness of sin and death. His body was tortured and

beaten, but he was still the most beautiful, the most perfect, the Suffering Servant who conquered sin, death, and the devil to give true beauty to the world. So today the Church does just that in the preaching of pastors. Beautiful feet, beautiful voices: these are beautiful, not because of what they are but because of what they bear.

The author of beauty is beautiful, and he makes creation beautiful all for the sake of the article on which the church stands or falls. What is the place of beauty in Lutheran theology? It is yet another spoke in the wheel that finds its hub in the death and resurrection of Christ and the righteousness of faith. Thus true beauty is at home in him who is beautiful and who is the author of beauty: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who has redeemed the world through the beautiful Good News of the Gospel.

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## Beauty in the Classroom

by Abigail Clevenger

Do you remember your elementary school classrooms? Go back and imagine. What do you see? What catches your eye? What do you remember most?

Perhaps you most recall the teachers and classmates who filled your classrooms with their presence. People are generally far more interesting and memorable than physical spaces.

If you can remember the physical space of your childhood classrooms, were those spaces the kind of places where you wanted to spend your days reading, thinking, and learning? Were they dark and dingy, or bright and clear? Were your classrooms distracting and chaotic? Or were they calm, orderly, and inspiring?

Too often in schools today—public, private, and Christian—classrooms resemble either a sterile, cubicled workplace or, more often, a circus fun house peppered with motivational posters about “leadership” and “ambition.” Who wants to spend large amounts of time attempting to learn in either place?

Why do we assume that children’s classrooms should have photos of cartoon animals in gaudy colors rather than accurate illustrations or depictions of animals? A beautiful, accurate illustration of an elephant is far superior to the exaggerated, humorous, cartoon version. The underlying assumption behind busy,

colorful classroom décor is quite progressive. Secular progressive education sees the student, not the teacher, as the center of the classroom learning “experience.” Instead of relying on the teacher and the content to do the actual teaching, progressive mainstream classrooms put the emphasis on colorful, entertaining walls and dumbed-down or cartoon images in an effort to appeal to the child.

Google “over-stimulating classroom.” Even mainstream research agrees that the environment impacts learning, often quite significantly. Students tend to learn better and perform better on exams in simpler, less-stimulating classrooms.

Classical Lutheran schools and homeschools should think with especially great care about their classroom and learning spaces. Classical Lutheran educators excel at selecting or creating curricula with pedagogical principles that reflect both classical and Lutheran principles. We seek content and methods to inculcate and model truth, beauty, and goodness—the historical yet radical approach to education in the context of more prominent secular progressivism today.

Yet are these principles of classical Lutheran education translated into the physical environment of our classrooms? How are we shaping the spaces in our homes and schools to point our children to what is true, good, and most significantly in this area, to what is beautiful?

Here are three reasons classical Lutheran schools and homes should rethink their classroom and learning spaces:

### **1. Beauty is a central part of any classical Christian curriculum.**

Beauty matters profoundly, for it points us to something beyond ourselves. Beauty wields the unique power of stirring the imagination and the soul toward what is good and true. Just as God created beauty in the world and gave us an innate longing for beauty, so we should seek to cultivate beauty in the world. God placed us as stewards over his creation, so we should guard and design our resources, materials, and physical spaces to cultivate a habit of care and beautification. We share in that beauty-creating desire and ability in many different ways according to the talents and vocations given to each of us individually.

As God's children, our hearts are drawn to beautiful experiences. Consider cooking a delicious meal: more than merely a utilitarian function, this can be a beautiful and savory experience. Think about a conversing with lovely woman: she wears beautiful clothing, arranges her hair attractively, and speaks graciously. Contemplate watching a splendid sunrise: the rich layers of light and color lift our hearts for a moment beyond the temporal cares of life. Without beauty, life would lose much of its meaning and certainly much of its joy.

### **2. Beauty is often experienced most powerfully through physical spaces.**

As Christians, we start with the knowledge that the physical earth and body matter profoundly, for God made the world “good.” When mankind fell, Christ became incarnate, and his bodily resurrection points to the restoration of all things, including the physical aspect of existence. We exist now and in eternity as soul and body. Physicality matters.

Caring for our bodies matters, and caring for our physical spaces matters. We are given the profound task of shaping our environments in beautiful ways, for beauty manifests itself most powerfully through the physical. The spaces around us are not wholly “neutral;” they shape and teach us something. Our classrooms can even point us to knowing God more fully.

Just as we tend to the nurture of our children's souls in classical Lutheran education, so we should tend to our children's physical environment. We experience the world around us—and particularly the beautiful things around us—through the senses and particularly through the eyes. So if beauty matters, the physical world matters also. This includes our classrooms.

### **3. Whether beautiful or ugly, classroom spaces will communicate something.**

Most schools, classical and mainstream, fail to realize the importance of its learning spaces. Consequently, most schools fall

short of articulating a purpose and plan for classroom beautification. We have a powerful opportunity to introduce our students to beauty in what they see every day in their classrooms.

We can begin by asking this question: what is purpose of the classroom arrangement? Classroom design should aim towards creating a comfortable environment that nurtures the minds and souls of students. The purpose of classroom spaces is NOT primarily to convey information, because this is the teacher's role. Rather, the purpose of the classroom space is to create a beautiful, inspiring, and orderly environment conducive to learning deeply from the teacher and from the material being taught.

The beauty, or lack thereof, within our classrooms will shape our students whether we realize it or not. Walls should not be filled with distracting images, excessive teaching charts, or unnecessarily flashy colors. Classically, the teacher is the center of the classroom—not the student—and the teacher, not the walls, teaches the students.

The sinister philosophy of progressive education targets the typical American classroom with the appearance of learning through dumbed-down cartoon images, gaudy plastic containers, and shallow motivational posters. These serve to *distract* from true learning and create an overall sense of fleeting entertainment, rather than teacher-directed inspiration towards what is good, true, and beautiful. Let us move towards beauty with accurate

depictions and careful images. Our classroom – or homeschool – spaces will communicate something. They have the capacity to teach something memorable, profound, and lasting.

### **How to Rethink Your Classroom**

So what should classical Lutheran classrooms look like? How do we start rethinking our own physical spaces? Our classrooms can be cheerful, wonderful, and enjoyable places, but our classroom spaces should reflect our principles: classical and Lutheran. We must elevate far above what is merely “fun.” Instead, we cultivate learning while guiding aesthetic sensibility. After all, there is great enjoyment to be found in the challenge and hard work of learning difficult things.

Bringing together creativity and imagination with basic design elements for easily applicable changes. We are all limited by time, resources, and ability, but simple changes can be made. You can move your classroom or homeschool room into a place where your children will flourish academically and be inspired by the surrounding beauty.

Start by identifying the room’s focal point. Place there a beautiful print to catch the eye upon entrance to the classroom. Remove all wordy, gaudy, overly stimulating, and unnecessary posters from the wall. Create some clean, empty space. Put a plant on the window sill for the natural beauty of green, growing life. Declutter your desk. Remove plastic.

Organize toys and books with wooden baskets or matching, neutral cloth bins. Make small changes to replace “cluttered, overstimulating, and ugly” with “calm, orderly, and beautiful.” Invite a friend or colleague into your home or classroom to give you a fresh perspective.

Like any craft, the craft of classroom beautification grows from mindful practice over time. Creating a sense of beauty and order in our classrooms will yield great rewards, as we teach within a pleasing space to help students see, experience, and know beauty in the everyday.

Here are a few additional checklist items to consider:

- Is there too much on the walls?  
Is the overall effect one of distraction? What could be removed?
- Are beautiful items visible from the students' eye level?
- Is there a sense of balance and symmetry to the walls?
- Is wall art an appropriate mix of words and images (not overly wordy)?
- Is there balance between contrast and colors?
- Is there enough empty space for the eye to rest?
- Is excellent student work displayed in an orderly manner?
- What is the room's focal point?  
To what is the eye first drawn?

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## Salvation by Grace Alone in Dante's Comedy

by Dr. E. Christian Kopff

In two years, 2017, we shall be celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. Luther's 95 Theses argued that the Gospels, read in Greek, do not tell people to "do penance" (*poenitentiam agite*), but to "repent, change your mind" (*metanoete*). Christ "wanted the whole life of believers to be penance." Soon Luther and other evangelicals were insisting that Christians were saved, not by good works, but by God's grace alone (*sola gratia*). Some Catholics will ask us, as they have in the past, whether God permitted Biblical truth to vanish from the earth for fifteen hundred years until a university professor in Wittenberg, Germany restored it.

There is no reason to be surprised that some Christians have been confused about Christian truth. Even today polls tell us that many Christians do not understand central points of their faith. And it is not just Christians. The Pew Research Center reported in 2012 that, "14% of [self-described] atheists...say they believe in God." And we think *we* have problems with catechesis!

<http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise-religion/#belief-in-god>

Without arguing about percentages, I would like to argue that the author of the greatest literary work of the Christian Middle Ages, Dante Alighieri, clearly

expressed one of the central ideas of our faith.

In *Inferno* Canto 26 Dante and Virgil arrive at the eighth ditch of Lower Hell, where Fraudulent Counsel is punished. For Dante and the Aristotelian tradition, intellect is the distinctive trait of human beings. In *Paradiso* 1.120 Dante gives a Christian spin to this concept when he calls men *creature ... c'hanno intelletto e amore*. ("Creatures that have intellect and love.") Evil counsel is a clear example of misuse of the intellect, the conscious perversion of the faculty that leads to a just social life and the Beatific Vision, *il ben dell'intelletto*. ("the good of the intellect") (*Inferno* 3.18)

Dante slows down his fast-paced journey to devote two cantos to two figures, one from Classical Antiquity, the second from contemporary Italy, the first interviewed by Virgil, the second by Dante. "The two worlds Dante has fused in the Comedy stand side by side..., while for the first and last time in Hell two major figures punished for the same crime are presented in parallel." (Judith Davies, *Cambridge Readings*, 1981, p. 49) Dante gives each one a canto to tell the stories that will echo elsewhere in the Comedy.

Dante looks down upon the eighth ditch and sees it full of souls wrapped in flames. "As many fireflies as the peasant sees in the valley below when he rests on a hill [in the summertime when dusk is coming on] —with so many flames the eighth ditch was shining, as I noticed when I arrived at the point where the bottom was visible." (*Inferno* 26.25-32)

Virgil explains that the flames contain souls who are being punished for giving evil advice. Dante asks about a flame that contains two souls. Virgil tells him that the flame contains the suffering souls of Ulysses (Odysseus) and Diomedes, the two trickster heroes of the Trojan War. Canto 26 is challenging for classical educators. Ulysses persuades his men to leave home and sail beyond the Pillars of Hercules by telling them: *Fatti non foste a viver come brutti/ma per seguir virtute and canoscenza*. (“You were not made to live like animals, but to follow virtue and knowledge.”) (*Inferno* 26.119-120) *Virtus et scientia* is the motto of many classical schools!

Canto 27 moves from Ulysses’ flame to another. At first the flame moans incomprehensibly, but eventually Dante and Virgil understand him. He heard Virgil speaking Italian and asks about his own home: “If you just now have fallen into this blind world from that sweet Latin land from which I bring all my guilt, tell me if the people of Romagna have peace or war.”

Dante tells him that the rulers of Romagna are corrupt, but the land is at peace. Dante then asks who he is and promises to tell his story on earth, as he offers to do for other souls in Hell, like Pier della Vigna in canto 13 and Count Ugolino in canto 32. He has misjudged his current interlocutor, however. The last thing this soul wants is for the world to know his present location in Hell. He tells Dante:

“If I thought that my response would be to a person who would ever return to

earth, this flame would stand still with no more shaking; but since no one has ever yet returned from this abyss, if what I hear is true, I am answering you without fear of disgrace.” (T. S. Eliot used Dante’s Italian as the epigraph of his “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.”) Unlike others in Hell, this soul left a good reputation on earth and wants to keep it.

He is Guido da Montefeltro, a Ghibelline general who kept Romagna free of Papal domination. In 1288 he was excommunicated, but in 1296 he was reconciled with Pope Boniface VIII, gave up his earthly goods and joined the mendicant Franciscan order of monks. This decision impressed his contemporaries. In his Italian *Convivio* (*Banquet*) 4.28.8, Dante describes old age as a time for preparing oneself for God. “Like the good sailor, who as he nears harbor lowers his sails and glides quietly into port, so we too must lower the sails of our earthly cares and turn to God with all our mind and heart, so that we may reach that port with all peace and quiet.” He gives as an example “our very noble Italian Guido of Montefeltro.” An early commentator on the *Comedy*, Benvenuto describes the once proud general begging for bread in the streets of Ancona: “I have heard many good things about him that would permit one to have good expectations for his salvation.” Guido was well known as a brave and resourceful general who ended his life reconciled with the church and at peace with God and his conscience.

Convinced that no one on earth will hear of his fate, Guido tells his story. “I was a man of arms and I became a Franciscan with a rope for a belt” to gain a place in Heaven. He is sure his plan would have worked, “if it had not been for the great priest—may the Devil take him!” Guido always planned well. In life “my deeds were not those of the lion but of the fox. I knew all the tricks and covered ways and I practiced them with the result that word of it went out to the end of the land. When I saw I had reached that part of my age when everyone should lower his sails and gather in his riggings, I was sorry for what had pleased me before and I repented, confessed and became a friar. Ah, dear me! [My plan] would have worked....The Prince of the new Pharisees, at war near the Lateran palace—and not with Saracens nor with Jews, for every enemy of his was Christian, and none was present at the taking of Acre or traded in the Sultan’s land—he had no regard for his high office nor the sacred orders or my status as Franciscan friar.... He asked me for advice and I held my tongue, because his words seemed drunk.

“Then [the Pope] spoke again: ‘Let not your heart be troubled. I absolve you here and now and you teach me what to do so that I conquer Palestrina. I can lock and unlock Heaven, as you know, for there are two keys, which my predecessor [Celestine V] did not hold dear.’ Then his weighty arguments pushed me where keeping silent seemed the worse course, and I said, ‘Father, since you wash me of this sin into which I now must fall—*long*

*promise with short keeping* will make you triumph in the Holy See.’

“When I was dead Francis came for me, but one of the black cherubim said to him, ‘Don’t take him away, don’t do me wrong! He must come among my servants because he gave the fraudulent counsel, from which till now I have been at his hairs, because one cannot be absolved who does not repent nor can one repent and will at the same time because the contradiction does not allow it.’ Oh the pain I felt! How I started when he took me and said to me, ‘Maybe you did not think that I had studied logic!’ He carried me to Minos, who coiled his tail eight times around his rough back and after he bit it in great rage, he said, ‘He is among the guilty in the thieving fire.’ So I am lost here where you see me and going about dressed in fire, I am bitter.’

“When he had finished what he had to say, the flame went away in pain, twisting and twitching his pointed horn. We passed on, I and my guide.”

The canto’s themes are found elsewhere in Dante’s writings. He discusses the figure of Guido himself, as previously mentioned, in *Convivio* 4.28.8, including the imagery of lowering the sails as the ship of life prepares to enter the final harbor. The key theological issue of the canto is discussed in *Monarchia* 3.8.8. To show that the authority given the Pope by Christ is absolute in temporal as well as spiritual matters, Pope Boniface VIII in the bull *Unam sanctam* (1302) had appealed to Matthew 16:19, where Jesus tells Peter, “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall

be bound in heaven and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Dante argues that the scriptural context shows that the authority granted here and at John 20:23 is spiritual, not secular. In any event, it is limited by the nature of moral reality. “If the ‘whatsoever’ in the statement ‘whatsoever thou shalt bind’ is taken as absolute, then my adversaries’ statement would be correct; not only would [the Pope] be able to do the things they claim, he would also be able to loosen a woman from her marriage to one man and bind her to another—and this is quite impossible for him. He would be able to grant me absolution even if I were not penitent—which not even God himself can do.”

In *Purgatorio* 5 Dante and Virgil meet Guido’s son, Buonconte on the lower slopes of mount Purgatory, where those who have delayed their repentance until the last moment await permission to ascend. Canto 5 deals with those who died violently without last rites. They flock to Dante so that he may on his return to earth remind their relatives to pray for them and so speed their path to heaven. “Then another spoke: ‘Ah! So may that desire that draws you up the high mountain be fulfilled, have pity and help my own. I came from Montefeltro. I am Buonconte.’” Buonconte da Montefeltro was the son of Guido and like his father a brave Ghibelline general. In 1289 he led the Ghibelline forces of Arezzo against Guelf Florence in the battle of Campaldino. Dante fought in this battle in Florence’s cavalry and asks the question that fascinated everyone.

What happened to the body of the Ghibelline leader, Buonconte da Montefeltro?

“‘Oh,’ he answered, ‘at the foot of Casentino a stream crosses that is called Archiano, which is born above the Hermitage [of Camaldoli] in the Apennines. I arrived at the place where it flows into the Arno wounded in the throat, fleeing on foot and shedding blood on the plain. Here I lost sight and speech. I died with the name of Mary on my lips and there I fell and only my flesh remained there. I shall tell the truth and you repeat it among the living. The angel of God took me and the one from Hell cried out: “Oh you from heaven, why do you rob me? You carry off from this fellow the eternal part because of a tiny tear [*per una lagrimetta*] that takes him from me. But I will deal with the rest of him in a different way.” ’”

Dante tells the fate of Buonconte’s soul in 21 lines, seven tercets. He devotes the same number of lines to the fate of his body, which is swept away by a flashflood caused by a sudden storm that Buonconte explains in terms of Greek science and Christian theology: “That evil will that seeks evil with its intellect arrived and moved the fog and wind by the power its nature gave it.” The sudden storm caused a flash flood that carried Buonconte’s body into the Arno. “It rolled me through the banks and through the river bed, then covered me and girded me with its spoils.”

For many scholars Guido da Montefeltro is a clever trickster who was tricked by an even cleverer one, Boniface VIII. To me he

seems a virtuous man, as Dante presents him in *Convivio*. He exemplifies the classical cardinal virtues. He is a wise, just, brave and prudent general. His first question in Hell is about his country, Romagna, which he preserved at peace and free from Papal oppression. Only when he had accomplished these goals did he take thought for himself, reconcile with the Papacy and enter a mendicant order. He was damned for giving politically astute but morally corrupt advice to the Bishop of Rome and then depending on a promise of absolution that no Pope can give. Dante held a high opinion of the role of the Pope in Christendom, but he cannot save impenitent sinners from their fate. No one can, he believes, not even God.

Guido's son, Buonconte, is the opposite of his father. A brave soldier, yes, but reckless and irresponsible, his last breath was one of repentance for a misspent life. He was forgiven for his faith and his last-second repentance, although he had not performed a single good deed. Dante admired virtue and great accomplishments, but they do not lead to salvation.

In *Paradiso* 12 Saint Bonaventura talks of the thirteenth century church. It seemed to be in serious trouble when God sent Saints Francis and Dominic to found the mendicant orders and recall Christians to virtue and knowledge. "The army of Christ, that at so high a price rearmed itself, was moving behind the standard slowly, fearfully and few, when the emperor who always reigns took care for his troops who

were in doubtful plight "through grace alone, not because they deserved it": *per sola grazia, non per esser degna*.

Where does the expression *sola grazia* appear in the *Divine Comedy*? *Paradiso* 12.42. Is anyone saved without performing a single good deed in Dante? Yes. His name is Buonconte da Montefeltro in *Purgatorio* 5. There are good men with good deeds in Hell: Dante's teacher, Brunetto Latini in *Inferno* 15 and the brave and loyal soldier, Farinata degli Uberti in *Inferno* 10. There is a section of ante-Purgatory (*Purgatorio* 7) for workaholic rulers who devoted too much time to their earthly vocation and too little time to God. (They include good king Wenceslaus from the Christmas carol.)

Dante understood that salvation is not won by good works and cannot be awarded by the Bishop of Rome. Guido da Montefeltro did many good works, but never repented of one spectacularly evil one, performed with his intellect. His son Buonconte was irresponsible, reckless and disloyal, but he repented at the very last second without performing a single good deed. Dante states very clearly how Christendom is saved: *per sola grazia, non per esser degna*. In *Monarchia* 3.3 Dante says that the Bible takes precedence over Papal decretals and church traditions. It was given to Martin Luther in the sixteenth century to awaken Europe with his statements on "grace alone" and the primacy of the Bible over ecclesiastical traditions. Over the centuries from the time of the early church, Christians who

took the Bible seriously knew what it taught. We do not usually know their names, but one name we do know: Dante Alighieri. His *Divine Comedy* is beautiful, but in important respects it is also true, a gift from the past that can enrich our lives, although we have done nothing to deserve it: *per sola grazia, non per esser degna*, like salvation itself.

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