

RESURRECTION OF BEAUTY FOR A POSTMODERN CHURCH

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NOVEMBER 2000

I dedicate this thesis with love,
to my mother
Nancye Herbert
October 2000

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The genesis of this thesis parallels my own spiritual journey over the past 15 years. While studying at Regent College in Vancouver Canada, I encountered the icon of the Holy Trinity written by Andrei Rublev. It was this encounter with the silent eloquence of iconography that opened my mind and heart to the depth of intimate, loving, relational life that exists at the very heart of God and at the heart of all he has created. I was able to explore the glory of the Holy Trinity further in courses given by Drs. James Houston and James Torrance at Regent College. Both these paths merged as I personally discovered my own life taken up and included in the perichoretic dance of Trinitarian life. Quite simply, creation became for me an experience of Divine Love and Divine Presence – and an experience of dynamic and transforming love manifest as beauty for which I am eternally grateful. It is my hope that the insights included in this work may in some small way open up to someone else, the dimensions of beauty and joy that have so impacted my life. My personal journey continues while the expansive beauty of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is vast, inexhaustible and eternally open to his creation and most particularly, his church.

The process of thesis writing is both joy and tedium. I would like to thank those who have encouraged me in this venture particularly when the going has been difficult. Thank you to Marthiel O'Larey and John Sedore for their editorial work on my behalf. Thank you also to Dr. C.E.T. Kourie for her encouragement and suggestions throughout this process and her willingness to put up with a multitude of “computer” glitches.

I would particularly like to thank Anne-Marie Modrovich of Thousand Oaks, California, for her constant companioning of me throughout the production of this thesis. Her comments, enthusiasm, and care have helped me enormously and have proven, on a personal level, that beauty is truly experienced in the relational aspect of self-giving friendship.

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I declare that
Resurrection of Beauty for a Postmodern Church
is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been
indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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October 31, 2020
Date

ABSTRACT

Resurrection of Beauty for a Postmodern Church

by B.B. Herbert

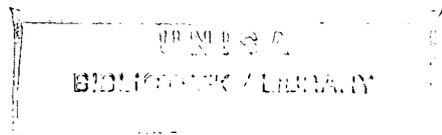
for the Degree of Doctor of Theology

in the subject of

Christian Spirituality

Promoter: Prof. C.E.T. Kourie

The purpose of this thesis is to re-assert beauty as a fundamental and essential value within contemporary Christendom as it exists within a postmodern culture. Once a strong and meaningful concept within Christian belief, beauty has been lost over the passage of two millennia. This thesis examines the loss of beauty as a meaningful concept in western Christian belief, and offers a re-evaluation of the concept particularly within the postmodern world. Drawing together the fundamental concerns of postmodern society and the contribution that beauty is able to make from within the Christian context, this thesis demonstrates that "beauty" speaks to contemporary concerns and meets its deepest needs. Here, beauty, understood as *the relational aspect of forms conceived by God, and offered to humanity as gift*, is shown to overcome the affective sterility that has overtaken western society as an effect of enlightenment thought. An examination of the concept of beauty, particularly in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Jonathan Edwards and Gerard Manley Hopkins serves as a basis to posit a definition of beauty that is consistent with Christian beliefs without violating its unique content. Tracing the loss of beauty in western Christian thought and in western culture at large, and recognising the absence of a similar phenomenon within the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches, suggests that the genius of these eastern traditions is their refusal to minimise the notion of "mystery" that stands at the heart of Christian revelation. The western Church then, is called to refocus on the centrality of the "mystery" inherent in her life. To this end, contemplation is proposed as the avenue wherein the believer experiences an intimate and transforming encounter with the Triune God which leads to the fruition of unique personhood that increasingly takes form as the "beauty of holiness."



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Resurrection of Beauty for a Postmodern Church
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Ten Words:

Beauty

Church: Eastern, Western

Contemplation

Enlightenment

History

Holiness

Holy Trinity

Mysticism

Personhood

Postmodernism

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A cursory glance at “Western culture” as she sheds the drab cloak of modernity and slips into the postmodern garb of pseudo-spirituality indicates that spiritual hunger is rampant within Western culture. Starved by the techno-mechanistic values of the past and craving the sustenance of affective encounter, the popular culture has opted to devour the spoiled offerings of a neo-pagan spirituality made palatable by the water of relativism. Surely, it is both the prerogative and mandate of the church to offer this particular world the pure “bread of eternal life” and quench its thirst from the living waters springing up from her own depth. It is toward this end that I propose the recovery of “beauty” as a significant Christian theme in the witness of the church – a grassroots theme – through which each Christian spontaneously permeates his or her personal landscape with faith, hope, and love borne of a vital encounter with authentic beauty.

The Problem

Beauty represents a lost value in Christian tradition. Concurrent with the loss of beauty has been the rise of postmodernism, which in popular Western culture is characterised by a deep hunger for spiritual reality, for community, and for an experiential and substantial demonstration of truth. The church is most perfectly suited to answer these longings of the human heart through her proclamation of beauty as a fundamental value both within and without the church milieu. Significantly, the church’s understanding of beauty anticipates the needs of postmodernism and is entirely adequate to provide for these deepest longings of the human spirit. To this end, “beauty” must be reasserted as a fundamental and essential value.

It is the purpose of this study to re-introduce “beauty” as a significant theme within Christian thought. It is recognised that beauty has in the past occupied a formal place in those theological works that are concerned to present Christianity as a unified

system wherein doctrine, as formal explication, coincides with spirituality an internalisation of doctrine. In this sense, spirituality is understood as one's response to the truth perceived in doctrinal beliefs. Thus, for a Buddhist, who adheres to the doctrines or tenets of Buddhism, it is expected that those beliefs will become formative in the actual life of the adherent. Similarly, for the Christian, the tenets of belief and their incorporation into the life of the believer is equally essential. For the believer, any separation between doctrine and response (spirituality) effects a dissolution of the content of the faith, which is primarily a response to the love of God, poured out in redemptive grace to his disciples. Thus spirituality, in the Christian context must be an appropriation of the blessed "drawing near of God" in love, mercy and grace. Here two major themes coinhere and offer a convincing witness to the truth of Christian belief. It is this coinherence of doctrine and spirituality that will be examined in this study.

Methodology: Historical and Theological

The nature of the theme of beauty, lost to social consciousness and the attendant need for its recovery, determines that the nature of this study will be multi-faceted. It is my intention to trace the historical path that beauty has occupied in the two thousand years of Christian history in order to demonstrate its continuity with the church's historical self-understanding. This method seems the most reliable given the "subjective" nature of the material under consideration. Hence the body of this work will initially consist of a historical overview presenting the development of philosophical and theological thought concerning beauty and those movements of culture which have served to undermine "beauty" as a valuable theme in Western society. This section will culminate in a discussion of postmodernity and its challenge to the contemporary church. Through this analysis, I will suggest that the loss of beauty is closely allied to the dissolution of the church's confidence in her own self-understanding as a bearer of "reality" to a fallen world. Herein, "reality" will be formally understood as the disclosure of Truth afforded an individual through his or her participation in the Triune life of God. Specifically, I will demonstrate that the effect of Enlightenment thought on the quest for knowledge so evident in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries significantly displaced Christianity as a viable source of underlying principles. It is to these very principles that culture must appeal if it is to reflect a deep continuity with authentic and perennial structures of reality. Inherent in the loss of Christianity to social consciousness is the attendant loss of the notion of “absolute truth” which contributes significantly to a “theology of beauty.” Ultimately, as relativism usurps truth, beauty as a relevant Christian theme is also lost to contemporary thought.

The second section of this work will be primarily concerned to present my own theological understanding of beauty and its consequences for the church and the individual. Herein, particular reference will be made to those explications of beauty found in traditional Christian writings, as well as to contemporary explications of beauty that have appeared over the past fifty years. *Thus, historical analysis and theological discourse will dominate this thesis.* Further, it will assume a conservative Christian stance wherein those doctrines, confirmed by the formative councils of the church in her earliest years and articulated in the Creeds of the Church, are believed “true” and reliable principles on which to build a theology of beauty. It will not, however, be limited to any one “confessional” expression.

Survey of the Christian Literature on Beauty

Those literary documents that will contribute much to this work are diffuse throughout the Christian tradition. Specifically, the writings of the Church Fathers contribute much to the understanding of “beauty” within Christendom. These will be referred to in the early chapters in order to demonstrate the profound understanding of beauty to the early Church as she attempts to articulate her own self-understanding. The theme of beauty, within the Orthodox Church, is the primary concern of Evdokimov (1990) who draws together the various strands of the Church Fathers’ understanding of beauty in his attempt to articulate a thorough theology of the icon. Although a contemporary work, Evdokimov’s contribution clarifies the views of the early church and will be cited often throughout the early chapters of this thesis.

Further, contemporary literature seen in the works of Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Patrick Sherry, John Navone, John Saward, Paul Evdokimov, Thomas Dubay and Alejandro García-Rivera contribute significant insights into the nature of beauty and its place in a contemporary Christian world. This present work will resist the current tendency to reflect solely on the work of von Balthasar for two specific reasons. First my intention is to demonstrate that “beauty” has been a significant theme in Christian belief from the earliest years of the faith, and to demonstrate that a theology of beauty need not be confined to one particular confessional stance.

Review of Early Literature on Beauty within Christian Tradition

Psuedo-Dionysius

In his work, *The Divine Names* (Luibheid & Rorem 1987), Dionysius ascribes the name “Beauty” to God and continues on to defend and expound his reasons. Dionysius draws deeply on Platonic tradition while clearly preserving the distinction that must be maintained between the older Platonic philosophical understanding and that of the Church. Primarily, Dionysius develops the theme of the continuity between “good” and “beauty” as found in Greek thought, and maintains that, although distinct from his creation, God’s beauty extends to creation as an emanation of his primal Goodness. Here, the writer makes a clear distinction between Beauty (God) and the beautiful (that which shares in “beauty” but is not coextensive with the Primal Beauty, God.) Equally Dionysius draws attention to the semantic link between *kalos* (beauty) and *kaleo* (to call). In later discussions of beauty, the work of Dionysius is significant and is echoed in the works of the Church Fathers cited throughout this thesis. Further it will be amplified by John Scotus Erigena (810-877) who formally introduces the concept of *pankalia* - the beauty of all that has been created. These primary insights of Dionysius as amplified by John Scotus Erigena concerning “beauty” will enter into the mainstream of medieval thinking as a received tradition. It is significant that these primary formulations concerning beauty are recognised in medieval sensibility concerning beauty in general.

Thomas Aquinas

The contribution of Aquinas to a theology of beauty is found embedded within his larger works, *Summa Theologica* (Hutchins 1952) and his *Commentary on The Divine Names* (Eco 1988). In these works, Aquinas addresses a wide range of themes, one of which is beauty. In general, Aquinas does not depart significantly from the contribution of Dionysius but does avoid the *tendency* toward an unacceptable pantheism that could be inferred from the work of Erigena. Aquinas' main concern is to focus on the "beauty" of actual substantial forms and thus clarify the goodness and beauty of the physical realm. Aquinas writes in response to the resurgence of ancient Manichaeism embodied in the teachings of the Cathars who posited a distinct duality between the spiritual realm which is good and the physical realm that is basically evil. To the basic themes introduced by Dionysius, Aquinas adds to the discussion of beauty an original focus on substantial forms, positing that "beauty" represents a *visual* and *concrete* manifestation of the good.

It is primarily these early works on beauty as well as those contemporary works cited below, that will contribute significantly to the theology of beauty that is delineated in this thesis.

Review of Contemporary Christian Literature on Beauty

It is not insignificant that at the end of the twentieth century a number of contemporary scholars have undertaken to bring "beauty" to the forefront of Christian concern. This movement suggests that the church is listening and responding to a perceived "lack" in contemporary culture. Although none of the writers addressed below writes specifically of postmodern concerns, each does demonstrate in his own way, that "beauty" requires a place to speak out its truth within the Christian context. The manner of addressing beauty remains unique to each writer, and each offers a particular insight into beauty and its meaning.

Although works concerning "beauty" outside the world of Art criticism are rare, it is understandable that where more rigorous treatments of beauty are presented, they are written from within the Christian world and deserve attention. Each writer cited

emphasises the place that beauty must occupy within Christian thought and each adds rich support to the notion that “beauty” is a central theme that the church should not ignore. Two contemporary treatments on beauty are to be found in the works of Hans Urs von Balthasar in his multi-volume *Glory of the Lord: A Theology of Aesthetics* written between 1982-1989 and Karl Barth, 20 years von Balthasar’s senior, who addresses the subject of beauty within his larger work *Church Dogmatics* (1957).

Karl Barth

Karl Barth’s (1957) understanding of beauty remains ancillary to his primary work and is only included in a larger section concerning the attributes of God. As might be expected certain aspects of Barth’s work are conformed by the basic presuppositions of Protestant belief most notably by the Protestant view of nature and grace to which Barth formally adheres. For Barth to remain true to his Protestant heritage, it is essential to maintain that the legacy inherited by a “fallen creation” consists of a complete rupture between God and the world (von Balthasar 1971:133). Inherent in this view is the subtle notion that to posit beauty to God is to reduce God to inadequate human terms. Based on the presupposition that outside of direct Christian revelation (Scripture) nothing at all can be known of God, to ascribe the value of beauty to God is to introduce an attribute entirely constructed by human insight and hence is not a value correctly ascribed to God. By way of contrast, Von Balthasar’s Roman Catholic belief that the image of God remains in the individual after the fall, allows the Catholic theologian to assert that humanity is able to sense within and through creation at least a dim understanding of its Creator. Thus as will be shown, for von Balthasar, humanity is predisposed to an apprehension of the Divine source of beauty and to an attendant turning toward God in love through prevenient grace. For Barth, on the other hand, creation is entirely cut off from God through the fall, and is only reunited with him through participation in the reconciling Covenant finally fulfilled in the drama of Christ’s redemptive work on the Cross. Particular encounters with Divine beauty, in Barth’s view are experiential and are understood in terms of “epiphanic” eventfulness. Hence Divine beauty does not truly lend itself to an

inclusive understanding of reality. Yet it is equally Barth's intuition that the "form" of Christ serves a greater end than merely providing substance to the Incarnation event. Barth demonstrates in *Church Dogmatics* the inherent difficulty he encounters in assigning beauty to God as an ontological category while maintaining the compelling evidence that such a conclusion is possible. He writes:

If we say...that God is beautiful, and make this statement the final explanation of the assertion that God is glorious, do we not jeopardise or even deny the majesty and holiness and righteousness of God's love? Do we not bring God in a sinister because in a sense intimate way into the sphere of man's oversight and control, into proximity to the ideal of all human striving? Do we not bring the contemplation of God into suspicious proximity to that contemplation of the world, which in the last resort is the self-contemplation of an urge for life which does not recognise its limits? But, the question is even more pressing whether we can hesitate indefinitely, whether we can avoid this step. Has our whole consideration of the matter not brought us inevitably to the place where what would otherwise remain a gap in our knowledge can be filled only in this way? Finally and above all, does biblical truth itself and as such permit us to stop at this point because of the danger, and not to say that God is beautiful (Barth 1957: 651)?

Ultimately Barth, unlike von Balthasar must leave his question resounding in the ears of his readers allowing them to consider for themselves its final resolution.

Hans Urs von Balthasar

Von Balthasar's extensive seven volume work *The Glory of the Lord: A theological Aesthetic* written between 1982-1989 is presented from a Roman Catholic perspective while that of Barth from the perspective of Protestant thought. Both men, recognising that beauty is a lost value in contemporary thought address the issue although von Balthasar more completely than Barth. Von Balthasar, who begins with "beauty," is concerned to demonstrate that the "form" of Christ constitutes "the glory of the Father." The place of Christ is key to von Balthasar's thought as is his concern that the over-emphasis in Church tradition on apophatic duality runs counter to the witness of Scripture which includes "sensory" experiences of God in its content.

Hence, the duality between sense and spirit must be synthesised in faith. Whereas physical senses are unable to attain to the knowledge or experience of God who transcends “sensibility,” von Balthasar speaks analogously of spiritual senses which are capable of apprehending the non-sensory nature of spiritual content (von Balthasar 1982:365-416). Von Balthasar is careful not to suggest that “beauty” within the Trinity can be reduced logically to the content of created beauty. Rather, for von Balthasar, “beauty lies beyond our categories of genus and specific difference, and thus it cannot be given an ordinary logical definition” (Dubay 1999:44). Yet it is in the primordial beauty of the Divine that all lesser beauty finds its source.

Through the death and resurrection of Christ, God establishes a “nuptial” union with humanity. Von Balthasar recognises the thorough going ontological change that such a union constitutes for the believer and thus for the church. Von Balthasar’s work represents the fruits of his own life entirely given over to the study of spirituality and theology. Hence his work consists of comprehensive and far ranging insights gleaned from a life of pastoral experience and theological thought. For von Balthasar, beauty is an ontological category in God and is revealed to humanity in the face of Jesus the Son. Moreover, the depth of God’s beauty, “the glory of the Lord,” is revealed most clearly in the death of Christ on behalf of humanity wherein and through which the nuptial relationship between creation and Creator is re-established. The perception of beauty that von Balthasar proposes is inseparable from the affective motion of love expressed in action. Beauty therefore is understood in terms of relational “being” conformed to the spontaneous expressions of authentic love. The theologian’s concern for the “form” of beauty as Jesus, allows von Balthasar to develop a theology of aesthetics which is not given over to abstract or spiritual notions of beauty, but rather celebrates the substantial “forms” of the material realm and intimates the sacramentality of all that exists.

Later Works on Beauty

In the last 10 years other more contemporary works on “beauty” have added to the discussion concerning the place of beauty in theological thought. Paul

Evdokimov's *The Art of the Icon: a Theology of Beauty* (1990), Patrick Sherry's *Spirit and Beauty* (1992), John Seward's book *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty* (1996), and John Navone's works, *Toward a Theology of Beauty* (1996), *Enjoying God's Beauty* (1999), T.Dubay's *The Evidential Power of Beauty* (1999) and Alejandro Garcia-Rivera's *The Community of the Beautiful* (1999) all consider beauty and its relationship to the theological enterprise.

Paul Evdokimov (1990)

As much of this thesis will demonstrate, a theology of beauty is a dominant theme in Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic thought. Evdokimov's book demonstrates the continuity of beauty throughout the writings of the early church. Although dealing primarily with "iconography," Evdokimov's thought is conformed to patristic thought with regard to the subject of beauty. Herein lies its value to this thesis. The notion of beauty is pervasive throughout the writings of the early church, and thus is not easily isolated. Evdokimov, however, clearly outlines these patristic sources (1990:19-37) and indicates the radical place beauty held in the thought of the early church. Following his discussion of patristic sources, Evdokimov presents a critical analysis of contemporary art and concludes with a discussion of the theology inherent in Eastern Iconography. Although these issues move beyond the concern of this thesis, Evdokimov's insight into the meaning of Iconography and the significance of the "symbol" are important themes in a consideration of beauty in the Christian context.

Patrick Sherry (1992)

Sherry's work, *Spirit and Beauty* (1992), is of particular importance and contributes an essential emphasis on the theological implications of the Holy Spirit to a theology of aesthetics specifically in the areas of revelation and inspiration. Sherry illuminates the fact that despite the proliferation of books concerning the Holy Spirit since the 1970's, none as yet has drawn together a theology of the Holy Spirit with a theology of aesthetics. Hence, Sherry's work provides an essential element in any

theology of beauty, primarily reinforcing the nature of the communication of beauty as a work of God himself and its perception as a part of Divine revelation through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Similarly, in his work, Sherry serves to clarify a central problem inherent in proposing that God is indeed beautiful or even more strenuously, as in Eastern thought and in that of contemporary theologians such as von Balthasar and Navone, that God is Beauty itself. To attribute beauty to God is essentially different from attributing to him other qualities such as kindness, or generosity. In the latter category, human concepts of kindness or generosity are associated with particular and specific criteria, which are commonly accepted and understood. Such is not the case with beauty wherein the constellation of meaning is not specifically associated with one concept. The concept of beauty commonly asserted in the works of the Church Fathers and linked closely with mystical experience, is most often defined through a process of negation. Such dependence on mystical experience to communicate the nature of Divine Beauty, Sherry suggests, leaves the individual unsatisfied because of the incomparable nature of the concept. As Sherry indicates, this tendency need not prohibit assigning an ontological ascription of beauty to God, but it does hinder a wide and confident acceptance of the notion of Divine beauty on the part of individual believers.

Sherry further suggests it is indeed possible to attribute beauty to God, based on either an appeal to inward mystical experience or to an externally predicated experience of God mediated by natural beauty. The latter “type” of mystical experience, externally motivated, is profoundly suggested by the poet-priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Whereas the former type of experience may not draw assent from those who have not enjoyed an internal “mystical” experience, the latter experience of beauty mediated externally through nature is more likely to find general acceptance based on the commonality of the experience. The question, however, must be asked, whether in a modern and postmodern culture the paucity of authentic mystical experience, to which much of a theology of beauty must refer, is not itself a direct result of the Western church’s own failure to include the contemplative and aesthetic

dimensions of Christian experience in her proclamations concerning Christian life? It is significant that the Byzantine Church, which to a great extent has successfully resisted the attempt of Rationalism to impose itself on theological beliefs, has retained a deep and abiding confidence in the notion of “mystery.” This confidence and ease with mystery allows the concept of “beauty” to undergird the full expression of her liturgical life without undo concern to defend this position. However that question is answered, it appears that the loss of mystery in Christian experience and the erosion of confidence in traditional spiritual experience, are themselves significant impediments to the assertion of God’s beauty in the life of the believer particularly as it relates to the realm of the mystical.

John Saward (1996)

John Saward’s *The Beauty of Holiness and the Holiness of Beauty* (1996) is itself an extended study on the centrality of the notions of holiness and beauty within the Church. His work, first presented in the context of the Gilpin Lectures in Durham, UK., is an attempt to produce in the manner of von Balthasar, a theological Aesthetic as opposed to an Aesthetic Theology, which focuses on the link between sanctity and beauty. Saward explicates his insights into beauty and its significance to Christian thought through an appreciation of the beauty of Christ and the iconic significance of the saints. Saward is primarily concerned with the substantial “form” of beauty as it is figured in the lives of the redeemed. Thus Saward’s thesis strongly urges the church toward a serious reconsideration of the centrality of spirituality and holiness within traditional Christianity.

John Navone (1996;1999)

John Navone’s two books might well be considered together. His first, *Towards a Theology of Beauty* (1996), appeals to both the triadic values of “beauty, truth and goodness,” and the Christian assertion of God as Trinity to construct and defend his argument that God is Beauty Itself. In his construction, Navone begins with the creation event wherein God as Trinity delights in the fruits of his work and

delights as well in his own Being. “If God knows Divine truth, loves Divine goodness, and delights in Divine beauty, a theology of beauty will have to concern the delight and joy and happiness of God (Navone1996:37). It is the affinity of delight and happiness with beauty that leads Navone to his assertion that God is Beauty Itself. Basing his structure for a theology of beauty in Aquinas’ thought, Navone presents and analyses beauty in a manner fully consistent with traditional theological understanding. Hence, Navone draws together the significant implications of traditional Roman Catholic thought with his contemporary and sympathetic insight into the impact of the loss of beauty on the church. Navone presents a cohesive and convincing starting point for a re-articulation of a theology of beauty that is fully inclusive of both traditional thought and the contemporary concern for affective encounter. Of particular significance in Navone’s work is his concluding chapter that clearly states the presuppositions that frame his thought and which serve as a foundation for his second work *Enjoying God’s Beauty* (1999). In his second work on beauty, the content ranges from an exploration of the experience of beauty in the life of the beholder to further discussion on the nature and theology of beauty itself. A significant contribution of Navone lies in his focus on the iconic significance of Christ and Scripture which provides an essential visual motivation toward Christian decision making and action and further serves as a source of transformation in the life of the believer through contemplative encounters with scriptural “iconic” forms. It is significant that Navone’s thought presumes a traditionally Catholic doctrinal stance regarding major themes, while it is Navone’s articulation of these basic themes, attended by the fruits of contemplation, that allow him to construct an original and convincing argument for a theology of beauty (Navone 1999: 57-84).

In contemporary Christian writing concerning beauty, Navone alone draws particular attention to and clarifies the radical and profoundly serious place of joy and delight as it asserts itself in Christian belief and life. Quoting Boris Bobinsky, he states:

The love of beauty...enriches us and fills us with joy. Such beauty streams forth from God-who is Beauty itself-generating the world with Divine energies. In Him alone do we discover the beauty of everything. We must

plunge into the silence and depth of our own hearts in order to listen to the heartbeat of a world already transfigured (Navone 1996:51).

Navone's work in this regard is reminiscent of both Romano Guardini (1998) and Alexander Schmemmann (1988b) who both express the delightful aspects of the "useless" beauty of liturgical structures and hence the playful contours of Christian belief.

Thomas Dubay (1999)

The Evidential Power of Beauty: Science and Theology Meet (Dubay 1999) represents an extended demonstration of the intricate and precise order of the universe as compelling evidence of the beauty of God and thus for a theology of beauty. Thus Dubay's work stands as a confirmation of the power of Natural Theology to evoke a response from humanity that includes an acknowledgement of the beauty of the Creator. It is in his later chapters that Dubay suggests the link between beauty (in itself) and beauty as holiness.

Alejandro García-Rivera (1999)

García-Rivera's (1999) *The Community of the Beautiful* represents a departure from those works previously cited. García-Rivera is primarily concerned to expound a theology of beauty that appeals to semiotic principles. Written from the perspective of Latin-American Christianity, García-Rivera affirms the nature of the "sign" as indicative of the true nature of the signified. Thus, the beauty of the forms of created reality are truly indicative of the reality to which they point. In this way, García-Rivera, drawing from an original source for his own insight, demonstrates in his work an understanding of symbol and sacrament reminiscent of Eastern Orthodox and Catholic thought. The continuity between the Orthodox and Latin-American synthesis of symbol and sacrament is of particular interest within this current thesis suggesting that the poverty of Western culture, given over to materialism and radical empiricism, has lost the ability to respond to the nuances of "mystery" that inhere in Christian thought. García-Rivera suggests that within the Western social context to recover the ability to perceive the *depth* of reality (of which beauty is a part) will require a

fundamental change in the manner in which Western society perceives its environment. To this end, Garcia-Rivera suggests that a strictly empirical mode of approach is not sufficient for a perception of reality and posits the need to develop the capacity to broaden and heighten the vantage point from which Western society ordinarily perceives its environment.

Although each of these writers is distinctive in style and methodology, the cumulative impact of their content reaffirms that beauty is very much an issue for Christian consideration. Further, each reaffirms that “beauty” is not a subject foreign to the witness of Scripture but is a pervasive theme in both Old and New Testament. Significantly the centrality of the Holy Trinity to the re-articulation of a theology of beauty is evident throughout: Evdokimov (1990:243ff), Sherry (1992:80-84), Navone (1996:77-78) and Seward (1996:88). While Sherry’s singular emphasis on the Holy Spirit secures for the faithful a confidence that beauty and the perception of beauty are indeed consistent with the mission of the Holy Spirit as he who both inspires and reveals. Cumulatively a review of the contemporary literature concerned with “beauty” indicates a perceived loss of beauty in the modern and postmodern Christian proclamation and an attendant commitment of Christian scholarship to reassert the centrality of beauty in the witness of the church. In this respect, postmodernity presents the church with an occasion to demonstrate the truth of her own understanding of reality to a culture that has lost all confidence in her capacity to address the vital and affective issues that impact the very task of being “human.”

Section Two of this work will begin with an analysis of those “theologies of beauty” that are evident in the work of Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* and *Commentary on the Divine Names*), Jonathan Edwards (*The Nature of True Virtue*, *The End for which God Created the World* and *Religious Affections*) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (*Selected Poems*). These primary documents as well as the insights of those contemporary theologians discussed above, will surface again in the final three chapters of this thesis as their particular understanding of beauty confirms the personal insights that will be offered.

Limitations

This thesis is concerned to present a “theology of beauty” by which is understood a consistently worked through explication of the beauty as it relates specifically to the Christian church. As such it will not focus on art and art criticism which might be expected in such a work nor will it discuss beauty extensively as it is apprehended in other religious traditions. The exclusion of Asian, Indian or Middle Eastern expressions of *beauty* does not suggest that beauty is of no concern to these groups. Beauty exists outside of Christianity. My intention, however, is to present a theology of beauty as it is suggested in the Christian world. Further, the exclusion of art and art criticism is not meant to indicate that these subjects are of no concern to Christian life, only that the present focus is more concerned with the “concept of beauty.” Therefore, this thesis is confined to a discussion of “natural beauty” and the beauty of God in a Christian context, suggesting the inherent relationship between the two. Finally, the nature of this study propels the work into the realm of mysticism as contemplative prayer. The writer is not unaware of the difficulties that exists in verifying the subjective content that will be expressed or the continuing debate concerning the validity of the contemplative life within the area of “theoretical mysticism.” Further, this writer affirms the rich contemplative or mystic traditions of other religious groups. These traditions will not be addressed extensively within this thesis. Again, the dominant orientation is toward a Christian theology of beauty. Therefore the *emphasis* will be on “traditional” and “authoritative” data taken from respected and established church historians and theologians.

Definitions

Throughout this thesis, a distinction will be assumed as indicated by von Balthasar, between an “aesthetic theology” and a “theological aesthetic.” The former is understood as explications of the faith, which include beauty as a significant and relevant consideration. A “theological aesthetic” begins with the notion of beauty and focuses attention on the subject in itself. Thus, Aquinas’ theology of beauty, as well as contributions to the topic from Karl Barth, are recognised as “aesthetic theology.”

The works of Jonathan Edwards and Gerard Manley Hopkins as well as von Balthasar himself, reflect a “theological aesthetic.”

In contemporary culture, aesthetics themselves are most clearly concerned with Art and Art criticism. Hence, the term used throughout this thesis, “theology of beauty” has been chosen to indicate its particular emphasis on “beauty” in the Christian context as it relates specifically to relationship with God.

Finally, the author is aware that Christendom, as expressed in the contemporary church, is dominated by four significant “groups.” These include: the Orthodox Church, not in communion with the Roman Catholic Church under the headship of the papacy; Eastern Catholic Churches which maintain the structure of Orthodox liturgy and an Orthodox spirituality but further acknowledge an allegiance with Rome and thus are not in communion with Orthodoxy; the Roman Catholic Church; and various Protestant denominations. For the purposes of this study the terms “East” and “Orthodox” will refer to Eastern Catholic Churches and to the Orthodox Church. This designation does not suggest “ecclesial” unity but the underlying commonality of liturgical structures and basic beliefs concerning areas of “spirituality” and “spiritual development.”

Structure

The work at hand will be presented in two distinct sections. The preliminary section will consider at its outset a historical overview of the concept of beauty in both the secular and theological realm of Christian thought in both the Eastern and Western world. Following this general discussion of “beauty,” an excursus on relevant concepts of beauty found in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Jonathan Edwards and Gerard Manley Hopkins as examples of Western spiritual thought on beauty will be presented. Finally, I will suggest a definition of beauty faithful to Christian theological thought and to the objective reality of beauty as a substantive and ontological form of Divine Personhood in the spiritual realm and as a visible objective reality in the created realm.

The second section of this work, utilising the criteria established and examined in section one, will explore the implications of “beauty” in the life of the church and of the believer. It will posit beauty as experiential Christology - a participatory reality and will continue to discuss the transformational potency of beauty as the fruition of “authentic personhood” for the believer. In conclusion, this thesis will examine the infinite dimensions of living a Christ-responsive life in the luminous glory of Divine Beauty – God made man.

Language

Throughout this thesis, an attempt will be made to use inclusive language. With reference to the Holy Trinity, masculine pronouns will be used to remain consistent with the traditional understanding of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as constituent of Triune relationships. Further, although historically the feminine pronoun has been used with reference to the Holy Spirit (as is the case with Ephrem the Syrian) the masculine pronoun will be used for the Holy Spirit to maintain a consistent expression. In those instances where “mankind” is used, primarily to provide variation in the text, the intention is not to suggest an exclusive male category. Throughout, it is understood that God transcends all sexual differentiation. In all instances within this thesis generic terms such as person, humanity and individual are inclusive of both male and female. Finally, following the traditional language of church history – reference will be made to the “Church Fathers” – a designation that primarily denotes male theologians in the first instance and one which has entered into common usage throughout the Christian world. For textual variation, the church will be referred to using feminine pronouns consistent with traditional usage.

Citations and Abbreviations

Certain documents to which this study will refer are not ascribed to a particular author. In these cases citations will use title initials. Specifically, the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the Menologion of the Orthodox Church, and the Oxford Annotated Apocrypha will be cited by abbreviation. Finally, no official method of

documentation concerning Internet access and academic papers on the internet is available. Thus, for the purposes of this study, the name of the original writer, the site from which the document was accessed and the date of access will document citations of works taken from the World Wide Web in the bibliography. The date used in these citations will refer to the last date of access and all attempts have been made to ensure current access is available at the time of submission of this study. Within the text, citations will include the name of the original author of a work or the work's title where appropriate and the date of access i.e. the citation within the text (Isenberg and Thursby 01:14:00) indicates original authors and the date of access from the World Wide Web, while the full address is listed in the bibliography. Because actual page numbers are not consistently provided in WWW resources they have not been included in the bibliographic data. Again, all attempts have been made to ensure that those citations from the WWW are accessible at the time of submission.

<i>Abbreviations:</i> DL	<i>The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom</i>
Men	<i>Menologian of the Orthodox Church</i>
OAA	<i>Oxford Annotated Apocrypha</i>
OL	<i>Orthodox Liturgy: The Divine Liturgy of our Father among the Saints John Chrysostom</i>

SECTION ONE

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPT BEAUTY: SCRIPTURE

In his significant work *The Glory of the Lord*, Hans Urs von Balthasar demonstrates that an essential aspect of theology which has been lost in the relentless movement of Western history through its successive phases of scholasticism, Enlightenment, modernity and postmodernity is a rupture of the inherent union of theology and beauty (von Balthasar 1982). Von Balthasar introduces his work with the words:

The word with which we embark on this first volume of a series of theological studies is a word with which the philosophical person does not begin, but rather concludes. It is a word that has never possessed a permanent place or an authentic voice in the concert of the exact sciences, and, when it *is* chosen as a subject for discussion, appears to betray in him who chooses it an idle amateur among such very busy experts. It is, finally, a word from which religion, and theology in particular, have taken their leave and distanced themselves in modern times by a vigorous drawing of the boundaries. In short, this word is untimely in three different senses and bearing it as one's treasure will not win anyone's favours; one rather risks finding oneself outside everyone's camp. Yet if the philosopher cannot begin with this word, but can at best conclude with it (always assuming that he has not forgotten it under way), should not the Christian for this very reason perhaps takes it as *his* first word? And since the exact sciences no longer have any time to spare for it (nor does theology, in so far as it increasingly strives to follow the method of the exact sciences and to envelop itself in their atmosphere), precisely for this reason is it perhaps high time to break through *this* kind of exactness, which can only pertain to one particular sector of reality, in order to bring the truth of the whole again into view-truth as a transcendental property of Being, truth which is no abstraction, rather the living bond between God and the world. And finally: since religion in our modern period has renounced that word, it would not be idle to investigate at least this once what countenance (if we can still speak of a 'countenance') such a denuded religion may exhibit. Beauty is the word that shall be our first (von Balthasar 1982: 1, 17-18).

The attending breach between word and content has reduced the theological enterprise in its Western expression from one vibrant with ontological consequences to

that of intellectual pursuit alone. It is not the intent of this thesis to disparage Western theological discourse and study but rather to allow “theology” to speak both from and to the heart of her disciples – the Western church she seeks to address. Indeed, the intention is to demonstrate “theology” as the science of the Christian life, as the source of authentic personhood - a radiant beauty illuminating the heart of the believer with the “light of the world.” In attending to the subject as such the reader will recognise the profound necessity to examine and ultimately integrate both the speculative and practical aspects of theology. Quite simply to rest in the truth, the speculative goal of “knowing,” and then to respond to the objective truth realised: to conform “life” to the objective parameters of truth thus apprehended and to which one must with integrity surrender.

Rahner suggests in his monograph “Priest and Poet”(Rahner 1974b:294) that language is much more than “thought” rather it is “thought become incarnate.” More precisely, for Rahner the word is the embodied thought, not the embodiment of thought (Rahner 1974b:294). Here the convergence of form and content manifests the integrity of that which “is.” This insight is particularly true in the realm of theology, the literal “God word” of Christianity whose alpha and omega radically converge in the historical figure of Jesus Christ, “one in being with the father, through whom all things were made.” Rahner’s thesis that the authentic word - the “primal word” - is one wherein form and content coincide allows a theologian to take the word “theology” and explore it beyond the parameters of academic propositions alone. Rather, Rahner invites us to broaden our concept of theology and within it discover the more elusive concepts of “art,” “beauty” and “creativity,” indeed the whole constellation of concepts and affective responses both elicited and evoked by the “truth” that theology circumscribes. To approach theology as “embodied thought” allows us to explore both cognitive and connative aspects of a boundless theme whose *raison d’être* is to draw the reader into the infinite domain of intimate relationship with Divine Love. Rahner invites the theologian then, to move beyond the realm of empirical knowledge into the fathomless world of affective encounter,

without violating the essential quest for objective truth that theology seeks to articulate.

Gerard Manley Hopkins in his vocation as poet-priest writes in the opening line of *God's Grandeur* that "the world is charged with the grandeur of God" (Gardner & MacKenzie 1990:66). Here the poet invites his reader to pierce through the simple objective form with which he or she is confronted and recognise within it the holy imagination of God. For Hopkins, all creation resonates with the sheer refracted beauty of God dynamically present to the heart that "sees." "Like shining from shook foil," created being erupts for Hopkins as an endless dance of affection – a flecked radiance - alive with Divine love and offered to us as gift (Gardner & MacKenzie 1990:66). Although a simple line of poetry Hopkins, with theological precision and aesthetic sensibility, elicits from his reader a spontaneous assent to truth. Beauty, finding its source in God's own being, is the essence of all that God conceives, beauty is the singular value by which his loving intention for creation is both recognised and appreciated, and ultimately effects within an individual a responsive life of love, joy and adoration.

Sadly within the contemporary Western church, "beauty" is no longer a word considered central to the *evangel* proclaimed from the pulpits of Christendom. It is the missing value – the lost promise - of the restoration of our humanity "to the *image and likeness* of God," the primal beauty of our humanity. But it is precisely as an experiential encounter with the objective light of God himself radiating and illuminating all that exists that opens to us a vision of the redeemed cosmos – as an adequate and worthy temple of God ablaze with the beauty of his presence. It is this "beauty," the primal "good" (*tawb/kalos*) of Genesis one, which reflects the foundation on which all Christian spirituality must be built if it is to maintain the essential integrity of God's holy intention for the world he has created and redeemed.

To perceive this "beauty" is not the prerogative of the poet or the artist, nor the elite territory of the scholar or the sage – neither must it be confined to the sterile

atmosphere of philosophical aesthetics. Rather, I would suggest – this beauty – is God’s gift to any heart that longs to “see” – to any heart opened to receive.

To reaffirm “beauty” as a fundamental Christian value and its perception as potentially “normative” for the life of the Christian, ultimately loosens beauty from both the exclusive grip of Western philosophical aesthetics and the often reductionist chatter of a postmodern “popular” culture.¹ It is my intention in this chapter to reassert “beauty’s” significance within the realm of normal Christian experience, and further, to elaborate the fundamental and unique role beauty could well occupy and promises to occupy within the Christian experience in a postmodern era. My purpose then is to articulate an “accessible theology of beauty” consistent with the historical traditions of the Christian church and Scripture, and to draw out from that theological construct the unique value which “beauty” contributes to contemporary Christian life and spirituality.

Theology in and of itself is not causative of spiritual life but rather, evocative of it. It is theology married to the illuminating presence of the Holy Spirit (Sherry 1992), which constitutes the essence of Christianity for the life of the believer. As Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Spirit of God calls upon each one of us to participate in the richness of the kingdom. Thus, a theology of beauty that is accessible to the lay person and which coincides with “normative” human experience, opens the subject to those of us who constitute the church as laity, as worshipers, as lovers and “amateurs” in the truest sense of that word. An “accessible theology” will reassert the fundamental link between beauty, goodness and truth, and thus recover an appropriately Christian understanding of the word, which terminates in the concept of holiness. By articulating a theological and spiritual discourse on “beauty” such as I propose, the subject opens out onto a broad horizon of spiritual encounter available to anyone who may choose to explore

¹ Whereas the philosophical roots of postmodernism are well thought out and formulated, the manner that postmodernity has been assumed into popular culture is expressed with little recognition of and reflection upon the philosophical assumptions regarding the basic values contemporary society both asserts and adopts. In this sense “popular” expressions of postmodernity often reflect a very eclectic and shallow understanding of the presuppositions to which allegiance is made.

the landscape of Divine presence. Herein lies a significant departure from the purely academic treatment “beauty” has received in both Western theological and philosophical discussions to date. My attempt will be to present “beauty” as both an intellectually relevant subject as well as an affectively engaging one wherein joy and thanksgiving, obedience and surrender become our spontaneous response to God who “fathers-forth” and “whose beauty is past change” (Gardner & MacKenzie 1990:70).

The topic under consideration in this thesis is one that must be broached with delicacy and care. To posit a precise and accurate definition of beauty is a difficult goal for any writer. Any attempt to restrict the word to a single constellation of meanings, even good acceptable meanings will ultimately fail to include the boundless array of meaning that the word connotes to those who recognise, feel, respond, and appreciate beauty. The word is boundless, ineffable – likely to free itself from any artificial restrictions with a youthful leap unanticipated and unstoppable. If, as is the case, “beauty” has leant itself to serious discussion and consideration in the past, in the Greek philosophical works of Plato, Aristotle, in the ancient church, in medieval scholarship, and currently by von Balthasar in his scholastic work, *The Glory of the Lord*, (von Balthasar 1982:passim) at the end of the twentieth century, “beauty” has lost the dignity and honour it once held. It has become a concept without actual content or adequate meaning. One is as likely to hear the word applied to the sublime (art, music, nature) as to the mundane (decoration, cleverness, etc). It is my intention to attempt to reclaim something of the luminous content of beauty that is the church’s legitimate heritage and derives from her inclusion in the Trinitarian communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The first challenge encountered in an exploration of the concept of “beauty” for the Christian lies primarily in discovering an objective definition of the word circumscribed by the greater contours of Trinitarian theology as the pinnacle of Christian revelation. Such a definition will be postulated in Section Two of this study.

Historical Overview of Scripture

The statement “God is beautiful” is neither common nor commonly embraced in contemporary declarations of Christian belief. The reasons for this omission are many and will be discussed separately. Presently, it will be demonstrated that “beauty” is indeed a concept that has its home in Christian belief, and finds its own genesis in the Christian understanding of God and creation. The most obvious reason for the failure of Christianity to develop a full theology of beauty rests on the perceived lack of concern by scriptural authors themselves to focus on the concept and develop the theme intentionally and fully.

It is true that the word “beauty” is used sparingly in English translations of Scripture. If frequency of use were taken as the measure of the importance of the concept in the Christian proclamation, the task at hand would be a hopeless pursuit. A brief check of Strong’s *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Strong 1890), reveals that the word appears approximately 100 times in English scriptural translations. However, a closer look at the vocabulary of beauty will establish that the concept of “beauty” is thoroughly engrained within God’s self-revelation.

This lack of a systematic and cohesive treatment of the concept “beauty” presented in Scripture has led to two specific conclusions on the part of biblical scholars. The scarcity of statements concerning “beauty” found in the Old Testament have led some to suggest that the concept is inconsequential to the belief system of Israel. Notably this negative conclusion has been reached by Grundmann who suggests that beauty has no place in Old Testament belief due to a “low estimation of art in biblical religion” (Dyrness 1985:421-432). Similarly, Von Rad concludes that no “particular significance” can be placed on the use of beauty in ancient Israel because it “moves in the place of the experience of beauty common to all men ”(Dyrness 1985:421-432; Kittel 1965:536-556).

Yet, as Dyrness (1985:422) suggests the problem lies not in an Old Testament disregard for beauty. Rather, he concludes, the problem rests in the more modern assumption that because beauty cannot be isolated in or prescinded from Scripture

and studied with systematic thoroughness – in the manner common to Enlightenment methodology – that the subject itself is unimportant (Dyrness 1985:421-432). These conclusions appear far too dismissive of a real concern for beauty found in the Old Testament and I would suggest in the New Testament as well. “Beauty” is used in both Old and New Testaments as a study of the vocabulary of beauty will demonstrate, while contextually it is encountered incidentally throughout the scriptural witness.

The semantics of any culture will invariably conceptualise its worldview.² Further, it is the function of language to conceptualise a culture in a manner through which the primary assumptions of that culture can be passed on. The precision of communication between cultures lies not solely in its choice of words. Moreover, the meaning of the word must be contextualized in the historical milieu in which it was used. Here the precision of language as a primary tool of communication is made difficult for the student. As cultures change or as unique cultures develop, conceptualisations will not necessarily provide semantic equivalents for equivalent concepts. This is true of both Hebrew and Greek when translated into English. Thus it is task of biblical “exegesis” to unlock the contextual background of a word or idea and clarify the precise meaning of a word in its seminal historical setting.

This premise is significant for a word study of “beauty.” As early as Genesis 1:1, in the first creation account, the concept of beauty is found. Written in the literary genre of “Mesopotamian Creation” accounts, Genesis 1:1-11 relies heavily on imagery and symbolism, to express its full meaning. Literary form, in this instance, is significant because it allows one to explore the account with the understanding that

² The contextualisation essential to an understanding of Scripture or any significant text introduces particular problems for the study of beauty which necessarily move from the realm of the physical to that of the metaphysical understood in terms of “mystical experience.” Here the problem arises concerning the role that traditional categories of belief play in the semantic interpretations of such experiences. The question arises in philosophical and empirical investigations of the nature of “mystical” experience whether it is ever possible to obtain “interpretation free” data with which to proceed with an investigation. At this particular juncture in the work underhand two significant statements must be made: first, Christian truth is not equivocally proven by the content of “mystical” experience. However, the interpretation of such experiences support Christian belief. Second, the claim is not being made that “mystical” experience is limited to Christian traditional belief. This subject will be addressed at greater length in Chapter 6 of this study.

the form is not, nor was intended to be, consistent with the genre of historical narrative. Rather, it is intended to address in a much fuller sense the significance of this creation story within its historical context. From this introductory note on the genre of Genesis and the purpose of biblical exegesis two points emerge that are significant to the work at hand. Genesis is not intended to present a historical narrative of the events of creation and further, it is to be expected that the translations of Genesis will in some ways be limited by the “equivalency” of meanings between words in two distinct historical contexts.

Beauty: Old Testament

As Dyrness (1985:423-432) convincingly argues conclusions such as those of Von Rad and Grundmann seem too hasty and dismissive of a real concern for beauty found in the Old Testament. Although “beauty” may fail to achieve the status of a fully developed theological theme, it does occupy a significant place in Israel’s existence that is always directed toward God as the one source of all that exists. This fact is further confirmed by Navone (1996,1999) who draws attention to the value of “scriptural icons” to the pursuit of an understanding beauty in a Christian context.

Dyrness’ exegetical investigation takes seven word groups in order to demonstrate this more positive conclusion. The seven included by Dyrness, *tsebiy*; *pa’ar*; *cham’ad*; *yophiy*; *na’ha*; *na’em* and *ha’d’ar* will be discussed briefly while *kabod* and *tawb* excluded in his study will be discussed in greater detail.

1. *TSEBIY*: Used to connote “beauty” and “honour,” *tsebiy*, is characteristically that quality which elicits admiration of both individuals and nations. In Isaiah 28:5 this word is used with direct reference to the Lord who will be a “crown of beauty” (Dyrness 1985:423).
2. *PA’AR*: In context the verb *pa’ar* takes on the meaning “to glorify,” “to crown,” or “to beautify.” In this usage *pa’ar* implies imbuing an object with those qualities that render the object worthy of adoration and praise. In Isaiah 44:23 (RSV) the promise

is made, “The Lord has redeemed Jacob and will be glorified in Israel” and further, in Isaiah 49:3, “You are my servant in whom I will be glorified” (RSV). In this sense, beauty is associated with glory and the showing forth – the out shining - of beauty bestowed on another (Dyrness 1985:423).

3. *CHAM'AD*: The verb, *cham'ad* refers to a desire associated with the loveliness of an object. It is a beauty that motivates action in order to possess that object for one's own. The value of *cham'ad* is both negative and positive. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden is attractive but effects disobedience, whereas God's instructions, knowledge, and wisdom are to be desired (found attractive) rather than silver or choice gold (Pr.8: 10-11 RSV) (Dyrness 1985:424).
4. *YOPHIY*: This word associated with the verb *ya'pa* is commonly associated with fair or beautiful outward appearances. As Dyrness (1985:424) indicates this word is used to describe Sarah (Gen12: 11), Rachel (29:17), and Joseph (39:6). Israel is lovely because of God's kindness to her (Ezek16:13-14; Jer.11: 16). Such beauty becomes a negative value when it develops into a source of pride (Ezek. 16:12-14). Significantly, the word is used in Psalms 50:2 and 48:2 (RSV). In the former, “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth,” and in the latter “His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation, is the joy of all the earth...” This same word is used to describe the “highest natural perfection that God's ordered creation can reach” (Eccl: 3:11).
5. *NA'AH*: This word, translated as beautiful, comely or becoming, carries the sense of that which is specifically suited to the situation to which it refers. In Isaiah 52:7 the beautiful feet of the messenger are well suited to the beauty of the message that he brings. Further, Psalm 93:5 concludes, “holiness befits (God's) house” while similarly “fine speech is not becoming a fool” (Pr.17: 7 RSV) (Dyrness 1985: 425).
6. *NA'E'M*: “To be pleasant or lovely,” the words associated with the verb *na'e'm* are associated with the quality of loveliness and are used to describe objects, the land and individuals. Further, as Dyrness indicates, when the word is descriptive of individuals its meaning includes the notion of “moral appropriateness.” He points to

the relationship between David and Jonathan (2Sam.1:26), to brothers dwelling in unity (Ps.133: 1). Equally, the word appropriately characterises God himself (Ps.90: 17; 16:11) (Dyrness 1985:425).

7. *HA'D'AR*: The use of *ha'd'ar* is significant to a word study of the vocabulary of beauty found in the Old Testament. Ascribed to God, the word implies a “visible” expression of his power and holiness. *Ha'd'ar* “is that character or honour that is perceived by people and freely acknowledged, especially with respect to God or the king” (Dyrness 1985:425-426). Never self-achieved, God bestows *ha'd'ar* on an individual – giving beauty for ashes (Isaiah 61:3).

From this brief outline of word usage provided by Dyrness (1985:421-432) it is evident that “beauty” has a definite place in Hebrew thought which counters the negative conclusions of both Grundmann and Von Rad. The “low estimation of art” to which Grundmann points suggests not Israel’s failure to find a place for beauty in her religious life. Rather, “beauty” for Israel is thoroughly enmeshed in her daily life that is primarily referred to God in all its aspects. God and beauty coincide for Israel in the fullness of living in covenantal relationship with the God who has chosen her to be his own. It is not a disinterest in beauty that we see in Israel but an approach to beauty that defies separating the concept out from everyday life and examining it as a separate entity in the manner of modern aesthetic philosophy. Similarly, the conclusion that there is no significance to Israel’s understanding of beauty because it moves “in the place of the experience of beauty common to all men” seems to disregard Israel’s self-understanding as a theocratic society whose life is always lived with conscious reference to God who is with her. Thus beauty is a significant value in Israel, even if not exclusive to Israel, because her own unique self-awareness will not allow beauty to be experienced outside of God’s love to his people. Beauty may move in the place of an experience common to all men; however, Israel’s response is indeed unique and must be considered as a part of her spiritual experience and heritage which includes her experience and understanding of beauty.

Two concepts Dyrness does not include in his exploration are *tawb*, (good: beautiful) and *kabod* (splendour: glory) which both add distinctive elements to Israel's understanding of beauty and deserve exploration.

1. *TAWB*: In Genesis 1:1-11 creation is set in motion through the word of God in a series of distinct statements. Each event in this series of "creational fiats" is enclosed by the statement, "God said...and it was so..." and the concluding statement, "and God saw that it was good." The primal "good" in this instance is the Hebrew word "*tawb*" which represents a synthesis of the Western concepts of both "good" and "beauty." In Hebrew thought, "good" is always understood in relationship to God and his actions with his people. It is a personal value inherent in God and undergirds all of God's actions on behalf of humanity. All that God bestows on humanity through his actions is "good" precisely because it derives from the One who is Primal Good. In Genesis 1 the "good" expressed as *tawb* further encompasses the aesthetic quality—the primal perfection, the primal purity, the primal beauty of God's creation as yet unmarred by sin (Brown 1980:103-105). It is significant to note that the "*tawb*" in Genesis one is translated in the Septuagint by the Greek "*kalos*" which also carries the sense of the good and the aesthetic quality of the beautiful.

As early as these opening verses of Genesis – the substantial word of God – his ontological truth – is circumscribed by the beauty and goodness of the cosmic horizon. Thus, in the earliest passages of Scripture the triadic values of truth, goodness and *beauty* inhere as the primary foundation of all that exists. Nor do they represent a descending order of value but the essential unity of a single value: the circumscription of Divine will. Representing not single notes in the holy song of creation, truth, goodness, and beauty are the song itself – played for us and to us in the unique "notes" – the substantial forms - God has willed into being. Here, unity in multiplicity, concordance with uniqueness, and motion without confusion, shine out on the created landscape as a reflection of the perichoretic life of the Triune God himself.

Not only is Scripture cognisant of the place of beauty in creation and validates its presence, but further Scripture is aware both of beauty's capacity to draw humanity to God and conversely its seductive powers to entice and deceive. A decisive place is given to beauty in the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom (OAA 1977:13), focusing on beauty in both its positive and negative potentiality. The book warns of the seductive power of beauty, which can draw humanity away from the "author" of all beauty. Herein, the writer is aware of beauty's power to entice and distract from the supreme beauty of God, its source, but nonetheless affirms and gives meaning to the perfection of God's "craftsmanship" as indicative of the perfect nature and being of its source.

For all men who were ignorant of God were foolish by nature and they were unable from the good things that are seen to know him who exists, nor did they recognise the craftsman while paying heed to his works...If through delight in the beauty of these things men assumed them to be Gods, let them know how much better than these is their Lord, for the author of beauty created them...For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator³ (OAA: 1977:117).

Further, the Greek concept "*kalos*" (good and beautiful) is found throughout the Septuagint wherein it is used for the Hebrew concept "*tawb*." This usage, carried through into the Apocrypha (as seen in the passage cited above), will surface again in New Testament thought integrating both the ethical and moral sense of "good" with the concrete and attractive form of beauty.

2. *KABOD*: Used approximately 200 times in the Old Testament, *kabod* expresses glory, honour, splendour, abundance, dignity, reverence. Specifically, *kabod* designates the "manifestation of a person" (Brown 1980:44-45) with a particular emphasis on the effect the manifestation creates in those who behold. Thus Job, stripped of his wealth, family, and reputation cries, "He has stripped me of my honour (glory), and taken the crown from my head" (Job 19:9) with the effect, "all

³ A major difference between Protestant belief and that of Eastern Orthodox, Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic confessions is seen in the books included within the canon of Scripture. Protestant denominations do not acknowledge the Apocryphal books as inspired and thus authoritative in the life of the church. However, in both Anglican and Lutheran confessions, the books of the Apocrypha are valued as having relevance for the life of the Church. The inclusion of apocryphal literature in this study reflects the earliest beliefs of the church and is therefore considered relevant to the consideration of beauty in the Christian life.

my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me” (Job 19:19). When used to express the presence of God, the word takes on the nuance of radiance and light – the splendour of Divine presence. In both Exodus and Ezekiel the radiance inherent in God’s revelation of himself is clearly evident. Similarly, the “glory of the Lord” expands the concept of beauty adding to it the dimension of “otherness” and grandeur with the power to both attract and repel those to whom it is revealed.

Characteristics of radiance and otherness are seen in the Exodus account of God’s self-manifestation to Moses. To Moses’ request, “now show me your glory” the Lord replies, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name...But, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.” And later, “When my glory passes by, I will put you in the cleft of a rock...” (Exodus 33: 18-20). The effect of Moses’ encounter with the Lord both personally and on the Israelites is significant. “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai...he was not aware that his face was radiant.... When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses...they were afraid to come near him” (Exodus 34: 29-30).

Ezekiel’s vision of God’s glory further broadens the concept and heightens an awareness of the superlative beauty of the “likeness of the glory of God” in the forms of the four living creatures. Again, brilliant radiance attends the prophet’s second vision (Ezek. 8:2-4). Nor is the glory of the Lord without effect. Rather, the deplorable poverty and alienation of Israel at her birth, is transformed when God passes by her. The Lord adorns Israel with “gold and silver,” “with clothes of fine linen,” “costly fabrics,” and ultimately places a crown on her head (Ezek. 16:11-13). Finally, the Lord declares to Israel, “your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendour I had given you made your beauty perfect...” (Ezek. 16:14).

It is clear that in the Old Testament, the concept of beauty is not a lost value or one ignored by Old Testament writers. Rather, it is diffused throughout the entire experience of Israel lived in the context of her covenantal relationship with the Lord,

and is radicalised in specific experiences of visions (Ezekiel) and theophanies (Moses).

As is the case in Old Testament thought, the New Testament also presents beauty, not peripherally but pervasively. Again, the thought cannot be isolated from the totality of the revelation to which the New Testament points. Nor does this difficulty suggest a disinterest in beauty on the part of its writers. Rather, beauty is found to be the true atmosphere of the new church as she finds herself in Christ and the goal to which it points in eschatological fulfilment. The concept of beauty in the New Testament is clearly expressed in relationship to the concepts of glory and light as they converge in the person of Christ, and finally in the beatific promise "blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." Hence beauty in the New Testament will be examined with specific reference to the Greek words "*kalos*," "*agathos*" (good/beautiful), "*doxa*" (glory) and those passages closely related to the notion of light. In conclusion, the Beatitude of the pure in heart will be demonstrated to open the stream of beatific vision in the present age culminating in a flood of perfect clarity - the eschatological fulfilment of the age to come.

Beauty: New Testament

1. *KALOS / AGATHOS*

The Greek concepts of goodness and beauty are expressed in "*agathos*" (good) and "*kalos* (beauty) which in New Testament usage are interchangeable terms whose meanings are largely influenced by the philosophical understanding of Plato and are demonstrated in his writings. Of particular significance is the concept of "*kalos kagathos*," coined by Plato, which extends the concepts of "*kalos*" and "*agathos*" significantly. Briefly, for the philosopher the essence of a virtuous man - "*kalos kagathos*" expresses the inner aspect of an individual, "respectful and fair, thoughtful and discreet, moderate and capable in the way he conducts his life" (Brown 1980:102)⁴ For the philosopher the good and the beautiful coincide in an individual

⁴ It is not within the scope of this thesis to demonstrate the historical development of Plato's philosophical system. A full account will be found in both of Plato's works *The Republic* (Cornford 1951) and *Symposium* (Hamilton 1952).

and are expressed as personal “character.” Thus it is not surprising that in John’s Gospel, the “good” shepherd passages utilise the word “*kalos*” to describe the person of Jesus (*ho poimne ho kalos*). Here, the emphasis is on both the outward form of the man and on his inner goodness the beauty that takes form in action compelled by love (Jn.10: 11). Discussing this fact John Navone (Navone:1996:35-36) draws attention to the commentary of Raymond Brown who translates the word “*kalos*” by the words “noble” and “model.” Both Brown and Navone suggest that the word “*kalos*” is appropriately understood as “beautiful” - the model of perfection. It is Brown’s contention that the Greek *kalos* “implies the correspondence between the nobility of the conception and the beauty of the realisation (Navone 1996:36). Thus, *kalos* here is understood as the outward form of the inward good (*agathos*). Navone goes on to state that:

Jesus, in the fulfilment of his work as “the Good Shepherd,” claims the admiration of all that is generous in us. This implies the intimate relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. The goodness/beauty of the shepherd cannot be understood without reference to the sheep. Jesus as The Good Shepherd is “good”/“beautiful” in such a way as to draw all persons to himself (Jn. 12:32). And the beauty of his goodness, which save the world, is supremely seen in the act by which he would so draw them, wherein he lays down his life for the sheep. This good which is perceived finds its concretisation in the saving work of Jesus (Navone 1996:35-36).

Similarly, in the synoptic Gospels the life that gains entrance to the kingdom must bear “good fruit” - *karpon kalon* (Matt. 3:10) once again the product of actions compelled by love. Later the “good works” - *kala erga* (Matt.m 5:16) to which Jesus calls his disciples are the “light” that attends them and reveals the love and nature of the Father.

However, New Testament writers do not take to themselves a purely Platonic philosophical system and apply it freely to Christian thought. Between Greek philosophy and Christian belief lies a necessary and radical chasm which lends to each a distinctive and unbridgeable uniqueness.

“Truth” for Plato resides not in the “reality” that presents itself to the senses, but in an “archetypal ideal” of the unity of the good and beautiful which exists outside the created realm entirely. For Plato, the soul or inner aspect of the human being is trapped within the substantial “prison” of body, a temporal fortification from which it must ultimately escape if it is to reunite with the “eternal” archetype from which it takes its origin. For the philosopher it is essential to maintain the integrity of the good, the beautiful and the true in terms that both preserve their unity and express their eternal nature, thus overcoming the essential discord evident within a creation that succumbs to decay and ultimately to death.⁵ Plato intuits the necessity of overcoming the decay inherent in the created order to establish a coherent explication of existence that is at one and the same time drawn to the eternal qualities of truth, beauty and goodness while facing the relentless transience inherent in the created order. Plato’s solution is one that by necessity must place the spiritual realm over and above the temporal thus introducing an inescapable rupture between created form and eternal order, between appearance and reality.

This difference between Greek Platonic thought and Christian belief is clearly delineated in the work of contemporary theologian John Zizioulas (1985:49-65). Zizioulas indicates the human dilemma wherein the individual trapped by his or her “biological hypostasis” (prone to decay) is given, through baptism, the gift of an “ecclesial hypostasis” (which constitutes eternal life) and overcomes the transient nature of biological existences.

Although New Testament thought also proclaims the unity of beauty and goodness in a manner similar to that of Plato, New Testament thought further introduces a radical departure from the Platonic scheme. The Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* expresses the unique claim that created being does not emanate from the essential Being of God himself. First coined by Clement of Alexandria,

⁵ The nature of truth by definition is that which is objectively “real” and thus unchanging. For Plato the physical realm represents a shadow or *image* of the primal ideal from whence it derives. Plato intuits the essential problem of the human condition longing to move out from itself towards beauty and goodness yet unable to account for such internal motions of the heart except through acknowledging an ideal outside of oneself – the archetype.

creation *ex nihilo* represents a Christian response to the conflation of creation with Creator inherent in Platonic thought as well as the suggestion that the creature is able, through human agencies alone, to know the nature of the Creator (Pelikan 1971:36-37; Lossky 1976:32-34; Evdokimov 1990:101-102). Creation is entirely distinct from its Creator – and its beauty lies not in any a priori union with God but in the “perfection” of its Creator whose own ontological beauty and perfection constrain him to create that which is consistent with his own goodness. It is God who has proclaimed “it good” (Gen.1); it is God who delights in his creation (Navone 1996:1-12).

Beauty then resides in the entire cosmos because God has created it as a reflection of his own primal beauty that is ultimately reproduced most fully in the redeemed lives of his disciples. Thus for the Christian and unlike the Platonist, the “good fruit” and “good works” alluded to above are not illusory in character. Rather, they are the substantial and lasting realities which constitute the order of the kingdom of God having broken anew into the world and which coincide with God’s own beauty, goodness, and love. Similarly, both the Old and New Testament understanding based on God’s self-revelation are able to account for the disparity between the seen “reality” of creation now fallen and the unseen “perfection” of God’s primal creation and his primal intention for all that exists. Beauty, goodness, and truth become in Christian thought eternally present in creation because God has created it freely in love and with the perfection of which only God is capable. Creation exists as the radiant outpouring of Divine love and joy; as gift (Navone 1996; 1999).

Freely given and under no constraint to create to add to his own fullness, perfection, goodness and joy, creation solely exists to radiate the love of the Father who endows his creatures with specific form and purpose. Each detail then is intended to express uniquely and harmoniously the perfect will of God and ultimately to glorify and praise him. Thus, the multiplicity of creation points in each of her details to the eternally present superlative beauty of God – her unified source,

to his wisdom, will, and intention to love and delight in that which he has created. The will of God to intentionally create a full and radiant universe implies that each detail is known and loved by him in its own uniqueness – in its own particularity. Herein lies the essence of primal beauty within the created realm – God who is radiant and good can create from his holy Imagination nothing less than a perfect and radiant embodiment of his own perfect thought. In creation, God is the perfect poet and creation the perfect poem whose sole content is meant to echo back Eucharistic joy and doxological praise.⁶

It is within the motion of responsive joy that created beauty fulfils her intended purpose. *Kalos*, the word under consideration, shares its root, “*kal*” with the verb “*kaleo*” to call out, to attract or to invite to itself (Luibheid and Rorem 1987:76). Thus in its linguistic purity beauty may be seen as attractive form which draws towards itself and evokes a response.⁷ In this way beauty is seen as dialogue: God’s beauty drawing creation into doxological praise and created beauty calling creatures to a eucharistic response toward the “Father” of beauty.

If the significance of beauty is to invite and evoke response, it is essential that beauty take form. Although an obvious statement, the form of beauty in a created and fallen world cannot be taken for granted. Without an objective and clearly circumscribed “form” beauty may evoke an appropriate response of thanksgiving and praise (Rom 1:20-23) or its express opposite, the inappropriate response of idolatry. Two significant problems exist if beauty is to take its rightful place in Christian understanding, beauty must first point toward its authentic origin – God, and further its articulation must account for the obvious distortions that mar the created order. For Plato, the problem necessitated an intellectual leap from the apparent world to the abstract thus negating the true value of the created realm. For Plato concrete form did not coincide with the eternal beauty of the Archetype

⁶ If not explicitly stated this view is supported by the work of Navone (1996, 1999); in the corpus of Jonathan Edwards as reviewed in chapter four; in the understanding of Hopkins (chapter four); in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius “On the divine Names” (Luibheid and Rorem 1987).

⁷ The link between *kalos* and *kaleo* is considered by Pseudo-Dionysius in his essay “The Divine Names” (Luibheid and Rorem 1987:76).

Good. Christianity must contribute a substantial and concrete “form” to the discussion of beauty if it is to avoid the Platonic conclusion and negate the value of the created realm.

The case is significantly different in Christian theological thought wherein any apparent disjunction between God’s primal intention for the created realm and the visible world in which we exist is accounted for by the fall of humanity. The distortion introduced by the “fall” is overcome in the promises of God to restore creation ultimately to its primal beauty through his own intimate and immanent presence with it, through the drama of salvation and redemption.

What was impossible for Plato is indeed possible for the Christian for whom all of reality, truth, goodness and ultimately beauty is made accessible to and actualised in the sensate world through the life, death and resurrection of the Person of Jesus, God’s Incarnate Son.

It is the unique claim of Christianity that in Jesus, God has entered into the created realm taking to himself the authentic substance of humanity. Through Jesus and in him primal beauty takes on distinct form. Beauty is figured in Divine Personhood, in the distinct man living among and with humanity, and revealing, through his life and death, God to humanity and humanity to itself. Ultimately for the Christian, Jesus, God the Son, expresses the objective standard for authentic beauty. Further, any apparent disjunction between God’s primal intention for the created realm and the visible world in which we exist is overcome through God’s redemptive intervention in it. Christ is the promise and fulfilment of the primal beauty of all creation. The unique position of Christ to the concept of beauty will be examined through a discussion of the concept of “*doxa*” as it relates specifically to the person of Jesus in selected passages from the New Testament witness.

2. *DOXA*

The Greek *doxa* represents the same constellation of meanings as the Hebrew *kabod* and is translated into English as glory and splendour. *Doxa* adds texture and weight to the concept of beauty investing it with the dynamic quality of brilliance

and radiance, grandeur and power.⁸ The word itself is used often in the New Testament hence this exploration of meaning and content will be confined to four separate instances of use wherein the dominant emphasis is on the visual aspects of “glory.” Citing McKenzie’s *Dictionary of the Bible*, Dubay summarises the notion of glory or *doxa*:

The glory of the Lord...is the supereminently luminous beauty of Divinity beyond all experience and all descriptions, all categories, a beauty before which all earthly splendours, marvellous as they are, pale into insignificance (Dubay 1999: 44).

The Birth of Christ (Luke 2:8-14):

In this passage the announcement of Jesus’ birth is attended by a blaze of the heavenly host – “the glory of the Lord”- which shines out testifying to the extravagant nature of the event. Further, it is an event, which elicits both fear and wonder on the part of the shepherds and compels them to search out the child and worship the one that has been sent to them. Here, the birth of Jesus and its proclamation to the shepherds is manifested by the light and music of the angelic chorus. The visual scene is entirely appropriate to the message and the event – splendour and joy circumscribe the horizon in a manner similar to the radiance and delight suggested in the very first movement of creation and initiated in the Divine imperative “let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). Again, light illumines the darkness, heralding the inauguration of a new creation, to be brought to its fulfilment in the life of the child who is born.

⁸ In secular Greek, *doxa* has the primary meaning of opinion, conjecture, and reputation. New Testament usage demonstrates the abrupt change in meaning that the word experienced under the influence of biblical writers where the secular meaning is not found at all.

The Transfiguration (Matt. 17: 1-9; Mk 9:2-10; Lk 9: 28-36)

The narrative of Transfiguration of the Lord described in each of the synoptic Gospels presents an objective moment in the life of Christ wherein the humanity and divinity of Jesus are revealed to his disciples and this in surpassing beauty and radiance. “He is transformed to so surpassing and Godlike a brightness, that His garments even glittered with rays of fire and seemed to flash like lightning” (Manley 1990:1010). Further, the church sings of the foretaste of heaven represented in this event:

Come, you faithful, let us welcome the Transfiguration of Christ,
And let us joyfully cry as we celebrate the foretaste,
The day of holy gladness has come,
The Lord has ascended Mount Tabor,
To radiate the beauty of His Divinity
(Men. Feast of the Foretaste of the Transfiguration).

Jürgen Moltmann suggests that in the West where the power of God, his dominion and majesty have become dominant themes, little emphasis has been placed on the loveliness and beauty of God figured in the passages under consideration (Sherry 1992:67). These passages however, remain for the believer, an objective visual representation of Jesus the Son, incarnate and glorified. Here the truth of Christ’s identity, the goodness of Christ’s human activity is made manifest in the unity of the man transfigured in beauty and as beauty. It is interesting to note of this passage Gregory Palamas suggests that indeed it is not Christ who changes at the transfiguration. Rather, he concludes the eyes of the disciples are opened allowing them see their Lord as he actually is (Evdokimov 1990:233).⁹ In any case, the “Light of Tabor,” the uncreated light of God himself – has been assimilated to the experience and expression of Christian spirituality throughout the church’s history. In his

⁹ “He is transfigured...by revealing Himself as He was to His disciples, opening their eyes and healing their blindness” (Quoted by Mantzaridis 1984:100). “Thus” states Mantzaridis, “the disciples whose eyes are transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit, were able to perceive the uncreated light of transfiguration.”(1984:100).

introduction to Gregory of Palamas' *Triads*, wherein, Palamas addresses Barlaam concerning the possibility of receiving a "vision of God" in this life, Meyendorff writes in the context of an affirmation of God's real manifestation to creatures, that,

Palamas, following Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus, refers to the New Testament accounts and references of Christ on the mount and to the Transfiguration (Mt.17: 1-9; Mk 9:2-9; Lk 9: 28-36; 2 Peter 1:17-21). And since the mount of Transfiguration is traditionally identified with Mount Tabor, the ... debate between Barlaam and Palamas is frequently referred to as the controversy on the "thaboric light." ... indeed in Greek patristic tradition, since Origen and St. Gregory of Nyssa, the vision of God is always defined as a luminous vision, probably because of the central biblical theme of "light" and "darkness"... and could easily serve as a convenient theological model. However, one of the major concerns of Palamas is to draw a sharp distinction between any form of light experienced outside of the Christian revelation, and the *real* vision of God's as Light that appeared to the disciples on the mount of Transfiguration, and that, in Christ, *has become accessible to the members of His Body, the church*¹⁰ (Meyendorff 1983:17-18).

The nature and glory of the disciple's Tabor experience is compelling described in Gregory's own words:

The chosen disciples saw the essential and eternal beauty of God on Tabor (as the church sings)...not the glory of God which derives from creatures...but the superluminous splendour of the beauty of the Archetype, the very formless form of the Divine loveliness, which deifies man and makes him worthy of personal converse with God; the very kingdom of God, eternal and endless, the very light beyond intellection and unapproachable, the heavenly and infinite light, out of time and eternal, the light that makes immortality shine forth, the light which deifies those who contemplate it (Meyendorff 1983:106).

¹⁰ Italics have been added for emphasis.

Jesus Prayer (John 17:1-5)

In the opening verses of Jesus' Prayer, the reader encounters an extended use of the word "glory" from Christ himself prior to his crucifixion and indeed pointing toward his own death. The opening statement, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" must be understood to refer specifically to the death that awaits him. The crucifixion appears to be the ultimate visual representation of Divine glory – not as light or radiant blessedness but as torture and destruction, an event seemingly devoid of beauty in the narrowest sense of the word. Yet, if God is indeed "beautiful" and this event is Christ's ultimate manifestation of God then the beauty of God must be evident even here at the lowest point in the Saviour's time on earth.

In this instance beauty resides not in the act of crucifixion but in the person of the crucified Lord who, "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped...[but], humbled himself and became obedient to death" (Phil 2: 6,8). Here the details of the Transfiguration accounts take on particular significance – the Father declares Jesus his beloved Son (Matt.17: 5) not only in the presence of his disciples but in the presence of both Elijah and Moses with whom Jesus speaks of his impending death. The glory of the Transfiguration is not obliterated in the act of crucifixion but is manifest through it. With the Transfiguration, and in fulfilment of all the "law and the prophets" represented by Moses and Elijah, the majesty and radiance of God is revealed as self-denying and self-emptying love. Here, the power of Divine freedom to unite itself with the deepest pains of a fallen humanity becomes in the figure of Christ the "dazzling darkness" of God:

where the living God of love is glorified as he pours out his limitless love for the creature kenotically into the void which is empty of himself, indeed into what is strictly totally other than himself: into the abyss of guilty, Godless darkness and Godforsakenness...and by the glorified Kyrios fashions glory out of humanity and the cosmos, which Christ in his final prayer declares to have been accomplished (von Balthasar 1984:11-12).

Hidden beauty, therefore, is not a negation of the concept of beauty; rather, the meaning is extended, and given depth and richness by broadening the notion to include that which is most dissimilar to our own human presuppositions concerning the beautiful. The beauty of God, which has been revealed objectively and with great clarity in the birth narrative and in the transfiguration, is not diminished by the outward form of crucifixion. The crucifixion becomes the instrument of saving and healing power precisely in the form of Jesus lifted up and drawing humanity into the drama of redemptive love (Jn.12: 32). Nor is it sufficient to say that the hidden beauty of God places Divine beauty in a strictly spiritual realm, thus positing the basis of a purely apophatic theology as such a negation would do. Rather, such hiddenness introduces humanity to the realm of the “*via positiva*,” of the illuminating darkness- the superlative light of God - that bears on humanity as it contemplates the mystery of transcendence deigning to become Incarnate. Divine Beauty is the figure of Christ on the cross – not simply as we remember back to the transfiguration (as important as that is) nor pointing ahead to the resurrection and ultimate parousia of God. Beauty is substantially figured in the eventfulness and majesty of Christ’s deliberate surrender to crucified love, freely accepted, and through which the fullness of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit blessedly re-orders the movement of history towards its ultimate restoration and fulfilment as cosmic harmony and perfection. Beauty is reflected then not in the visual depiction of crucifixion but in the perfect conformity of Jesus to the Father’s will for his own life – his vocation as lover, redeemer, and Son of the Father.

The Glory of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3: 7 -18)

The third passage to be examined in conjunction with the term “*doxa*” is Paul’s (2 Cor 3:7-18), wherein concepts of glory, light, and radiance as well as the transforming potency of beauty appear. In this passage Paul alludes back to Moses and his encounter with God (Ex34: 34) and makes effective use of the language of light and radiance to recall the dynamic that attends God’s self-revelation to Moses.

However, whereas the radiance of God shining through the face of Moses eventually fades, for those who draw near to God in prayer and contemplation, who gaze on the Lord with unveiled faces as the New Covenant invites them to do, the situation is significantly different. Here the radiance of God is increasingly imparted to the believer, and reflected in him or her with ever deepening intensity thus effecting a transformation into the likeness of Christ himself. The “glory of the Lord” in this instance is not static resting solely in the object of contemplation but is imparted to those who turn toward it as light in a mirror reflects on the one gazing at it. Further, this glory is one that penetrates, effecting a change that remains and imparts a lasting likeness to its source – it is an invitation to participate in the glory of the Lord as light and radiance. In this instance it is the person of Christ who has removed the veil covering the eyes of the heart (2 Cor 3:14) and allows “all with unveiled faces” to enter into the transforming radiance of the Lord. Nor does this invitation negate the notion that “no one may look upon God and live.” Rather, in holy condescension God has revealed himself in Jesus who in his own Trinitarian splendour beholds the face of the Father and mediates that radiant beauty to the believer.

Of particular significance to this passage is the notion of the heart which is not simply understood as the seat of the emotional life as a modern reader might expect. Rather, “heart” in both Old and New Testaments is understood to be the centre of the whole person. Emotion and rationality, will and spirit, passion and peace- indeed the entire gamut of human life – affective and cognitive, is reflected in the concept “heart” (Brown 1980:180-184) which is one of three dominant themes encountered in the Beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” As Brown suggests a difference can be recognised between the Hebrew understanding of heart which contains the full range of human capacities: intellectual and emotional as well as the capacity for free will. This unitive understanding is not characteristic of Greek usage where heart is primarily understood as the centre of physical life (particularly in the work of Aristotle) and is only extended to include the emotive element in humanity. In Classic Greek thought, the intellect is not considered in definitions of the heart. Hence New Testament usage is shown in Brown to follow the more unitive

Hebrew understanding of the concept (Brown 1980:2:181-184). It is this unitive understanding of “heart” that forms the foundation of Christian discussions that include the notion of heart.¹¹

Fifth Beatitude (Matt. 5:8)

As mentioned earlier, this Beatitude brings the concept of heart into focus, along with those of purity and sight. Clearly, this Beatitude refers in its fullest sense to the “beatific vision” that awaits the disciple at the end of the age - a view held in common by the Church Fathers. However, three specific questions may be asked concerning the relationship of this Beatitude to the notion of an accessible theology of beauty. Is it possible to see God in some sense in this life and if so, what is the nature of the vision and finally in what way does ‘seeing’ God relate to a theology of beauty?”

A preliminary answer to the first question is found in literature pertaining to prayer and to contemplative prayer in particular –a topic that will be discussed at length in a later chapter. At present it is sufficient to demonstrate that the goal to which all Christian contemplative prayer moves is that of union with God. In both Eastern and Western articulations regarding this end, images of either light or darkness are used to express the inexpressible nature of the encounter with God. Taking as their model Old Testament accounts of Moses’ encounter with God in thick darkness (Exodus 20:21) or his vision of God standing on “pavement as sapphire” (Exodus 24:10), and the actual Transfiguration, theologians insist that an experiential encounter with God is indeed possible. Further, this encounter, expressed

¹¹ See: Bovenmars (1991) In this work Bovenmars constructs a fully explicated treatise concerning biblical spirituality and the heart; Houston (1990;1996); Clouser (1999).

by images of light or darkness is an objective one, imparted to an individual and not under his or her control.¹²

It is a central paradox of Christian tradition that God is both “unknowable” yet truly known through faith and love experienced as intimate encounter. The answer to the first question then, is “yes” - it is possible to see God “in a mirror darkly” in this life. The ineffable mystery of God, who far surpasses human understanding and who stands “outside all things according to his essence” (Ware 1986:27) as St. Athanasius states, is known, experienced, and seen by his creatures according to his energies. This construction of a theology, which asserts that God is both transcendent in his essence and immanent in his energies, does not introduce into the Christian tradition a theology of intermediary agents (energies) which the human mind can somehow grasp. Throughout its early and middle history the church has wrestled with the paradox of Divinity – transcendent yet immanent – unapproachable yet condescending. Ware (1986:27) clearly outlines the contours of the Orthodox Church’s understanding. Initially quoting the Fathers, Ware asserts the church’s position on this paradox stating, “He is outside all things according to his essence but he is in all things through his acts of power” and further that, “we know the essence through the energy.” He continues:

By the essence of God is meant his otherness, by the energies his nearness. Because God is a mystery beyond our understanding we shall never know his essence or inner being, either in this life or in the Age to come. If we knew the Divine essence, it would follow that we knew God in the same way as he knows himself; and this we cannot ever do, since he is Creator and we are created. But, while God’s inner essence is forever beyond our comprehension, his energies, grace, life and power fill the whole universe, and are directly accessible to us. The essence, then signifies the radical transcendence of God; the energies, his immanence and omnipresence. When Orthodox speak of the Divine energies, they do not mean by this an emanation from God, an ‘intermediary’ between God and man, or a ‘thing’ or ‘gift’ that God bestows. On the contrary, the energies are

¹² See *Triads* (Meyendorff 1983) for an extended discussion of the concept of “divine energies” within Orthodox theology. The notion of the divine energies as articulated by Gregory Palamas constitutes the accepted Eastern teaching on this theme.

God himself in his activity and self-manifestation. When a man knows or participates in the Divine energies, he truly knows or participates in God himself, so far as this is possible for a created being (Ware 1986:27-28).

To “see” God is indeed a goal to which the disciple legitimately aspires in this age. Following the Eastern tradition it is possible to assert that God, in his self-revelation, and this primarily in Jesus the Son, condescends to the very limits of humanity and, through his own initiative, unites himself to the disciple – illumines and possesses him. It is through this authentic participation in Divine life and love that the disciple is transformed increasingly and inexhaustibly into the likeness of God himself. However, to assert that this Beatitude offers the disciple an experience of God in the present age, requires an equally strenuous assertion of its conditional aspect: purity of heart.

Jesus himself sheds light on the dimensions of purity of heart expected of his disciples throughout the Sermon on the Mount which echoes the familiar voices of the “law and the prophets.” David’s plea “create in me a clean heart” (Ps 51:10), God’s promise to exchange a human heart of stone for one of flesh (Jer 31:31-34), the demand “be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Lev 19:2), and to live “blamelessly” (Deut.18: 13) clearly express the fullness of purity the Beatitude implies and which Jesus himself reiterates in Matthew 5:48. The concept is a familiar one in Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant thought. Each tradition finding its own vocabulary and utilising its own familiar concepts, be that the ascetic theology of both Eastern and Western monasticism or the process of sanctification in Protestant theological thought (Watson [1660] 1971:174-175), recognises the priority of “purity of heart.” Whichever tradition is cited the end result remains the same – holiness as the praxis of the Christian life and the reclamation of the Divine Image. Following the thought of the Fathers of the church, it is true to suggest that the fifth Beatitude is not entirely reserved for the age to come. Rather, it is also to be expected as a participation in the Divine energies as the goal of contemplative prayer – the outshining of union with God. Nor should we expect that the vision of

God to which the Beatitude points will be that of sensory vision. Rather, it is the congruence of hearts beholding one another in love – “deep calling to deep” – a face to face encounter – the heart’s intuitive vision that bears upon the disciple and radiates the glory of God.

Again, although the clear and most complete vision awaits the disciple, even the dim reflection of the transcendent beauty of God is sufficient to effect a substantial change in the inner person. The nature of the exchange of love between the beholder and the beheld which terminates in an inward vision of God constitutes a profound vision of Divine beauty inherent in the encounter of the created being with the Divine source of all good and all truth. It is to experience a participation in the Life from which all life flows and indeed flowers. It is the mutual delight of love that at its source knows no imperfection and imparts to the disciple an authentic participation in Beauty as Divine Personhood in radical condescension uniting himself to created being. Further if, as the Fathers suggest, this vision is most profoundly experienced by those practised in the spiritual life, it is equally true to suggest that it is a growing awareness of God. Hence this deepening encounter is as open to the experience of the neophyte as to the spiritual master albeit in the degree and manner consistent with the capacity of the disciple to receive and delight in the Divine encounter. The effect of this mutual surrender of beholder to the beheld in love begins and deepens the transformation of human sensibilities allowing the disciple to “see” not only God but also the cosmic horizon, “with the eye of the Dove” (Evdokimov 1990:4).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From this overview of the vocabulary of beauty found in both Old and New Testaments, it seems premature to dismiss “beauty” as a concept that has no valid application to God’s self-revelation or the Christian proclamation of truth in general. Rather, it is possible to draw specific conclusions regarding the topic under consideration. The Old Testament clearly in its very earliest passages allows us to recognise in God an ineffable and infinite Beauty from which all relative created

beauty derives and in which created being yearns to participate. To follow after this beauty freely, to be enwrapped by and ultimately transformed in and through it is the goal of all creation and the sublime dignity of humanity created in the image and likeness of God. Further, it is not essential that the scriptural understanding of beauty in some way departs from a perception of “beauty” common to those outside the covenantal relationship to which Israel is called. Rather, it is the uniqueness of Israel’s relationship with God that compels a response of trust, thanksgiving and delight in all aspects of her life including her perception of beauty.

Similarly, the New Testament presents beauty pervasively throughout the Gospels, Epistles and in the Apocalypse seen in its presentment of a ‘New Heaven’ and a ‘New Earth.’ In the New Testament, the primal and creative Beauty so evident in the opening passages of Genesis, takes substantial form in the person of Jesus the Light of the World, the model of human perfection and the promise of human perfectibility. Through Jesus the beautiful is expressed not only as “form” demonstrated in the Transfiguration, but also ultimately as “human form” compelled by love to freely pour itself out in an extravagant act of self-renunciation on behalf of the beloved. In Christ, beauty finds its ultimate expression in self-forgetfulness and mercy, compassion and kenotic generosity. These virtues, so apparent in Jesus, present a clear image of the gift of personhood to which the Father calls each individual and which promises to circumscribe the perfect “form” of human beauty through the transforming vision of Divine love.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF BEAUTY: THE CHURCH

Examining the church from the perspective of the twenty-first century, we are confronted with a myriad of doctrinal and liturgical forms. The Orthodox East, the Eastern Catholic Church, the Roman Church in the West, and also, in the West a mosaic of Protestant forms ranging from Liturgical and sacramental churches to free flowing and informal church groupings, all contribute a particular edge to a discussion of beauty. However, this diversity has not always represented the church in history. Rather, for the first one thousand years of the church's life, there existed only one holy, catholic and apostolic church. Hence, for all Christians today, those first thousand years are not insignificant. The first millennium of Christian history represents the heritage of all Christians – and provides the historical foundation on which all post-apostolic Christians have built their individual theological systems. Therefore, in examining the churches' understanding of "beauty" our discussion will focus considerable attention on the first thousand years of the church's life which uniquely expressed a unity of thought and concern never achieved in later periods of her history. Following these earliest years, we will look more closely at the expression of beauty found in the three broad categories of ensuing Church life. Beginning with the Orthodox Church (which will constitute the main emphasis of this section), we will move to the Roman Church, and then discuss as a single category the Protestant Churches' use of "beauty." In this final section a certain caution must be observed. Protestantism represents a vast complex of understandings and so here it must be recognised that in these areas there will be degrees of overlap with both Orthodox and Roman expressions of the faith in some instances, whereas in others the divergence of views from the historical churches will be clear. Protestant churches, then, can be conceived as occupying a continuum from the highly structured to the informal.

THE ORTHODOX EAST

Light

It is not an overstatement to suggest that in the Eastern expression of Christianity formulated in the earliest era of post-apostolic belief, images of light and illumination dominate the spiritual landscape. To understand something of the Eastern understanding of beauty it is necessary to appreciate the places these images occupy in the greater scheme of Orthodox life. The language of light to which much of Eastern writing alludes refers back to Genesis and the creation of light associated with the Divine imperative "Let there be light." An equal emphasis is placed on the New Testament event of Transfiguration, on the Apostle John's declaration "God is light..." (1 Jn.1:5) as well as James' pronouncement that all good gifts come down from "the Father of lights" (Jm.1: 17).

This light, to which Orthodoxy constantly and intentionally refers, derives primarily from the "uncreated light," the Divine energies of God, perceived in epiphanic moments in the believer's life. Ware (1986:170-171) writes:

Being Divine, the uncreated energies surpass our human powers of description; and so in terming these energies "light" we are employing the language of "sign" and symbol. Not that the energies are themselves merely symbolical. They genuinely exist, but cannot be described in words; in referring to them as 'light' we use the least misleading term, but our language is not to be interpreted literally. Although non-physical, the Divine light can be seen by a man through his physical eyes, provided that his senses have been transformed by Divine grace. His eyes do not behold the light by natural powers of perception, but through the power of the Holy Spirit acting within him.

In Eastern theology the ineffable and incomprehensible nature of God's essence always remains in the forefront of theological discourse, and constitutes a continuing enigma in all expressions of Christian thought throughout the ages. The nature of God, as he is in himself, is entirely inaccessible to human thought. Yet it is the central claim of Christianity that this God has made himself known to his creatures. The mode of God's self-revelation, the degree of intimate encounter he affords his disciple and the manner that God is known and apprehended will remain the constant concern

of Christian spirituality which seeks to foster this encounter in the life of the disciple. It is also a theme significant to a theology of beauty and will recur time and again in the ensuing pages of this work.

Found in the earliest theological articulations of the church is the belief that God is perceived intuitively through an experiential encounter afforded the faithful as they grow in holiness and contemplation. In Orthodox thought, the movement of God towards humanity requires a concurrent motion on the part of the individual to move toward God through a commitment to ascetic disciplines which lead to the recovery of one's own primal innocence. Thus, the post-apostolic church posits that a certain synergy is expected between God and the disciple if the disciple is to be made ready to receive the epiphanic vision of God experienced as "the uncreated light." In Orthodox understanding, both past and present, the nature of this "light" and humanity's capacity to receive it –has been formally and finally articulated in the fifteenth century work of Gregory Palamas. Gregory's *Triads* (Meyendorff 1983), the Orthodox response to the abiding question whether humanity is ever able to experience the transcendent God, answers this question with an emphatic "yes." Orthodoxy maintains that the "otherness" of God as he exists in himself is truly inaccessible to human experience and human intellection. However, Gregory asserts, the energies of God are indeed accessible. The disciple is able to experience the love of God, his mercy, his kindness and his light in the mode of God's Divine Energies which, significantly, do not constitute a mediated or lesser experience of God. On the contrary, through these energies humanity is afforded a direct encounter with God which is accommodated by the distinction made between the Immanent Trinity (God as he is in himself) and the Economic Trinity (God as he manifests himself to man).

The encounter with God afforded the disciple in the experiential vision of God as the "uncreated light" of Orthodox thought, permeates the very being of the beholder who is transformed from "one degree of glory to another." In turn the deepening of one's receptivity to the holy Light is an efficacious event, transforming and elevating the disciple's physical senses to "spiritual senses" through which he or she contemplates the beauty of God. Gregory of Nyssa speaks of this elevation of the

soul to God and the ensuing effect on the believer: “You have become beautiful by coming close to my Light”(Evdokimov 1990:7). Contrary to the often negative rhetoric concerning the physicality of humanity, in which much of Eastern monastic writing is steeped, the goal of Eastern spirituality is not concerned with eliminating the senses but with their transfiguration. St. Maximus asserts that “...the powers of the soul expand and develop through the senses. The soul hears, sees, smells, tastes and therefore creates organs of perception the ‘senses’.” Evdokimov expands this theme concerning the “spiritual senses”:

The sharpened senses perceive sensually the Non-Sensible, or even better the trans-sensible. The beautiful is as a shining forth, an epiphany, of the mysterious depths of being, of that interiority that is a witness to the intimate relation between body and spirit. “Ordered” and “deified” nature allows us to see God’s Beauty through the human face of Christ (Evdokimov 1990:26).

The vision of beauty then, inherent in Eastern thought and allied to the notion of “light,” is not a minor theme but represents the fullness of God’s redemptive and restoring activity in the created realm moving the believer from one degree of holiness to another. Thus Evdokimov’s comment that in Eastern thought an emphasis is duly placed on the “ascetic rehabilitation of matter as the substratum of the resurrection and the medium in which all epiphanies take place” draws together the ascetic thrust of Eastern thought and the profound vision of created reality (Evdokimov 1990:26). The Eastern vision of beauty does not represent a hopeful fantasy of pious thought but constitutes “reality” in its fullest sense, and the fruit of an intentional ascetic life given over fully to the acquisition of the Divine nature.

The possession of spiritual senses allows the believer to perceive the extravagant beauty of an Eden-like creation wherein light dominates the new horizon that God has willed into being with his first imperative: “Let there be light.”

The first word of God created the nature of light: it made the darkness vanish, dispelled gloom, illuminated the world, and gave to all beings at the same time a sweet and gracious aspect. The heavens, until then enveloped in darkness, appeared with that beauty which they still present to our eyes. The air was lighted up, or rather made the light circulate mixed with its substance, and distributing its splendour rapidly in every direction, so dispersed itself to its extreme limits. Up it

sprang to the very aether and heaven. In an instant it lighted up the whole extent of the world...With light the aether becomes more pleasing and waters more limpid. These last, not content with receiving its splendour, return it by the reflection of light and in all directions send forth quivering flashes...So, with a single word and in one instant, the Creator of all things gave the boon of light to the world (Hexaemeron 28:09:99).

The diffuse nature of light, imparting life, radiating uniqueness, providing an ambience of time and space allowing for the historic progression of creation, becomes in Orthodox spirituality the gift par excellence and will appear and reappear through Eastern articulations of the meaning of life and the beauty of its content.

The value Eastern Orthodox spirituality places on the “uncreated light” of God, on the created light that derives from God’s loving will, and its emphasis on “spiritual senses” accounts in part for her distinct approach to epistemology from which all Western expressions of Christianity have largely departed. Specifically, Eastern Christian culture has developed in such a way that intuitive knowledge has retained a position of intellectual legitimacy which in the West has been displaced by a predisposition toward scholastic and Enlightenment analysis of thought and conceptualisation. Whereas later expressions of Christianity have carefully examined and analysed major doctrines of the faith and have attempted to formally articulate them with systematic thoroughness, the Eastern Church has resisted that emphasis. Rather, the Eastern Church only defined crucial areas of doctrinal belief as they were challenged by the encroaching culture in which she developed. This divergence from Western conceptualisation has certain ramifications for the study at hand. First, Orthodoxy is at home in an atmosphere of mystery and revelation. Second, thematic development of concepts such as beauty and personhood are not drawn primarily from treatises that formally examine these subjects in isolation although in later years a greater emphasis has been placed on works of this nature. Rather, they are found and elaborated upon in and through the church’s liturgical and devotional life developed particularly in the context of the monastery. Positively, a richness of thought on the subject of beauty will be found in examining the monastic understanding of contemplative prayer, asceticism, and the development of the

concept of theosis or deification. Similarly, beauty will be discovered pervasively in the works of the Fathers of the church which attempt to address those issues that pressed in on the church and required clear doctrinal statements.

Negatively, however, it will be seen that the narrow parameters of monastic life have tended to block the laity from its own full participation in the spiritual life. The enclosed world of the monastic does not entirely preclude the lay Christian from the realm of spiritual encounter and transformation to which monastic life moves and to which Eastern Christian spirituality aspires, but it often prescribes a methodology that is largely incompatible with the “normal” Christian lay experience. Here, the radical emphasis on ascetic practices, the gradual ascendancy of celibacy over the married state, and the rigorous emphasis on an apophatic spirituality create an exclusive and prohibitive environment in which to grow in love and union with God wherein “beauty” is ultimately discovered. Calling for the individual to divest him or herself of all humanly conceived concepts of God and further, the insistence that an individual dispossess him or her self of all sensate dependence on the “things of the world”, tends to nullify the value of the environment in which the lay individual finds him or herself. This tendency also leads, even if unintentionally, to the conclusion that the profound attraction of created “beauty” is, in truth seductive, drawing the individual away from the summit of Divine union with God. The seductive nature of beauty can exist and is addressed both in Scripture (the apocryphal Book of Wisdom: 13) and by Calvin (McNeill 1960). However, as will be suggested later in this study, this negative and exclusive view need not dominate and impose limitations on the laity’s spiritual growth toward personal holiness and union with God and participation in Divine Beauty.

Since the Divine liturgy and sacramental participation occupy the primary locus of Orthodox theology and teaching and ultimately constitutes the church itself, beauty will be discussed initially as it is presented in this fully inclusive context. Further, the distinctly Orthodox art of Iconography will be discussed in this broader context of liturgical and sacramental reality as perceived in Orthodox experience. Finally, the monastic emphasis on contemplative prayer will be examined with

particular reference to the concept of beauty. Monasticism in the past and in the present occupies a significant and indeed elevated place in Eastern spiritual thought. The entire order of the church's life is conceived in the monastic Community and its influence cannot be underestimated.

Liturgy

To begin a discussion of "liturgy" in the Orthodox Tradition the term must first be clarified. Originally, the Greek word *leitourgia* implied the "action by which a group of people become something corporately which they had not been as a mere collection of individuals. Further, it referred to the "work" of the people or an individual on behalf of the group (Schmemmann 1988b:25). This comprehensive understanding of the word "liturgy" frees the concept from the common reductionist definition of "religious cult." Rather, in Orthodoxy the baptised represent a new order of being – one that is first "at home" in the spiritual and sacramental life of the church, and further carries that life beyond the confines of congregational worship. Thus the liturgical life of Orthodoxy refers not to the separate entities of individual sacraments but to the fullness of life, both within and without the congregational milieu. The Orthodox community consists of those moving toward their final eschatological fulfilment – the restoration of their beauty in Christ increasingly imparted through their movement toward union with God. In this sense then, the church herself is a *leitourgia*, "a ministry, a calling to act in this world after the fashion of Christ, to bear testimony to Him and His kingdom"(Schmemmann 1988b:25). In Orthodox self-understanding no individual act of corporate liturgical life must be considered independently of the life of the Christian in particular. In the Eastern Church, corporate worship must be viewed not simply as a religious act isolated from, and opposed to, the "profane" life of the community. For Orthodoxy, all life, within or without the congregational setting is a liturgical expression of a life lived consciously in the presence of God. It is life then given up to love expressed in action as she bears Christ to the world. To understand liturgy in this sense allows us to understand and appreciate the "cultic" beauty of Orthodox worship.

An often repeated story in Orthodox tradition is that of Vladimir of Kiev sending ambassadors to the major spiritual centres of the Empire in order to help determine the religion that Russia would follow. On their return, the ambassadors reported of Byzantine worship, “We did not know if we were in heaven or on earth for on earth such beauty is not to be found. We thus do not know what to say, but we know one thing. God dwells there among men...” Concerning this story Evdokimov concludes, “God’s presence among men is what is beautiful; it is this beauty that ravishes and transports men’s souls” (Evdokimov 1990:8). Beauty, in Orthodox tradition is not simply an appendage to the work of sacramental life. More specifically, it is the appropriate environment for the glory and majesty of the proclamation of God’s immanence with his people. Liturgist Schmemmann speaking of the “beauty” of the Orthodox “cult” suggests that it is neither necessary, functional nor useful. Rather, it is an expression of love and the appropriate ambience for the celebration and expectation of God’s presence with his people. Speaking specifically of the Eucharist, Schmemmann writes:

It is heaven on earth; it is the joy of recovered childhood, that free, unconditioned and disinterested joy which alone is capable of transforming the world. In our adult serious piety we ask for definitions and justifications, and they are rooted in fear – fear of corruption, deviation, “pagan influences”.... But “he that feareth is not made perfect in love.”(1 Jn.4: 18). As long as Christians will love the kingdom of God.... they will represent it and signify it in art and beauty. And the celebrant of the sacrament of joy will appear in a beautiful chasuble, because he is vested in the glory of the kingdom because even in the form of man God appears in glory. In the Eucharist we are standing in the presence of Christ and like Moses before God, we are covered with his glory (Schmemmann 1988b:30).

Similarly, referring to the “useless beauty” of the liturgy, Romano Guardini quoted by Schmemmann expresses a parallel thought:

Man, with the aid of grace, is given the opportunity of relaying His fundamental essence, of really becoming that which according to his Divine destiny he should be and longs to be, a child of God. In the liturgy he is to go “unto God, who giveth joy to his youth”.... Because the life of the liturgy is higher than that to which customary reality gives either the opportunity or form of expression, it adapts suitable forms and methods from that sphere in which alone they are to be found, that is to

say from art. It speaks measuredly and melodiously; it employs formal, rhythmic gestures; it is clothed in colours and garments foreign to everyday life.... It is in every sense the life of a child, in which everything is picture, melody and song. Such is the wonderful fact which the liturgy demonstrates: it unites act and reality in a supernatural childhood before God (Schmemmann 1988b:30-31).

From this short background on the Orthodox understanding of Liturgy as the life of the church it is evident that all life is experienced within the bounds of “liturgical life” which in its broadest definition constitutes a radiant experience of joy and delight compelled by love. Expressed with exuberant yet reverential delight radiating from the presence of God himself, the liturgical life of the church upholds the cosmic proportions of the sacramental life. Liturgy opens out into a fresh and dynamic reality of God’s kingdom on earth and the restoration of the primal goodness, purity, and beauty inherent in created being. More specifically, however, we will discuss the particular liturgical movements of the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist which add a significant dimension to the concept of beauty.

Baptism

In his “Instructions to Catachumens,” John Chrysostom clearly expresses the dimensions of the event to take place in Baptism. He states: “Ye are not about to be led to an empty dignity, but to an actual kingdom: and not simply to a kingdom, but to the kingdom of Heaven itself”(Chrysostom, 01:14:00). Consequently for the Christian initiate the baptismal event consists of a vital encounter with Christ the glorified King through the deifying work of the Holy Spirit. Hence John asks for their prayers:

Remember me when you come into that kingdom, when you receive the royal robe, when you are girt with the purple dipped in the master’s blood, when you will be crowned with the diadem, which has lustre leaping forth from it on all sides, more brilliant than the rays of the sun. Such are the gifts of the Bridegroom, greater indeed than your worth, but worthy of his loving kindness (Chrysostom 01:14:00).

To enter into Baptism is to enter into the “laver of regeneration” which does not simply remove sin or cleanse the disciple from his or her faults. Baptism constitutes

an ontological change – a new birth – “for it creates and fashions us anew not forming us again out of earth, but creating us out of another element, namely, of the nature of water (Chrysostom 01:14:00).

Baptism does not simply wipe the vessel clean, but entirely remoulds it again. For that which is wiped clean even if it be cleansed with care, has traces of its former condition, and bears the remains of its defilement, but that which falls into the new mould, and is renewed by means of the flames, laying aside all uncleanness, comes forth from the furnace and sends forth the same brilliancy with things newly formed. As therefore anyone who takes and recasts a golden statue which has been tarnished by time, smoke, dust, rust, restores it to us thoroughly cleansed and glistening: so too this nature of ours, rusted with the rust of sin, and having gathered much smoke from our faults, and having lost its beauty, which He from the beginning bestowed upon it from himself, God has taken and cast anew, and throwing it into the waters as into a mould, and instead of fire sending for the grace of the Spirit, then brings us forth with much brightness, renewed and made afresh, to rival the beams of the sun, having crushed the old man and having fashioned a new man, more brilliant than the former (Chrysostom 01:14:00).

There is no hesitation on the part of Orthodoxy to express the mystery of Baptism in the most splendid terms possible. The eloquence of the message is utterly compatible with the nature of the event. A new and vital reality breaks into the lives of individuals whereby they are transformed, indeed, re-formed in the primal glory and beauty for which they were created. The writings of the Fathers do not constitute an unseemly enthusiasm. The superlatives used in the rich descriptions of the spiritual exchange taking place attempt to rise to the level of reality – to express the holy beauty of the re-creation event.

The Sacrament of Baptism is one of New Birth and regeneration wherein the believer is brought into an entirely new realm of being. The individual is made ready to receive the Lord in the sacramental Eucharist, and further to learn to recognise within the regenerate community of the church, the self in Christ and Christ in the self; the church in union with her Lord, and the Lord in recreating intimacy within the church. It is new life and nuptial life the depth of which is expressed in the Eucharistic liturgy.

Eucharist

The Divine Liturgy, historically attributed to John Chrysostom represents the normative experience of Orthodox worship of both the ancient Church and the contemporary Church.¹³ In *The Great Catechism*, Gregory of Nyssa's defence of the Holy Trinity, Gregory reminds us that "man was necessarily created subject to change (to better or to worse)" and that "moral beauty was to the direction in which his free will was to move." However, by the cunning of Satan man was deceived by an illusion of moral beauty and 'sold himself to the deceiver' (Gregory 01:14:00). This primal fall accounts in humanity for the deformation of God's image while the Incarnation constitutes God's loving intent to "restore his (humanity's) diseased nature to its original beauty"(Gregory 01:14:00). The movement of the Divine Liturgy temporally actualises the eternal Gospel proclamation that God the Father, in Jesus the Son has entered fully into the life of His creation, to redeem and restore it through the power of his Holy Spirit. In the Kontakion of the Feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy the church sings:

The uncircumscribed Word of the Father was circumscribed
When he took flesh of you, O Theotokos,
And when he had restored the defiled image to its ancient
state,
He suffused it with Divine Beauty.
Therefore, confessing our salvation,
We record it in word and deed (DL 1977:163).

The Incarnation and the liturgical and Sacramental reality to which the Eastern Liturgy points strongly affirms the redeeming presence of the Holy Trinity re-establishing and reorienting the created universe to its original purity and sustaining that "beauty" through participation in the Bread and Wine. The eventfulness of the Eucharist and its significance lies in its transforming potency, the reordering of chaos

¹³ There is no consensus concerning the authorship of the Liturgy of John Chrysostom. The title more correctly refers to the anaphora, the prayer of consecration, which may have been written by Chrysostom. More importantly, the attribution of the Liturgy to John Chrysostom indicates its historical emergence in Byzantine worship. All quotations from *The divine Liturgy* are from: *The Orthodox Liturgy: The divine Liturgy of our Father Among the saints John Chrysostom*. This will be abbreviated DL for further references.

to cosmos, of defiled humanity to its undefiled purity. This healing motion of love fully expressed in the Eucharistic drama of the church effects and constitutes the New Creation and reintroduces the Edenic beauty from which humanity has fallen. This central proclamation draws those gathered into the celebratory eventfulness of their own “Incarnational” reality as children of God, as the Body of Christ, as Church. The drama of the Liturgy represents the intersection of the temporal reality of the church with the eternal joy of and participation in the kingdom of God.

The concept of the “eighth day” is equally significant to the liturgical event. Here, the day, which concludes the historic salvic action of God, inaugurates within the temporal realm, an eternally present reality – an eighth day – a dawn without sunset – the “time” of eschatological fulfilment. To enter into the Liturgy is an affirmation of the intersection of time and the timeless making the kingdom of God both present as the “reality” in which the faithful live on earth. Further, participation in the communion event renders each believer a bearer of Divine Beauty to the fallen world in which he or she exists. The church becomes “the first fruits” of the New Creation, and each member becomes a herald of humanity restored to primal beauty and integrity.

The liturgical life of the Orthodox Church is her life – beginning and culminating in the Eucharistic feast but not limited to the moment of participation in the sacrament. Rather, in Orthodox understanding, all is sacrament, all is receptivity, nourishment, mercy, and grace. The enactment of the Divine Liturgy transcends both sign and symbol, becoming at each moment the actualisation and fulfilment of all that is expressed through corporate worship. In this way, liturgy can be viewed as the context of existence in which every moment and every action contributes a distinct note to the profound harmony of life’s intended sacramentality. Herein, lies the corporal participation of created matter in a perfect expression of its intended purpose – as a revelation of God’s love. In its liturgical context the unique truth and goodness of each object or action coincide in and as beauty first surrendered then offered to God in love and obedience by the faithful.

The Anaphora (the Prayer of Consecration) clearly expresses the church's perception of her Eucharistic and her liturgical life as a detailed examination of its content will demonstrate. The movement of the Anaphora begins with the priest's proclamation of the imperative "Let us stand aright. Let us stand with fear. Let us attend that we may offer the holy Oblation in peace"(OL 1982:10) to which the faithful respond, "A mercy of peace. A sacrifice of praise" acknowledging both God's initiative in the drama of salvation which is first "gift" and the church's adequate response to such grace, a reverential and attentive "sacrifice of Praise."(OL 1982:10) In this liturgical movement it is the Triune God who is worshipped. Although his transcendence and glory have been revealed to the church, Orthodoxy insists that God cannot be reduced to "definition" or experience. The priest's prayer magnifies God in a series of seeming negatives that ultimately constitute a supra-affirmation of God's very nature. He is "the ineffable, inconceivable, the invisible, incomprehensible, ever existing and eternally the same Lord" whose very being surpasses all human concepts and images. Yet it is this God who reveals Himself as Saviour and Lord and to whom the priest sings:

[You] brought us from non-existence into being and when we had fallen away You raised us up again and did not cease to do all things for us until you brought us up to heaven and endowed us with your kingdom which is to come. For all these things we give thanks to you and to your only-begotten Son and to Your Holy Spirit, for all things of which we know and of which we know not, whether manifest or unseen, and we thank you for this Liturgy which you have deigned to accept at our hands, though there stand by you thousands of archangels and hosts of angels, the Cherubim and the Seraphim, six winged, many eyed, who soar aloft, borne on their pinions singing the triumphant hymn, shouting, proclaiming, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory! Hosanna in the Highest (OL 1982:67-68).

It is significant that the Anaphora speaks of God's action on man's behalf as an accomplished fact, the church has been brought from "non-existence into being" and that new being consists of "being brought up to heaven" and endowed with God's kingdom. There is no presumption here, nor is there any suggestion that this new hypostatic reality is the effect of humanity's personal ascent through holiness into

the Divine Presence. Rather, it is gift and the only appropriate response is thanksgiving and joyful participation in this new life which mirrors the beatific reality of Jesus' own character already represented in the third antiphon (the chant of the Beatitudes), representing the full dimensions of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. It is this life that is received in the Communion event.

To enter into the liturgical movement of the church does not suggest a discontinuity with the very real and often dishevelled content of human existence. Rather, Divine Liturgy celebrates the joy inherent in bringing the whole self, the totality of one's being to God and perceiving in that the glorious actuality of "being" in Christ. Each individual, affirmed by Divine reception, is invited to celebrate life with an authentic realism that does not discredit or minimise human weakness but frees the individual from enslavement to it. Through her Liturgy the church invites the believer to "taste and see" the authentic dimensions of the "normal" Christian life in Christ, whose own loving obedience, self-giving and trust express the essential dimensions of holy personhood. This image of God characterised by beauty, as the mutuality of loving surrender - the harmony and consonance of ecstatic communion stands a model for human personhood. In the traditional expressions of Orthodox liturgical life the faithful move with hope and love towards their own transformation into an iconic likeness of the rich, holy and beautiful humanity of her Lord.

The Triune nature of the liturgical movements of the Orthodox Church equally expresses the Primal Beauty of Divine Personhood as it relates to this mutual surrender of each person in love.¹⁴ Initially, the loss of innocence for Adam and Eve and the disfigurement of the primal beauty bestowed on them is expressed in their loss of the relational harmony reflected not only in their attempts to blame, but further in their self-consciousness effecting the foreign experiences of shame and guilt. Ultimately, Adam and Eve lose their ability to regard the otherness of creation with delight and joy and thankful hearts – "self" becomes the arbiter of their perceptions and their ability to choose. At this earliest stage humanity exchanges its God-like

¹⁴ One area of difference between the Orthodox East and the Western Church, Catholic and Protestant, lies in the area of the Holy Trinity. This difference will be discussed in detail in Chapter six.

freedom for the tyranny of necessity. However, within the Trinity God exists as ecstatic relationship. The Father eternally pours out his own fullness into the Son who in turn offers Himself back to the Father in reciprocal motions of love and freedom. Similarly, the Holy Spirit receiving his own uniqueness through the eternal spiration of the Father rhythmically breathes back into the Trinity the essence of his own life and beauty. The Triune life consists, at least in part, in this dynamic motion of mutuality and love, in the eternal dance of responsive joy and delight that constitutes the Trinity's perichoretic nature. Corporately the relational dissonance to which a fallen humanity is subject is overcome in the reception of the Divine nature wherein multiplicity is not dissolved but unified in its participation in the perfect Oneness of Divine Perfection. In the recognition of its own nakedness, in the assertion of self as the primary source of reference, and in the loss of the capacity for relational consonance within the created order, corporately and individually humanity finds itself "barred" from an Edenic celebration of the "otherness" of creation. The eventfulness of the liturgical movement overcomes this human predisposition toward dissonance and "self" not simply by incorporating the individual into a "scripted" perpetuation of the church's historical understanding of herself as the temporal locus of the New Creation, but through the sacramental fulfilment of that identity as communion with God and participation in Divine Beauty.

The Eastern perception of the cosmic proportions of each of her sacramental moments, described most often in terms of fulfilment commonly associated with the eschatological promise, is equally concerned with the common order of human reality. Hence the structure of liturgical movements, of the church building, of liturgical form are expressed in a full sensory manner. Humanity transfigured sacramentally is also invited to participate fully in the new creation, through and in the church's consecration and inclusion of the material forms which signify the created realm in time and space.

If the Old Testament had already begun to sanctify springs, mountains, and stones, the Christian liturgy...undertakes the consecration of the whole world.... The church's liturgy is not simply a copy of the heavenly liturgy but is rather the eruption of the heavenly into history: God descends and sanctifies not only souls but also the whole of

nature and cosmic spaces.... It is man's task to grasp and extend these transcendent measures over human time and space (Evdokimov 1990:120).

It is distinctive of Orthodox worship to recognise that in the coming of Christ and the in-breaking of the kingdom of God, time is included in the church's proclamation of the Gospel. Time is sanctified, made holy, drawn in to the eschatological vision but is not negated by it. The manifestation of the kingdom takes place fully in the dimensions of an authentic and historic milieu. There is no absurd negation of the value and glory of the physical realm within the Tradition. Herein, the "stuff" of human and physical existence, space, time, form, and matter are fully included in Orthodox expressions of the faith wherein they too, just as humanity, are reinvested with their primal significance. The physicality of the created order is fully a symbol of the Divine Intention for it. Schmemmann expresses this recognition of sacramental fulfilment in his discussion of the forms of sign and symbol as they relate to the sacramental significance of all that constitutes the physical creation (1988b:139-140).

The Fathers of the church do not recognise any opposition between sign, symbol, images and mysteries as they relate to Orthodox theology and reality. When the Fathers, unlike later Western writers, refer to "symbolon" they are not referring to vague or imprecise *images* representing in some way the absence of the reality. On the contrary, the "symbol" is the key to sacrament:

...because sacrament is in continuity with the symbolical structure of the world in which "omens...creature *sensibiles sunt signa rerum sacrum*."¹⁵ And the world is symbolical – *signum rei sacrae* – in virtue of its being created by God; to be "symbolical" belongs thus to its ontology, the symbol being not only a way to perceive and understand reality, a means of cognition, but also means a participation. It is then the natural symbolism of the world – one can almost say its "sacramentality" – which makes the sacrament possible and constitutes the key to its understanding and apprehension. If the Christian sacrament is unique, it is not in the sense of being a miraculous exception to the natural order of things created by God and "proclaiming his glory." Its absolute newness is not in its ontology as sacrament but in the specific *res* which it "symbolises," i.e. reveals, manifests, and communicates – which is Christ and his kingdom. But

¹⁵ "all sensible creatures are signs of the sacred."

even this absolute newness is to be understood in terms not of total discontinuity but in those of fulfilment.

The *mysterion* of Christ reveals and fulfils the ultimate meaning and destiny of the world itself. Therefore, the institution of sacrament by Christ... is not the creation ex nihilo of the “sacramentality” itself, of the sacrament as means of cognition and participation. In the words of Christ, “do this in remembrance of me,” the this (meal, thanksgiving, breaking of bread) is already “sacramental” The institution means that by being referred to Christ, “filled” with Christ, the symbol is fulfilled and becomes sacrament (Schmemmann 1988b:139-140).¹⁶

It is an astounding pronouncement on the part of the liturgical Tradition of the Eastern Church that creation exists as sacrament fulfilled through its participation in Christ, and, in being “filled” with Christ, “is re-established in its in ancient dignity and united to Divine Beauty.” In this way creation resounds once again with the voice of God declaring “it is good,” “it is beautiful.”

Writing of the Orthodox significance of iconography, Archimandrite Vasileios writes:

Time and nature are made new: worldly space is transfigured; perspective that puts man in the position of an outside observer no longer exists. The believer, the pilgrim, is a guest at the Wedding. He is inside, and sees the whole world from the inside. History is interpreted differently: the events of the Divine Economy are not past and closed, but present and active. They embrace us, they save us. What we have in the icon is not a neutral, faithful historical representation, but a dynamic liturgical transformation. In iconography, the events of salvation are not interpreted historically but expressed mystically and embodied liturgically; they interpenetrate with one another. They become a witness to the different way of life which has broken through the bounds set by corruption. They invite us to a spiritual banquet, here. Now (Vasileios 1984:82).

¹⁶ Cf. Garcia-Rivera, Alejandro (1999: 39-63) who underlines the centrality of “sign” to both spiritual life and the life of a culture in general. The power of the “sign” or “symbol” is also emphasised by Bernard Lonergan (1990: 216) wherein he supports the notion that “symbol” operates at a level deeper than contradiction. – Lonergan concurring with Eliade, suggests that “images by themselves constitute a language that is independent of words.”

Recognising this perception of the reclamation of the primal beauty and perfection of the cosmos, iconography becomes a distinctive element of Eastern Christian expression, not simply as decoration, but consistent with Eastern theology, as a symbolic and visual articulation of the grand theme of Divine Presence in all its cosmic proportions. The recognition of the suitability of iconography to the church was not easily won. The period of the Iconoclast Controversy in the eighth century was one of great passion and debate centring on essential Christological questions concerning the Incarnation itself. In 745 a theologically refined objection to the use of icons arose in the church which opened a debate on the nature of Christ. Because Christ is One hypostasis with two distinct and unconfused natures, the circumscription of Christ implies, it was charged, a co-circumscription of Divinity. While to separate the circumscribed Christ from his divinity would be a repetition of the Nestorian Heresy. In his refutation of this charge, Theodore the Studite asserts that the church must acknowledge that the incomprehensible Divinity has been comprehended in Bethlehem, that the invisible has become visible, that the impassable One has suffered. The properties of the uncircumscribable pertain to Christ's divinity, the circumscribable to his manhood. Christ then, is circumscribable in his humanity while uncircumscribable in his divinity. Because the one hypostasis contains both natures unconfused, the iconoclasts must either acknowledge the circumscribable or abandon the tangible, visible reality of the Incarnation itself. This admission, Theodore the Studite asserts, would be the "height of impiety." Theodore's conclusion is significant to a theology of beauty: Jesus represents God's chosen "form" to lead humanity to the contemplation and worship of the One God (Theodore the Studite 1981:24).¹⁷ Dealing with each proposition put forward by the iconoclasts, Theodore comes to the question, neo-platonic in origin, which attempts to assert the superiority of "spirit over matter." Theodore rebuts that such a view demonstrates an

¹⁷ See *God's Human Face: The Christ Icon*, (Schonborn 1994) and *On Holy Icons* (Theodore the Studite 1981) for a complete analysis of the Iconoclast Controversy. The significant conclusion of the church during this period is the appropriateness of the "form" of Christ as an expression of Divinity and humanity which will resurface in later articulations of the place of beauty in the church.

inversion of values. Rather, than viewing Christ's reception of a material body as a degradation of the Lord, it is more correctly appreciated as the "glorification" of matter that Christ, who has created the material world should grace it with the mystery of his presence (Theodore the Studite 1981:29). The significance of "form" to a theology of beauty cannot be underestimated – Christ as the express *image* of the Father – visits on the created realm the fullness of holy perfection and circumscribes "Beauty" in its highest and holiest form (cf. von Balthasar 1984; Hutchins 1952).

Iconography and Beauty

The significance of visual artistic expressions of Christ and the saints to Eastern worship is not marginal and constitutes a liturgical expression of the life of the Orthodox Church. More accurately, these holy "images" attest visually to the church's faith in the abiding presence of Christ her Lord, to her eschatological self-understanding as the locus of that presence within the temporal realm. Ultimately iconography confirms Orthodoxy's unshakeable confidence in God's holy intention to restore the broken image of humanity to the beatific likeness of Christ Himself, and creation to its own beatific integrity. That human nature finds its fullness in its participation in the Divine nature is a constant and recurring theme throughout Eastern Christendom and is expressed substantially in the presence of icons in the liturgical life of the church. To view iconography simply as a decorative adjunct to both Church and home would be a significant error; iconography is a natural and consistent extension of the vision of the truth, goodness and beauty inherent throughout the tradition.

As is the case with all Eastern Christian tradition, iconography represents the restoration of the created realm to its original beauty. Hence iconographic depictions of Christ, the saints and those events depicting scriptural revelation are expressed with an uncommon grandeur and power utilising a methodology thoroughly designed to capture the "inner vision" of the Orthodox understanding of reality brought to

fulfilment in and through Christ. Hence it is not to be expected that iconography will present a simple mimicry of the natural world. Rather, its intent is to enter and reflect the depth of God present and alive in the world. It is spiritual vision, “true” vision to which the Icon opens the believer. Hence the Icon is fully consistent with the Eastern understanding of Sacrament – iconography becomes for each person – an entrance into the contemplative realm of silent communion with the immediate presence of the Holy Trinity. Authentic iconography is fully the product of prayer, revelation and inspiration – it is a holy act. The prayer of the iconographer reflects his or her dependence on God’s interaction with the very act of painting.

O Divine Master of all that exists, enlighten and direct the Soul, heart and mind of your servant; guide my hands so that I might portray worthily and perfectly Your image, that of your holy Mother and of all the saints, for the glory, joy and for the beautification of your holy Church (Aiden 1993:4).

Whereas icons represent original art within the tradition, they do not represent the iconographer’s personal vision. Significantly, iconography from its earliest expressions to the present rely on well defined categories of symbols and colour which speak clearly of the central themes of the object under consideration. The Icon is not open to a “free” interpretation by either painter or observer but is specific in its detail and its intention which are conveyed by “common symbols” that penetrate the human heart and speak. In this respect we are reminded of Rahner’s concern regarding the loss of a sense of the “primal word” in contemporary culture a condition which has not occurred in the Eastern Church. Further iconography retains its own vision of perspective and dimensionality, from which the iconographer will not depart. Fully, iconography is the visual articulation of Orthodox spirituality and not simply a peripheral extension of it. The profound understanding of iconography as “sacramental” representation of the reality of the redeemed cosmos requires that the guard of “tradition” be placed around the entire artistic endeavour. This protection is fully provided for in the monastic setting which is primarily concerned not only with guarding and prescribing artistic methodology but, with maintaining the traditions whereby the

sacramental “*image*” of Christ is reproduced in the life of the disciple him or herself. The Russian Council of Moscow in 1551 prescribed, among other things, the character expected of the iconographer which coincides with the sacred intention of the Icon itself.¹⁸

The painter of icons must be humble, gentle and pious, avoiding immoral conversation and mundane scurrility; he must be neither quarrelsome nor envious of others, neither a drunkard nor a thief; he must practice both spiritual and corporal purity (Aiden 1993:4).

Monasticism

Monasticism serves to ensure that personal holiness precedes the artistic act. Of equal importance, in the Orthodox East, monasticism provides the genesis of the entire spiritual tradition of the church. The specific context of the monastery well serves to foster holiness within its confines and hence, monastics are highly respected commentators of the spiritual life – they, among the believers, are considered masters and mistresses of the art of holiness. Hence monastic influence disseminates throughout the Eastern Christian world through writings on all aspects of spirituality and the ascent to holiness.

In this context it becomes evident that the “telos” of the Christian life as the restoration of the primal image of humanity and union with God to which Orthodox spirituality points is not an immediate experiential reality for the faithful. The *telos* of the spiritual life requires its *scopos* – its own methodology leading the disciple into the acquisition of that “spiritual sense” which allows his or her encounter with God to become an experiential reality. A reality beyond articulation and understanding, but none the less, fully real and an experience of which the disciple is cognitively aware.

¹⁸ See Chapter one. It is also of interest to note that the Icon is not regarded strictly as a painting but as a written witness to the church. The “primal word” is concretised in the artistic expression of the Icon

Asceticism

The “scopos” of Orthodox spirituality alluded to above, is the ascetic life most fully expressed as monasticism.¹⁹ It is the writings of the early monastics that introduce a seeming duality into Orthodox thought. On the one hand, the beauty of creation is a theme repeated again and again in Eastern thought. The perfect order of the cosmos as well as the harmony and intention of the physical world are reverentially acknowledged by the monastic. The clarity of this perception is commonly expressed in terms of illumination and revelation. On the other hand, monasticism places an equal emphasis on the profound incomprehensibility of God and the need for the individual to divest him or herself of all intellectual preconceptions of the Divine essence. The disciple is exhorted to throw off all dependence on and attraction to the physical realm in order to enter fully into a “dazzling darkness” and experience the presence of God. Hence, in these ascetic writings we are faced with the inescapable presence of neo-Platonism which, in its most extreme forms, severely denigrates the physical realm and posits an untenable division between physical and spiritual reality. As this tendency became apparent to the early church, such as in the work of Origen, it is significant that the official church ultimately withdrew its approval of “severe asceticism” in its concern to underline and preserve the value of the physical realm.

Monastic literature exists that occupies a milder middle ground however, and makes clear that both concepts, those which uphold the glory of the created order and those that insist on an ascetic withdrawal from the attractions of the world are both perfectly consistent one with the other. Stithatos, monk and biographer of Symeon the New Theologian writes:

A soul that disdains everything unspiritual and that is wholly wounded by love for God undergoes a strange Divine ecstasy. Having clearly grasped the inner nature and essence of created beings, as well the upshot of matters human, it cannot bear to be imprisoned and circumscribed by anything. On the contrary, surpassing its own

¹⁹ A Historical analysis of the history of the formation of monastic life can be found in *The Desert and the City* (Gannon and Traub 1969).

limitations, rebelling against the fetters of the senses and transcending all creatureliness, it penetrates the Divine darkness of theology in unutterable silence and – to the degree that grace permits it perceives in the intellectual light of inexpressible wisdom the beauty of Him who truly is. Reverentially entering ever more deeply into intellectual contemplation of that beauty, it savours, in loving awe, the fruits of immortality- the vision of the Divine. Never withdrawing from these back into itself, it is able to express perfectly their magnificence and glory. Activated, as it were, in a strange way by the Spirit, it experiences this admirable passion in unspeakable joy and silence; yet how it is activated, or what it is that impels it, and is seen by it, and secretly communicates to it unutterable mysteries, it cannot explain (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware 1995:155).

This passage from the *Philokalia* (literally, lover of beauty) illuminates two important aspects of the call to asceticism. First it is the heart's answer to the "wounding of love." Desire for God compels a freely chosen life that seeks nothing but to be satisfied by Love itself. Thus, tendencies toward sin that so cripple the soul's ability to unite with God are experienced as true enemies of the soul. It is not "evil" in matter or the senses themselves that inhibit union with God, but the disciple's own innate responses to them which prevents the soul's union. The disciple brought to a realisation of the spontaneous motions of his or her attraction to that which is "less" than God, willingly chooses to rehabilitate that very spontaneity in order to allow the heart to move freely toward the object of its love. It is not primarily the "senses" that fetter the progress of the soul but the disciples crippling dependence on them. The soul cannot bear to be "circumscribed" by the limitations of the purely physical realm when it has tasted the "savour" of the spiritual. Simply, the intellect or rational capacity which humanity enjoys is for the individual a vehicle of instrumentality, a notion clearly expressed by Gregory of Nyssa and consistent with Eastern Christian anthropology:

Man's nature adapts itself to the direction of reason, and it is susceptible of whatever form it is inclined to by the movement of free will. Under the passion of anger, it becomes angry; when overwhelmed by concupiscence, it is dissolved in pleasure. And so whatever inclination there may be towards cowardice or fear or any of the other passions, our human nature similarly receives the forms of each of

them. Contrariwise, if it takes unto itself the virtue of fortitude, purity, peace, resistance to anger or grief, courage, imperturbability, and the like, lulling itself into a state of tranquillity it impresses the form of each of these virtues upon the structure of the soul...so it is that the soul that has been purified by the Word and has put off all sin, receives within itself the circular form of the Sun and shines now with this reflected light. Hence the Word says to her: You have become fair because you have come near to my light, and by this closeness to me you have attracted this participation in beauty (Musurillo 1979:170-171).

Rationally, the individual chooses to move toward the object of his or her desire – for good or ill. Hence the ascetic life represents a conscious effort to re-orient the complex of desires and passions which assault the fallen human heart and which if left unchallenged, dominate the disciples' freedom to choose those actions which are compatible with the Divine *image of God*. Asceticism is, for the disciple, a process of liberation from the dictates of his or her inordinate dependency on self-gratification in all its forms.

Further, Stithatos' passage indicates that the goal toward which the ascetic life moves is not one free of affective content. It is in essence an experiential encounter with God that, if beyond verbal description and thus "unspeakable and silent," is not an empty silence but one full of the Divine Presence, savoured in "awe and joy." Hence descriptions of the ascetic or monastic life which often stress aspects of severe self-denial and imply a disdain for the natural world, presume on the part of the disciple, an a priori understanding of the positive value of nature that is also inherent in the process of spiritual growth. This passage suggests, not a movement from physical evil to spiritual good, but is more precisely understood as a passage from physical "good" to spiritual "best."

The methodology prescribed for those who would seek and strive after union with God posits two specific motions of the soul: repentance and prayer, which in essence are not separate motions but coinhere as a life focussed on the Lord and given over to him. Repentance in this instance reflects a permanent orientation of the

heart turned toward God, which the disciple expresses in his or her willingness to through off all that is not pleasing to him.

The rigours of the ascetic life – fasting, prayer, self-denial all lead not to a disdain for the created realm but to the reclamation of the beauty inherent in a well ordered life. It is the gift of freedom which allows the disciple, once again, the power to choose right action over those which are compelled by inordinate passion and desire for self-satisfaction. Creation, rather than being dismissed, is in the vision of the disciple elevated to its true value – “the soul which has been perfectly illuminated by that indescribable beauty of the luminous glory of the face of Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit...is all eye, all light, all face” (Aiden 1993:16). The beauty of creation is duly perceived as the holy gift that it is. However, as Gregory of Nyssa and others in the tradition will insist, the beauty of God reflected in the created cosmos is as nothing compared to the transcending and unchanging beauty of Beauty Himself. Hence, the journey toward contemplative prayer is one that embraces the beauty of creation – and in fact constitutes a re-education of human sensibilities in Christ.

The Contemplative Ideal

Deification

The ultimate goal of the monastic life is understood as deification or *theosis*. Rarely encountered in Western thought, deification is that profound state of union with God and a participation in him to which all Eastern Christian spirituality points. It is holiness incarnate in the lives of those who have entered into the depth of the Divine presence and there behold the beauty of the Lord and are conformed to the humble dignity manifest in the Divine Life of the Triune God himself. Deification is the fruit of contemplative union and ultimately the purpose for which humanity was created and toward which full redemption moves (2 Peter 1:3-4).

The Eastern Church prescribes no single model for the contemplative life. Rather, all share the same goal – to bring the mind into the heart – thus integrating the individual and reordering his or her life to its proper dignity. In this instance, the

heart is understood in its Hebrew sense as the “inner core” of an individual who is an integrated creature of both flesh and spirit.

The threefold contemplative scheme of *praktiki*, *physiki*, and *theologia* suggested by Origen, modified by Evagrius and formally developed by Maximus the Confessor clarifies the sequential motions of the “heart’s” progress towards its goal of union with God. This scheme delineates three stages in the contemplative life – separated for the sake of clarity – but which in practice will not constitute definite rungs on a spiritual ladder. The Eastern view of spirituality recognising the freedom of God to manifest and reveal himself as he chooses requires that the disciple understand that the prescribed steps will be fluid and often overlapping. Keeping this proviso in mind, Maximus’ three stages, *praktiki*, *physiki*, and *theologia* provide a logical framework in which to demonstrate the place given to holiness, beauty and contemplation in the spirituality of the Eastern Church.

The initial stage of the spiritual life begins with *praktiki* – the practice of virtue. As discussed earlier, true repentance and the resolve to conform one’s life to the will of God characterise this early stage. It is, for the disciple, a willing embrace of the dimensions of life articulated in the Sermon on the Mount and which for the monastic is radicalised in a literal adoption of Christ’s words, “If you would be perfect....”(Matt. 19:21). *Praktiki* is the fundamental call to obedience and to the development of the habit of virtue. The disciple on the way to spiritual maturity is urged by the Lord, concerning the various obstacles to the development of virtue, to “Get up, take up your pallet and walk. ”

The Lord urges him to take his mind from the love of pleasures which dominate him, to take up his body on the shoulders of the virtues and to return home, to heaven.... For it is good that what is worse be raised up to the better on the shoulders of the practice of virtue rather than for the better to be carried to the worse through the ease of the love of pleasure. The one who sincerely embraces the evangelical life has cut off from himself the beginning and the end of evil and pursues in word and deed every virtue. He offers the sacrifice of praise and confession in having freed himself from every burden of the activity of the passions and is now free in his mind from the struggle against them. Now he has only an insatiable happiness which nourishes the soul with the hope of the blessings to come (Berthold 1985:143).

The spirit of Maximus' insistence on virtue is precisely that of the Beatitude, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." The practice of virtue constitutes for the disciple the "gymnasium" of the spiritual life and the development of those habits of virtue so essential for moral and spiritual growth. Life then, will ensue as one constantly calling out for a deeper and deeper repentance as the disciple moves from the renunciation of obvious sin to sin in its most subtle forms. At this first stage of the movement toward contemplation, the disciple is introduced to the mystery of his own being. The believer progressively discovers both the wonder and reality of his or her own created nature. Early on the disciple is confronted by his or her innate predisposition to be both drawn toward the perfection of love of God, and away from that goal by the assault of his or her passions and personal desires. This primary stage then introduces the disciple to his or her potential to reclaim the lost *image of God* in the soul by reorienting the will towards a preference for the good effected by an active denial of the temptations toward self gratification and sin. Through these first movements toward "purity" of body, mind and soul the disciple begins to experience a degree of freedom from tendencies towards self-indulgence and self-satisfaction.

This progress moves the disciple into the second stage, *physiki*, the contemplation of the natural world. The heart, now actively conforming itself to the will of God is free to enjoy the beauty of creation appropriately recognising it as God's gift, imparting to the disciple a sense of reverence, thanksgiving and awe. Thus, the created realm becomes a source of natural contemplation where each object speaks clearly of its uniqueness and glory. The mystery of "self" revealed in God compels the disciple to contemplate the natural glories of creation itself. "Deep calls to deep" - the mystery of his or her own personhood now recognised and appreciated by the disciple awakens the individual to the mystery of all that God has created. In the contemplation of nature the disciple's eyes are open to the glorious horizon of created beauty in the material world. This second stage, *physiki* constitutes an essential bridge between the ascetic goal of purity of heart and the final goal of union with God. It is, states Gregory of Nyssa, in "learning how to see things properly that we first begin to be enchanted by the beauty of God." This emphasis on *physiki*

awakens in the disciple the insatiable hunger for God that will lead to the transcendent contemplation of God himself in the final stage of *theologia*.

The one who gazes on the physical universe and perceives the wisdom which is reflected in the beauty of created realities, can reason from the visible to the invisible beauty, the source of wisdom, whose influence established the nature of all reality (Berthold 1985:96).

Similarly, Bychkov quoting John Climacus writes:

...the aim to which the ascetic aspires is to perceive every creature in its first created, victorious beauty. The Holy Spirit reveals Himself in the ability to see the beauty of creation. To always see the beauty in everything would mean 'to resurrect before the general resurrection' would mean to anticipate the final Revelation... (Bychkov 1993:36).

It is this final stage of contemplative growth, *theologia*, that constitutes the goal of the spiritual life. Herein God is encountered beyond all categories of human intelligibility and beyond all powers of description – God and humanity come face to face. This constitutes the “harvest of harvest,” “the circumcision of the heart in spirit” - the complete stripping away of all that is less than God himself, and opening the heart of the disciple to receive him who, beyond all conceptualisation and articulation is experienced as the One Who Is. According to Maximus, through this gracious action of the Spirit, the disciple finds that he or she has crossed by comprehension all the ground of what is subject

to nature and to time. He is transported to the mystical contemplation of the immortal ages, and in an unknowable manner he makes Sabbath in his mind in leaving behind and totally surpassing being. The one who has become worthy of the eighth day is risen from the dead, that is, for what is less than God: sensible and intelligible things, words, and thoughts; and he lives the blessed life of God, who alone is said to be and is in very truth the Life, in such a way that he becomes himself God by deification (Berthold 1985:138).

Bychkov continues:

Thus the monastic endeavour should be crowned by the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens and transforms man spiritually and physically, makes him beautiful and capable of perceiving beauty. 'The Spirit-bearing person is beautiful...and twice beautiful. He is beautiful objectively, as an object of contemplation for those around him; he is also beautiful subjectively as the focus of a new, purified contemplation of what surrounds him' (Bychkov 1993:36).

The goal of deification then is not instantaneous but the result of a progressive growth in patience and holiness imparted by the Holy Spirit. It is fully the grace of God meeting the soul that has first been opened by an insatiable desire for God on which all attention has been fixed. The monastic life, which describes most fully the motions of the soul toward holiness, is also the context which frees the soul from all necessity allowing it to press forward with unrelenting resolve to attain the goal at hand. By choice and vocation, the monastic has given up all in a quest for perfection.

The vowed life is for the monastic, an intensification of the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. His or her chosen withdrawal from the world permits the monastic to focus on holiness within a perfectly and intentionally designed environment that is not available to those outside the confines of the monastery. Within the Eastern Christian context, the laity finds itself in many ways excluded from the *scopos* that monasticism articulates as the way to move toward the goal of deification.

The separation however is not a complete one. Specifically, for the lay individual the church provides the definite rhythm of Orthodox life with its seasons of fasting and of prayer coupled with the prominence of its own theology of the sanctified nature of time. Further, the profound place of Iconography in the church's tradition and ultimately her constant insistence on the sacramental presence of the Holy Trinity undergirding and fashioning every aspect of life are elements of Eastern spirituality in which the laity is encouraged to explore and participate. Yet it remains for the laity to develop an ascetic lifestyle consistent with its own condition and circumstance a task for which monastic spiritual literature offers little assistance. The laity is not entirely abandoned to the work of adapting the wisdom of monasticism to the context of its particular life; however it is certainly presented with a spiritual challenge that monasticism does not encounter and to which it does not address itself. As such it is

accurate to suggest that in Orthodox thought there exists an abyss between “the perfect life” of the monastic and the more “worldly” life of the lay person.

The vision of beauty in Orthodox thought and theology then, glorious though it is, is not without its difficulties which will be examined when discussing the loss of beauty as a vital aspect of Christian concern and experience. However, despite difficulties that the Eastern understanding of beauty and the spiritual life may present, the fact remains that within the Eastern Church, the glorious vision of God and his kingdom continues to assert itself – dominating its art, its architecture, and the liturgical structure of its life. When both the Fathers of the church and contemporary Orthodox theologians articulate the genius of Christian belief, their writings swell to descriptive crescendos in an attempt to circumscribe the vision of beauty with which Orthodoxy fully allies herself. Further, in the East there are no attempts to justify the use of “beauty” either as a word or concept. Beauty exists and is perceived most fully as a gift of God, a mirror of God, as his own radiance and splendour poured out and offered to his creatures with deep, infinite and abiding love.

ROMAN WEST

Common Heritage

As mentioned earlier, until the eleventh century the Christian church could with integrity recite the words of the Nicene Creed, calling herself “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.” This expansive era of Christian unity, constituting the face which Christianity presented to the world, was also the period during which the church was challenged to define herself doctrinally and thus guard herself from the encroachment of cultural and philosophical systems that threatened her from both within and without. Although the West began much earlier in her tradition to adapt a different emphasis in her proclamation of the Gospel than the Eastern Church, it is not until approximately 1050 that schism officially disrupted the unity of the church. Thus, it is not to be expected that the Roman church would find difficulty in the concept of beauty as it is expressed in Eastern Christianity. Hence, in that literature which discusses the spiritual life and progress toward God, the concept of beauty is

used in a manner similar to that of the East. Theological constructions, determined by both early church councils and Church Fathers, are foundational to Roman Catholic theology and constitute the common heritage of both expressions of the faith. Thus the influence of John Scotus Eruigena's aesthetic perception of reality, written in the seventh century, suggesting that the created world is a revelation and nature itself a theophany alive with symbols and Divine disclosure, together with the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, strongly impress themselves on later medieval perceptions of beauty particularly those of Thomas Aquinas (Eco 1988:24-25).²⁰

Divergence will be seen however, in the Christocentric emphasis of the Western Church. Here, the Eastern focus on the unknowability of God - his ineffable and transcendent nature - which tends to give prominence to spiritual beauty, is not displaced in the West but is harmonised with an emphasis on the humanity of Christ and its particular contribution to the spiritual journey.

As a Western expression of Christianity emerges as the Roman Church, it is necessary to recognise that the Continent itself undergoes massive changes culturally, socially and spiritually. Although it is necessary to elucidate the shifts in thought in a linear fashion the profound movements of social, cultural and religious changes take place concurrently. Hence, throughout, a significant degree of interpenetration occurs between the "secular" world and the "church" which will have a profound impact on the place of "beauty" in both worlds.

The Human Face of Christ

The growing Christocentric emphases in the Western church gives greater prominence to and provides a deeper focus on the historic Christ and the material world as the locus of God's continuing interaction with creation. These differences in focus between East and West, it must be stated, are not opposed one to the other. Both are able to incorporate the other's emphasis without doing theological damage to their own understanding of God and their articulation of that understanding.

²⁰ The influence of John Scotus Erigena on the Church's understanding of the contemplative life is fully explicated by Bernard McGinn (1994:80-118).

However, as each explicates reality in a manner consistent with their dominant emphasis- the glorified Christ in the East or the historical and trans-historical Christ in the West - certain aspects of beauty absent in one will be seen in the other.

Both traditions share the understanding that God in his essence transcends all categories of human intellection. Hence the “dazzling darkness” of God that reappears in the Orthodox construction of theology is not absent from theology in the West and is found in the writings of Augustine, St. John of the Cross, of Teresa of Avila in their various discourses; while for this reason Aquinas proposes the use of “analogy” when speaking of God (Hutchins 1952). Similarly, the East has not ignored the physicality of the Incarnation and its profound significance to God’s self-revelation. Specifically, the works of Irenaeus and Athanasius in their defences against Gnostic intrusions into Christian theology affirm the serious and essential nature of the Incarnation to the process of salvation. Later, in the West, the church encounters the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and that of Bonaventure (1221-1274) giving prominence to the importance of the material realm in God’s self-revelation. Later, in the work of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the church is presented with an Incarnational spirituality that encourages the disciple to use both Scripture and imagination as valuable tools in their progress towards union with God. As suggested above, this difference in perspective devolves from the manner in which the Incarnation is presented in those writings that deal with the development of the spiritual life. Particularly the manner in which the church explicates the continuing hypostatic union of the Divine and human nature of Christ will propel both expressions of the church in opposite but complementary directions.²¹

Paradox of the Redeemed Life

In the Orthodox East an emphasis is found on the glorified Lord, who in his birth, death and resurrection, has carried humanity into the very heart of Trinitarian

²¹ The Church’s understanding of the Trinity will be discussed in greater detail later. At this particular juncture it is important to recognise that the Eastern construction has led to a focus on the glorified Lord while in the West, the human/historical person of the Son has enjoyed prominence.

life. Because the Incarnation does not constitute an *essential* change in the nature of God the Son, it serves to elevate the faithful to a place of surpassing dignity. “God became man so that man might become God”(On the Incarnation ;83) or, as a Christmas hymn of the church insists: “Sharing wholly in our poverty, thou hast made Divine our earthly nature through thy union with it and participation in it” (Ware 1986:98). Hence, the dominant emphasis is on the glorified life of the church now present on earth as the first fruits of the New Creation. Although this construction is consistent with the Incarnation and with the truth concerning the reality of human life in Christ that is shared by both East and West a difficulty does arise. As von Balthasar (1982:17-34) suggests, no church pronouncement concerning “beauty” will have a particular relevance to the ordinary religious believer, if it is in any way detached from the normal or average scope of human activity. Precisely at this point the Christian is confronted with the central paradox of redeemed life – the continuing effects of a fallen creation on one’s existence despite the reality of the “risen life” imparted to the believer through his or her incorporation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Regardless of the transcendent reality to which they point, the descriptive contours of articulations concerning the “new life” in Christ presented in Eastern thought lead, at best, to a theology of beauty which has little impact on the day to day life of the believer. To limited human understanding it appears that the East, with its insistence on the present taken up and radically transformed in the theology of the Eighth day, exalts the spiritual over the actual or temporal reality with which the individual is confronted. Such an emphasis suggests an inherent duality at the heart of the Christian message – the rupture of body and spirit, the material world and the heavenly kingdom.

However, it is not the nature of faith to resolve paradox but to exist in its midst. It is precisely faith which apprehends mystery and opens the believer to the motions of the Holy Spirit illuminating the mind and revealing the essential truth inherent in opposing conditions such of immanence and transcendence. Thus, the proclamation of the Eastern Church fully reflects the Truth and the sacramental nature of reality

into which the believer has been incorporated nor is it a reality questioned by the Roman West.

It is, however, precisely in this Neo-Platonic scheme found in the early works of theologians such as Origen, Augustine, Gregory et.al., leading to an emphasis on the glorious and cosmic proportions of the Incarnation, which open the way to error if left unmediated by an attendant theology of matter and form. Specifically, Neo-Platonism leads Christendom to the errors of Gnosticism and of Arianism positing the inferiority of the Son to the Father – based on the uncreated nature of God and the nature of Christ as begotten of the Father. The problem is compounded by the further emphasis on the radical transcendence of God and the limitations of human intellection in knowing him. Yet it was not the church's intention to relegate the physical realm and the substantial physicality of Christ to a place of secondary importance in the witness of the church.

In the fourth century Athanasius introduced an Incarnational spirituality to the church which, without minimising the cosmic proportions of the Incarnation refocused attention on the figure of Jesus himself as Image of the Father. For Athanasius, in the Incarnation,

[God] sojourns here as man, taking to himself a body like the others, and from things of earth, that is by the works of his body (he teaches them) so that they who would not know him from his providence and rule over all things, may even from the works done by his actual body know the Word of God which is in the body and through him the Father (*On the Incarnation*, :23).

Jesus, therefore, fully the image of the Father, fully God himself, as well as fully man becomes an adequate model for humanity and the appropriate object of human contemplation and love. Further, it is the sensory nature of humanity that allows it to recognise in Christ the perfection of the Father as well as the perfection of humanity. For the Christian, to become like Christ in imitation of him is a worthy and necessary goal of the spiritual life. Nor does the rehabilitation of the Divine Image through the contemplation of Christ in the world effect a transformation that is external to the human heart. It is precisely through the imagination taken up and illumined by the Holy Spirit that humanity's heart is rekindled toward God and drawn forward into its

own participation in the Holy Trinity (Cf. Garcia-Rivera 1999). Without minimising the transcendence of the Holy Trinity, Athanasius reaffirms the Divine condescension that in love has entered the created world in a manner that is appropriate to the human object of God's love. However, he insists:

While present in the whole of Creation, he is at once distinct in being from the universe and present in all things by his power, - giving order to all things, and over all and in all revealing his own providence and giving life to each thing and all things, including the whole without being included, but being in his own Father alone wholly and in every respect, thus even while present in a human body and himself quickening it, he was, without inconsistency, quickening the universe as well, and was in every process of nature, and was outside the whole, and while known from the body of his works he was none the less manifest from the working of the universe itself (*On the Incarnation* :26).

This introduction of an incarnate spirituality will account, in part for the Western church's emphasis on the human face of Christ – on his love, his actions, his suffering and on his companioning of a fallen humanity. And as the “one in whom the fullness of God dwells” the Son circumscribes within the physical realm the beauty of the Father (Col. 1:19). This Incarnational spirituality allows the individual to recognise the beauty of God in the face of Jesus thus freeing the concept of beauty from the realm of the purely spiritual. Neither is Athanasius introducing a “new” thought to the church's understanding but echoes the voice of Irenaeus who, countering the claim of the Gnostics in the second century, insisted that all things were made by the Word and adorned with Wisdom, that matter is good and finally that God is indeed revealed through his “two hands” the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the most obvious place that the difference between East and West is felt is that which exists between the Orthodox goal of *apatheia* and the Western goal of abandonment to God. Both *apatheia* and abandonment, terminate in the contemplative “vision” of God and hence are significant to a “theology of beauty.”

The former goal recognises that God the utterly unknowable, uncreated, and as the Transcendent One, is in the fullness of his essence, impassable – unmoved by the vicissitudes of passions and emotion. To conform oneself to the nature of God and to

Christ himself as glorified Lord, is to allow oneself to achieve a similar degree of *apatheia* – and find in the domination of one’s passions, the freedom to love and serve God with singular focus. To disarm one’s tendencies toward passion and emotion implies conforming one’s body, mind and spirit to a rigorous self-denying exercise of the will. In achieving “*apatheia*” the disciple achieves the essential “purity of heart” which opens the way to the full experiences of contemplative prayer and an encounter with the “uncreated light” of God.

Negatively however, the intense focus on *apatheia* as a means to achieve or recover some degree of God-likeness also implies the notion that God himself is entirely free and unencumbered by affective motions in his own Being. A simple syllogism is suggested: God does not ‘feel’; Jesus Christ is both God and man therefore Jesus must only ‘feel’ in his humanity (for the duration of his incarnate life) and not in his Divinity (for the eternal duration of his risen life). Hence those human predispositions that inhere in humanity’s affective nature expressed in the constellations of “feelings” to which human nature is subject bear no likeness to the Divine nature. Unless this type of linear reasoning is aggressively balanced by an emphasis on the love of God and the suffering love of God in particular, the believer is left, save in the most spiritual manner, alone in his sufferings and pain – alone in an unfriendly universe. As Ware (1986:100) writes concerning Christ’s willingness to share fully in the human condition as the mode of his redemptive work:

...this notion of salvation as sharing implies – although many have been reluctant to say this openly - that Christ assumed not just unfallen but fallen human nature....Christ lives out his life on earth under the conditions of the fall. He is not himself a sinful person, but in his solidarity with fallen man he accepts to the full the consequences of Adam’s sin. He accepts to the full not only the physical consequences, such as weariness, bodily pain, and eventually the separation of body and soul in death. He accepts also the moral consequences, the loneliness, the alienation, the inward conflict.

Further, it might be added, in his resurrection Jesus carries the fullness of his human experience into the Divine Trinity – not just remembering his human existence but in his continuing hypostatic union as God and man. In the resurrection, humanity itself is

drawn into the life of the Holy Trinity, with the Risen Lord through the Holy Spirit, who thus remains beyond time and in time as the eternal convergence of heaven and earth. Because Christ remains both God and Man, and the Spirit continues to enter the realm of created existence, it does not violate the eternal and transcendent nature of God to acknowledge Divine affectivity and the suffering to which that leads. The refusal of some to acknowledge the suffering of God to which Ware alludes has a practical consequence concerning our present reality: a conception of God who no longer suffers with and for humanity.

The Roman understanding that one experiences true freedom in his or her abandonment of self to God requires the same degree of obedient submission to God's will and the exercise of self-discipline leading to "purity of heart," as the Eastern goal of *apatheia*. However, the basis for trusting abandonment to God rests more fully on a notion of God who in love continues to enter into the sufferings of humanity and companions the individual through it in the person of Christ, God the Son. The West then, has developed a deepening reliance on the character of God and intimate relationship with him in the midst of one's personal circumstances. In inviting the believer to focus on the humanity of Jesus, the church more clearly legitimises the actual circumstances of the believer's life as a vital locus of personal encounter with God himself. Hence, Beauty who is God sanctifies and indeed beautifies the "ordinary" or mundane circumstances of life which become the premier context of transforming encounter with the Holy Trinity. This divergence of emphasis is also seen in the context of discussions on *apophatic* and *kataphatic* spirituality (cf. Garcia-Rivera 1999; Holmes 1980). Both views must be held in tension, the kataphatic mediating the apophatic and the apophatic transcending the analogical concepts suggested by images without negating the truth such images hold.

The significance of this later Roman contribution to a theology of beauty cannot be underestimated. The laity is invited to enter fully into an experiential encounter with God – through the illuminating presence of the Holy Spirit – which effects a transformation of his or her perception. Herein, the day to day life of the believer is legitimised as well as the context of the actual circumstances of that life.

The beauty of creation, now experienced in turmoil, flux, and subject to decay, is recognised as beautiful because God, the Father of beauty and source of beauty, has not abandoned it. The believer is able to discern with joy and delight the glory of the creation in its full actuality as one brought into being by God, sustained by him, and in which God continues to delight and rejoice. The focus on the humanity of Jesus allows the believer to perceive the beauty of the world as God has intended it to be, and with equal intensity compels an active and loving interaction with the world precisely as it is as the continuing landscape of Divine Presence. The extravagant claim that God, is in the present, fully experienced in a fallen world as redeeming love, does not diminish the Eastern emphasis on the Glorified Lord and the cosmic proportions of his existence. Here the Western focus on the humanity of Jesus provides a necessary balance that legitimises the actuality of human experience and in its midst allows the believer to encounter his or her life as the locus of God's love, delight and grace experienced fully as Sacramental Communion. As bearer of Christ, the believer, contributes personally to the fulfilment of God's intention for creation in a manner consistent with the humanity of Christ as the embodiment of human perfection and beauty. Jesus, in his Incarnation serves as the model of authentic humanity fully capable of creatively and lovingly engaging the world in whatever circumstances it is found.

In the Roman church, the Christocentric focus takes form in the devotional life of the faithful. The contemplative mysteries suggested in the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, the spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, the prominence of the saints in the life of the church, and the whole range of sacramentals incorporated in Roman devotions, all attest to the reality of the Holy Trinity, present to the world and made visible to the heart of the believer. Through the many "iconic" forms found in Scripture and in the lives of the saints the believer is transformed through meditation and contemplation into an authentic image of Christ. An imaginative participation in these iconic forms of Christ in the world, using the senses and the mind, matures into

the darkness of contemplative encounter (Navone 1999).²² In the same manner that the bramble and stones of a mountain pathway finally and with mysterious delight offers up to those who persevere the vision of a wild and glorious seascape, so too “iconic” or “image -full” meditation and contemplation opens the believer to the dark but delight-full realm of Divine experience and the cognitive awareness of Divine presence. The end then of meditation and contemplation in the Roman West is a gracious encounter with God. The unsuspected beauty and bounty of Divine Presence envelops the individual in an entirely new, entirely vast and untamed “form” that imparts both sustenance and refreshment and compels an insatiable thirst for this Divine Love and beauty. However, to reduce “beauty” or a theology of beauty to such isolated moments of Divine revelation, is to lose sight of the concordant beauty that attends the journey towards the goal. This tendency will be discovered in the Protestant contributions to the discussion of beauty in the Christian context. However, in both Eastern and Roman understanding “creation” is both affirmed and held sacred.

Here, the beauty of the created realm in which God acts and which he both sanctifies and consecrates by his indwelling presence must be affirmed. Creation then, despite the continuing effects of the fall upon it remains, even in its disfigurement, a centre of joyful encounter with God who in love and compassion, mercy and grace, commits himself to it. Specifically, it is in God’s constant and unrelenting commitment to creation in general and humanity in particular which witnesses to the notion of “beauty” in the entire created realm.

God’s Incarnation perfects the whole ontology and aesthetics of created Being. The Incarnation uses created Being at a new depth as a language and a means of expression for Divine Being and essence....As One and Unique, and yet as one who is to be understood only in the context of humanity’s entire history and in the context of the whole created cosmos, Jesus is the Word, the Image , the Expression and the Exegesis of God. Jesus bears witness to God as a man, by using the whole expressional apparatus

²² In his contribution to the subject of beauty, John Navone (1999) discusses in chapters 6,7 & 8 of his book the concept of “scriptural icons” and the interpersonal aspect of contemplation. Similarly, the incarnate Christ as the form of God made visible and revealed in Scripture, is explicated fully and convincingly by von Balthasar (1982:28-30).

of human existence from birth to death, including all the stages of life, all the states in life, the solitary and the social situations. He is what he expresses – namely, God – but he is not whom he expresses namely the Father. This incomparable paradox stands as the fountain head of the Christian aesthetic, and therefore of any aesthetics (von Balthasar 1982:29).

PROTESTANTISM

That von Balthasar can affirm that Jesus is the living locus of Beauty, does not suggest that the place of Jesus as such remains uncontested in the theological realm. Rather, within the Protestant world, based on the a priori rejection of Catholic thought in general, some objections to such lines of thinking will become apparent.

Clearly, both the Eastern and Roman traditions of the church have embraced the concept of “beauty,” recognising in it a breadth of meaning that is compatible with the nature of God and the goal of the Christian life – holiness. Thus, “beauty” is a recurring theme in dogmatic literature as well as in that literature which speaks of spirituality. As will be discussed later (Chapter five) the early post-apostolic Church demonstrates its acceptance of beauty as a theological theme by embracing the work of Dionysius the Aeropagite “On the Divine Names (Luibheid & Rorem 1987) which attributes beauty to God, indeed includes “beauty” as a name of God. The later work of John Sottus Erigena, (Eco 1988:24) will develop Dionysius thoughts on “Divine” beauty, expanding his predecessor’s intuition concerning beauty dramatically, leading the church ultimately to condemn his work and its apparent tendency toward pantheism itself. An exhaustive list of authors that demonstrate the ease with which the church adopts and utilises the concept of beauty might well include all those writers with whom the Christian world is most familiar. Following the Protestant Reformation, however, this ease with the concept of beauty disappears from the new theological landscape that emerges in Western Europe. The reasons for this immediate loss appears twofold. On one hand, the enthusiasm of Reformation thought will be primarily articulated in theological works that are concerned to locate theological insights in Scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*). The concept of “beauty,” so

evident in the “traditional” writings of the church, will not immediately surface in new theological constructions. Further, it is the nature of Catholic and Orthodox scholarship to ascribe value to those philosophical ideas, evidenced in their incorporation of Platonic thought and Aristotelian methodology that serve a Christian end in theological discourses. Protestant theology, however, in the premier place it gives the written documents of Scripture, will contest the validity of Catholic theological insights borrowed from pre-Christian sources. Luther’s invectives against Aristotelian thought, so prominent in the works of Aquinas, suggest the deep distrust that Protestantism holds for Catholic Scholastics such as Aquinas. Luther denounces these incursions into Christian faith, calling them, “the devil’s whore,” and referring to Aristotle as “the destroyer of pious doctrine,” “the Sophist and quibbler,” “inventor of fables” and the “stinking philosopher” (Brown 1968:43).

This distrust in the methodology of Catholic scholarship will also serve to undermine those monastic teachings on spirituality which, closely allied to Catholic and Orthodox asceticism, are perceived to suggest the *primacy of works over faith* in the eyes of those concerned with structuring Reformation thought. Further, it must be acknowledged that in Reformation years, the secular world undergoes its own “reformation” in Renaissance and Enlightenment thought which will compel the church, both Roman and Protestant, to focus more deeply on the growing number of secular alternatives to faith. Hence, apologetic defences of faith will displace in importance more esoteric concepts of which “beauty” is one. It would be an error, however, to suggest that “beauty” is entirely lost to Protestant sensibility.

Protestant Thought

Jean Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (McNeill 1960) present for his Protestant readership a glorious understanding of God. Creation, in Calvin’s view is radiant with the beauty and wisdom of God.

[God] daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. As a consequence, men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him... You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without

being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness (McNeill 1960:52).

The beauty of God's creation is abundantly clear in Calvin's work. Further, Calvin reveals his conviction that creation exists as a focus of Christian contemplation through which the magnitude and bounty of God are clearly evident even to the most brutish observer. Yet it is equally Calvin's conviction that perception of the beauty and glory of God through creation is only fully experienced by those whose "eyes" have been opened by Divine revelation afforded an individual through God's gracious motions toward him or her effecting personal salvation. Thus, beauty, is not affirmed as an inclusive value. This very theme will be taken up and expanded by Jonathan Edwards (Chapter five) who finds sufficient grounds in the work of Calvin, to rest his own theological work soundly on the concept of "beauty." As alluded to earlier, all Christian life shares the common heritage of the first 1000 years of Christian history. Thus, Calvin's full theology will demonstrate a strong allegiance to the works of Augustine and other early commentators on the faith whereas the work of Aquinas is conspicuous by its absence. Calvin will strongly contest the validity of Catholic theologians whom he believed to be postulating an entirely speculative theology. It seems apparent that in the tumult of emerging Christian thought concerned to warn the faithful of the dangers of more traditional expressions of the faith, the notion of beauty although evident, is not a major consideration.

Protestant Distrust

The impact of Reformation thought cannot be underestimated. Protestant theology, in the premier place it affords the written documents of Scripture and its understanding of the restricted aspect of revelation, will contest the validity of Catholic theological insights gained from pre-Christian or extra-Christian sources. Von Balthasar, speaking of Luther's contempt for Catholicism suggests that its severity might be equated with what Kierkegaard will perceive as an "aesthetic

emasculatation and dulling of the sharp cutting edge of God's Word" (von Balthasar 1984:45).

The Protestant Reformation, perceiving little value in Roman Catholic theological thought will effectively expunge it from its own theological formulations that appeal exclusively to the authority of Scripture as constitutive of God's self-revelation. Ultimately, "beauty" is not a straightforward theological theme. Those theologies and philosophies which deal specifically with humanity's capacity to appreciate and experience beauty, are allied, in Protestant thought, with the metaphysical realm inherent in Catholicism's aesthetic and speculative approach to theology. Beauty does not lend itself to a clear explication from Scripture. Hence, the subject of "beauty" provides little interest to the various theological constructions that develop in growing expressions of Protestant thought. The direction in which Protestant thought develops will retain, until the nineteenth century, a forceful attempt to explicate the faith without recourse to the "sophist" incursions of Catholic theology. Later Western explications of theology, both Roman and Protestant, increasingly challenged by the cultural changes in the Western world, will be challenged to articulate Christian themes in a manner consistent with Enlightenment methodology and scientific concerns.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is apparent that the concept of beauty has, during the first one thousand years of church history, occupied a significant place in Christian thought. In the Eastern and Roman traditions, the consistent and profuse use of the concept of beauty is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that beauty has been considered a "central" theme in theological articulations of the faith. During those first one thousand years of Christian history, the church enjoyed an unsurpassed unity concerning major doctrinal themes of which beauty was one. Yet doctrinal statements themselves concerning the subject are neither evident, or in the mindset of first millennium Christians essential. Rather, beauty, so apparent in the substantial forms of the created realm, is a subject both received and celebrated yet neither defined nor defended by the church. Despite

this fact, beauty is prominent in the ambience of liturgical life of the Orthodox East; it is celebrated in the writings of the Church Fathers as well as in early monastic literature which serve as a foundation of Christian teaching on the spiritual life that has extended into the contemporary world. As such, in both Eastern spirituality and in Roman Catholic thought beauty stands as the goal toward which creation and the church as “new creation” moves in anticipation of the ultimate eschatological fulfilment of a New Heaven and a New Earth. The common era of Christian unity, suggests that the reclamation of beauty is not antithetical to Christian concern and further, is well suited, despite theological differences that have ensued, to the whole church – Orthodox, Roman and Protestant. Similarly, coupled with the scriptural witness to beauty (although not treated as a separate theme but pervasive throughout), beauty stands as a viable and necessary consideration within Christian thought.

It is apparent that the significance of “beauty” to the realm of theology is maintained and developed within the “tradition” of the church. To the extent that “tradition” is severed from the fundamental articulations of the faith during the Protestant Reformation, so too, beauty as a theological theme slips from focus. A concern and recognition of beauty, however, is not alien to Protestant thought. Rather, the development of Protestant theology, allied exclusively with the written word of Scripture, will not find “beauty” of significant importance to occupy more than a peripheral place in Protestant theological discourse. In the seventeenth century, the American theologian Jonathan Edwards will extend and develop Calvin’s glorious vision of God into a full theology of beauty. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, Edwards’ contribution will remain an isolated and virtually ignored contribution to the continuing development and articulation of Protestant theology.

This discussion of beauty has focused exclusively on its place within the church itself. The church, however, does not exist in isolation. Concurrent with the growth and expansion of Christian doctrine is a vast and dynamic change in the nature of Western culture itself. In Chapter four, we will reflect more closely on these cultural

changes which will contribute most significantly to the loss of beauty to the Christian West.

CHAPTER FOUR

CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR BEAUTY: ENLIGHTENMENT, MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY

In the preceding chapter, the theological issues discussed concerning the concept of beauty were intentionally brought to the forefront for the sake of clarity. However, the theological changes that take place in the Western Church, both Catholic and Protestant, do not take place in isolation. Rather, they move like waves in a sea of change that flood the entire cultural shoreline. The dynamic cultural shifts that attend Western history throughout its middle age, the age of scholasticism and the age of Enlightenment effect an extreme discontinuity between the intuitive mode of understanding that dominates the East and a new rationalism that increasingly impacts the West.²³ A primary difficulty arises in arriving at a workable definition of culture itself. A detailed analysis of the concept “culture” reveals a vast array of theories but few conclusions. Hence Malinowski (1944) attempted to define culture by appealing to the organisation of social institutions, while Cassirer (1944), White (1959) and Geertz (1973) locate culture in humanities propensity for symbolic organisation of its deepest concerns. The difficulty is brought into sharp focus by the work of Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) who, after reviewing over one hundred definitions of “culture,” were only able to “demonstrate the complexity of the problem and the incompleteness of the solutions proposed” (Pannenberg 1985:315). In the context of this study, a general definition of culture is taken from E. Tylor (1871) who understands culture as the “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (quoted by Lee 1969:10). Although not an exhaustive definition, Tylor’s contribution reflects a comprehensive understanding of the concept that corresponds to its use by Newbigin (1991:3) and Niebuhr (1951:31-39) whose works

²³ The use of “East” throughout this chapter refers specifically to the Byzantine and Hellenistic world and is not inclusive of Asian culture.

will be cited later in this study. However, common to all definitions of culture is the recognition of the human propensity to organise itself socially and invest that organisation with value and meaning.

Background

During his reign Charles the Great (771-814), undertook the creation of the first united Empire after the destruction of Rome. Crowned emperor by the Roman Church, Charlemagne exerted a tremendous influence throughout the territory. Dominating the political sphere, and strongly supported by the church, the emperor was able to foster creative and enduring changes on the educational system of the time. The ensuing Carolingian Renaissance is particularly note worthy for the development of a robust educational system centred on monastery and cathedral schools. To ensure a well educated clergy within the church, Charlemagne incorporated within this developing system the best scholars from the Roman world which was undergoing its own Renaissance characterised by a new found appreciation of ancient classical art, literature and logic. It was under the sponsorship of Charlemagne that the old Roman educational system, one predominantly rhetorical and literary, was replaced by a curriculum following the system of the seven liberal arts, and was thus extended to include: the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, logic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, astronomy geometry and music). Similarly, during this period ancient languages (through Greek translations of Arabic thought) from the Eastern world became accessible to the West in a way not experienced previously. Hence classical Greek and Arabic works of literature and philosophy, previously unknown in the West, were both translated and made available to Western scholarship. Effectively and efficiently, the ensuing period of vast intellectual activity both theological and secular propelled the Western culture into an era of profound rationalism and an attendant movement toward humanism.

Philosophy: Sixteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

As scholarship opens the doors to the new ideas found in Eastern thought, philosophical inquiry begins to investigate the nature of reality using a fresh criterion: rational thought severed from the domination of Christian dogma and doctrine. The perception of reality, which until this period conformed itself to the belief system of the church, begins to emerge as an object of intellectual speculation wherein the former presuppositions of the Christian faith are pushed further and further into the background. The implications of this historical movement become most evident in the waves of Scholastic (eleventh to fourteenth centuries), Renaissance (fourteenth to sixteenth centuries) and Enlightenment (eighteenth century) thought which dominate Western intellectual pursuits from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries. Emerging from these historical movements, the West will develop and adopt the formal structures of empirical and rationalist epistemology following the introduction of “Aristotelian” categories. This chapter will begin with a brief discussion of these three major areas of intellectual pursuit. The impact of these epistemic themes will be considered in this present chapter as they are reflected in the works of Rene Descartes and Blaise Pascal, as well as in the development of Scientific Rationalism and Deism. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a discussion of Immanuel Kant in particular and of David Hume in general whose works bridge the Age of Reason with that of modernity. This overview, although not exhaustive, will be indicative of the dominant “paradigm shifts” which ultimately lead to a loss of beauty as a significant motif in Western thought. A brief introduction to the dominant trends that impact the European continent during the eleventh to eighteenth centuries will suffice to indicate the collage-like canvas of changing themes that Western Europe reveals to the historian during the period under consideration.

Scholasticism

Scholasticism refers to that period of history beginning in the Carolingian period during which the philosophical works of Aristotle were translated from Arabic to Greek and thus opened themselves to the consciousness of Western scholarship.

Through this movement, the church was confronted with a cohesive system of thought that approached epistemological questions using the criteria of “logic and reason.” The introduction of Aristotelian thought with its “rational” emphasis was adopted by the church in the West in its own attempts to systematise and delineate the theological truths with which it has been entrusted. Through this movement, evident in the introduction of the particular theological genre of *Summas* (compendiums of Christian understanding and belief), the church inched its way towards a dominant emphasis on logical theological explications and expositions of its basic themes particularly in response to incursions of heresy into the medieval church. The impact of “scholastic” thought on the church is both positive and negative. Without the influence of scholastic thinking the church itself could easily have lost herself in the growing wave of cultural and intellectual interests characteristic of the Renaissance consciousness and style. Negatively, however, as asserted by Jean Leclercq (1988), the tendency toward scholasticism at times eclipsed spirituality as the primary concern of Christian life. Commenting on the shift of emphasis, Leclercq states: “The scholastics are professors.... Their sermons, like St. Thomas’, will themselves be scholastic. And the church will consider the greatest of them its ‘doctors,’ no longer as its ‘Fathers’” (Leclercq 1988:173). During the scholastic period the changes in orientation from a strongly spiritual allegorical interpretation of Scripture to one more securely rooted in a deepening study of the literal text, is a gradual one. Yet cumulatively the effect was not always a positive one. Although the Scholastic period represents a needful and realistic attempt to engage the primary documents of the faith with intellectual integrity and insight drawn clearly from the written word, a distinction between the spiritual importance of such documents becomes eclipsed by the logical exegesis of the documents alone (Leclercq 1988).

Renaissance

Renaissance thought, evident across the European continent from approximately the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, does not exist in isolation from the scholastic movement but reflects more fully the cultural impact of “new thought” in the West.

Thus, the primary characteristic of the Renaissance lies precisely in the acceleration, ready adoption and implementation of the values and ideals encapsulated in the Classic works of the Ancient world. The continent, alive with a resurgence of appreciation for classic art, literature, and philosophy began to consider the relationship of humanity to the culture in which it exists. Thus, the focus shifts from one primarily concerned with humanity and its relationship with God, to the relationship of humanity to the physical world in which it exists. In northern Europe, this movement retains a spiritual dimension in the growth of Christian Humanism. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the expanding transition from a culture dominated by the church to one more acutely concerned with the place of the individual within the greater physical world leads to an eighteenth century characterised by the assertion of human reason in all aspects of human activity. Hence, Scholasticism and Renaissance thought provide a general background to the particular philosophies and ideas in the ensuing discussion on Enlightenment thought.

Rene Descartes: (1596-1650)

Rene Descartes inherited the scholastic excellence of a classical education provided by the church through the Jesuit order of priests, wherein he absorbed and mastered the art of mathematics. In the perfect progression of simple and structured solutions discovered in arithmetic problems leading to ever greater and more complex mathematical conclusions, Descartes recognised the possible potential for utilising a similar methodology in the realm of philosophical thought. The chains of simple reasoning that prove invaluable to the study of geometry leads Descartes to the conclusion that nothing is so far removed from the rational mind as to evade discovery. If a problem is approached in a mathematical fashion and “provided we abstain from accepting the false for the true,” declares Descartes, “and always preserve in our thoughts the order necessary for the deduction of one truth from another,” all knowledge is available to humanity including the knowledge of God (Brown 1968:50). Because the possibility of “error” exists in human judgement, Descartes takes “doubt” as his starting point and attempts to discover those elements

of reality which might properly be termed “certain.” Ultimately, Descartes’ dictum “Cogito ergo sum” embraces the philosopher’s dominant conclusion of a “doctrine of solipsism” concluding that all that is truly knowable is the self, while that which occupies the external environment is understood as a projection of the mind. Hence, Descartes arrives at a pure rationalism, wherein certainty is only assured through the exercise of rational thought as it confirms personal self-awareness.

Although Descartes remained associated with the Catholic Church throughout his life, his speculative thinking and reasoning represent a “revolutionary” departure from traditional religious thought. In the Cartesian model of philosophy, rational thought is the tool by which humanity will plumb the depths of human existence. Rationality then displaces God as the source of true wisdom and knowledge which will afford humanity the only form of certainty possible. In Descartes’ thesis, the mind, moreover, the *personal* mind, is proposed as the final arbiter of truth. Whether or not the philosopher succeeds in his intention, and later philosophical criticism will certainly question his work, Cartesian methodology and Descartes’ unbridled faith in humanity’s ability to “know” the world through cognitive analysis alone, effects a strong and dominating reliance on rational thought that continues into the present.

Blaise Pascal: (1623-1662)

Descartes’ radical confidence in human rationality without an attendant concern for the concomitant human inclination toward affective sensibility does not go unchallenged. Pascal, whose own life spans only 38 years, was a prolific thinker, mathematician and philosopher. Following an intensification of his commitment to faith in 1654, Pascal begins his work on what would have been a critical “Christian Apologetic” directed primarily toward those scholars who were indifferent to the Christian faith. This work, never completed, survives in fragments as Pascal’s *Pensées* – a collection of thoughts jotted down intermittently which would have formed the backbone of the greater work he envisioned.

Pascal challenges the presuppositions of those philosophers whose confidence in rationalism has propelled philosophy into a mode that only gives place to rational and

thus abstract thought. Primarily, Pascal reasserts the notion that the complexity of human existence, and the vast abyss that separates the material world from the immaterial, the physical from the spiritual, require that different areas of concern must be approached and understood through different modes of knowledge:

The heart has its own order, the mind has its own, which uses principles and demonstrations. The heart has a different one. So our claim to be loved cannot be proved by setting out in order the causes of love; that would be absurd (Houston 1989:204).

Pascal attempts to counter the rising forces of rationalism by asserting: “the heart has its reasons which reason knows not of” (Houston, 1989:230). Pascal’s voice however does not overtake the rising din of voices asserting their new confidence in rational analysis as the means by which humanity will ultimately arrive at a satisfactory and certain knowledge of the meaning of existence.

Scientific Rationalism

The unbridled confidence in human powers of cognition introduced by Descartes in the Age of Reason led to the inescapable conclusion that the laws governing nature are accessible to human investigation and analysis if studied in a manner consistent with mathematical precision and progression. Natural Science follows philosophy in its growing confidence in rational study wherein it too recognises that the mind, through empirical investigation of the substantial forms and patterns of the universe, is capable of formulating and proving scientific hypotheses concerning the nature of the physical world. Isaac Newton demonstrated through empirical study the orderliness of the universe and the reliability of “natural law” thus suggesting that the Creator of such orderliness might himself be discovered through creation without recourse to Scripture or revelation. In his movement away from revelation, Newton effectively, if not intentionally, severed Christian belief from those elements which were not accessible to reason. Preserving the notions of God’s omnipotence, transcendence and perfection Newton threw a pall over other major

doctrines of the faith not demonstrable by methods of empiricism and reason. In a similar manner, Copernicus and Galileo were able to demonstrate through empirical studies an entirely new cosmology wherein humanity is displaced as the centre of the celestial universe envisioned by the church. Culturally the break down of confidence in metaphysical speculation and in dogmatically asserted notions of Christian truths, overwhelmed the Western world.

Consequently, the knowledge of dependable “natural laws” revealed through empirical analysis, opened the way for humanity to assert control and dominion over the physical environment. In the realm of natural science the progression from rational thought to empirical investigation and the articulation and explanation of natural law, ultimately leads to the assertion of human autonomy and humanity is freed from the perceived non-rational strictures imposed by religious beliefs. In his work, John Locke (1696) develops an empirically based epistemology that asserts that experience is the basis for human knowledge.²⁴

Deism

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the profound effect of Cartesian thought on the manner in which the world is confronted as well as the empirical method suggested by Newton and Locke, is absorbed into all areas of scholarship including theology. Theology incorporates the new emphasis on rational and empirical thought in the emergence of “Deism.” Asserting the belief that God, Creator of all that exists, ultimately steps back from his creation at its completion and allows it to unfold in its own manner, Deism no longer clings to the revelatory principle of traditional Christian belief including those scripturally defined beliefs

²⁴ Locke’s views are developed in “The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures” (1696) and in “Essay concerning Human Understanding.” Also see, *God and Nature Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, (Linberg & Numbers, 1986) which provides a series of discerning essays demonstrating the profound influence of Scientific rationalism during the sixteenth century and that provide the background to this section of this study.

concerning humanity itself.²⁵ The confidence of the “new” theologians in humanity’s capacity to move toward “perfection” as a progressive pattern of evolutionary growth, locates the development of personal morality and values within the individual. Ultimately, Deist trust in human nature allows for the eventual articulations and proliferation of “Liberal” Christian Theologies that maintain little or no allegiance to authoritative sources of tradition or Scripture. Although traditional or more conservative expressions of Christianity are not entirely displaced by the “new” humanistic articulations of religious belief, they are forced to coexist with a culture that is increasingly abandoning the most profound presuppositions of traditional faith - the notions of revelation, faith and authority. The philosophical, scientific, and theological constructions of this period do not deny God. Rather, God is relegated to the periphery of scholarly concern while humanity itself occupies

²⁵ The place of revelation in Christian belief, is a vast subject and cannot be addressed fully in this forum. However a brief analysis will indicate the contours of Deist belief and the Christian notion of revelation. Christian belief maintains that whereas the physical world – its order, its beauty etc. points toward the reality of a creator, a more complete knowledge of God inheres in the special revelation entrusted to the church in either tradition and Scripture or both. Consistent with Enlightenment thought and the growing confidence in rationalism, Deism reflected, in the work of Herbert of Cherbury (seventeenth century) attempted to demonstrate the rationality of religious belief without appealing to the traditional authorities of church and Scripture. Deist works maintain that Christianity is profoundly a religion of nature. (Dowley, 1977:489). In *The History of Western Philosophy* (1979) Bertrand Russell, hostile to traditional Christian values, demonstrates the extreme end to which the erosion of Christian authority as it pertains to the “special revelation” points. Russell states that all “philosophy” is a product of two factors “religious and ethical conceptions” and “science.” In Russell’s view, “all definite knowledge...belongs to science; all dogma as to what surpasses definite knowledge belongs to theology” (1979:13). Further, the role of philosophy is to appeal to a middle ground which takes seriously the “physical,” empirically knowable, universe and from it projects a plausible answer to the metaphysical questions that attend human life. The quest for certainty concerning what is real and what is true is open to speculation and reflection. Hence, revealed truth, as that which is imparted to the church through the Holy Spirit, illuminating Scripture and guiding the church, is not an essential or verifiable source of “true” knowledge. Russell’s extreme reaction is to discard Christian insight entirely. Deism, represents the earliest movement toward this explicitly “material” view of the universe. Deism does not deny the metaphysical truth that inheres in the special revelation of Scripture but does move toward an explication of Christian belief that relies less formally on the accepted authorities of Scripture, tradition, and on God’s continuing involvement in the movements of the cosmos. Deism therefore is not a strictly uniform system of belief but reflects a less defined “group” wherein the response of faith to God relies less on a dogmatic adherence to traditional authority and more on the observation of the physical universe leading to a natural theology and a concomitant faith in the human ability to discover the truth through empirical investigation. This belief by extension leads to a growing confidence in the perfectibility of humanity. Etienne Gilson, presents a more positive view of the “special revelation” as it is understood in Christian belief see: *A Gilson Reader* (Pegis, A. ed. 1957:289).

centre stage, supported by its growing and dynamic confidence in rational and empirical thought.

The deep confidence in rational thought which so envelops the Age of Enlightenment when carried to its logical end, leads ultimately to the profound reductionism of Leibniz (1646-1716) and the unrelenting scepticism of Hume (1711-1776). Ultimately, the thesis that undergirds rationalism and strict empiricism as it influences Christianity and the irrational nature of faith, is contested by the deist movement introduced by Lord Herbert of Cherbury in the seventeenth century. This movement represents an attempt to demonstrate the inherent rationality of Christian belief. Herbert's view was extended by John Toland (1669) in *Christianity Not Mysterious* and by Matthew Tindal (1730) in *Christianity as Old as the Creation* (Briggs, Linder & Wright 1977: 492-497). These attempts to counter the scepticism produced by rationalist and empiricist thought led to a profoundly reductionist view of Christianity that posits the value of natural theology over a more balanced view wherein both the natural and spiritual world have true relevance for the Christian believer. However, the essential and positive contribution of the age to the task of understanding the physical world itself is neither questioned or diminished as Enlightenment thought gives way to modernity in the work of Immanuel Kant. The Age of the Enlightenment and the radical optimism into which it propelled the Western world is summed up effectively by Alexander Pope in his Epitaph for Isaac Newton: "Nature and nature's laws lay hid in night: God said, *Let Newton be!* And all was light" (quoted in Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, 1985:378).

Immanuel Kant (1724-1824)

The philosophy of Immanuel Kant represents an attempt to resolve the impasse that haunts philosophical thought: the failure to rationally bridge the gap between the material world and the immaterial, between rational and intuitive knowledge. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Meiklejohn 1993). Kant makes a distinction between "analytical" judgements and what he terms "synthetic" judgements. In the former, the object or concept under consideration contains its own

truth, such as the statement “trees are plants.” Synthetic judgement presupposes a prior knowledge of the subject – in this case the statement “the wood is good for building” depends on a prior knowledge or experience of the particular type of wood. Synthetic judgement, integrating prior knowledge of the object, is able to interpret and impose meaning and purpose on the object in a way that analytical judgement cannot. Ultimately in Kant’s philosophical construction, natural sciences and purely “rational” data, are wrested from the realm of pure ideas by the synthetic judgements of interpretation (Meiklejohn 1993).

Kant draws natural science and transcendent knowledge together in the manner by which he concludes that humanity’s innate drive to find “purpose” imposes upon it a necessity to “interpret” the sensory data with which the “substantial” universe teems. Further, in Kantian thought, this human impulse to understand the transcendent constitutes an inherent ontological need in humanity. Synthetic judgement provides the essential “rationale” - the particular meaning - which unites isolated data and humanity’s authentic need to discover personal meaning and purpose. Kant proposes an aesthetic philosophy which presupposes the human need to experience purpose and meaning and integrates this need into a formal theory of aesthetics. The philosopher maintains that the world of ideas and the world as it is perceived are not two distinct realities as Descartes suggests but constitute two faces of a single reality. Thus, Kant concludes, neither the transcendent nor the phenomenal world may be excluded from philosophical constructions dealing with the nature of reality.

In his *Critique*, Kant asserts that “beauty” is correctly understood as a subjective judgement concerning a particular object under consideration closely associated with “taste,” while further maintaining that beauty is also correctly understood as objective. Kant attempts to overcome the subjectivity imposed by personal taste by distinguishing between “interested” observation (synthetic judgement) wherein the observer brings his or her needs or tastes to the task of observing and “disinterested” observation (analytical judgement). In the latter category an object is judged “beautiful” strictly according to qualities that inhere in

the object itself and elicit responses of attraction and delight independent of the needs of the observer. Kant further distinguishes “the beautiful” from “the sublime.” The beautiful, in Kant’s thought, coincides with physical forms and their particular power to attract, while the “sublime” alludes to the surpassing and unbounded attraction of those concepts or intuitions that are conditioned by uncircumscribed vastness and power – a wild ocean scape, or the infinite brilliance of stars and sky. The impact of the sublime leads most assuredly to awe and wonder, to a trembling acknowledgement of the immensity of things that elude all powers of human description. It is the innate human capacity to be moved either by the sublime or the beautiful, and the inexhaustible human drive toward meaning and purpose which “rationalism” is unable to incorporate into a philosophical construction that relies on reason alone.

Two aspects of Kant’s philosophical thought demonstrated in his aesthetic philosophy are particularly significant to a postmodern and Christian understanding of the theme of beauty. Kant departs from a strictly rational approach to the study of philosophy by assigning true value to the subjective element in human reasoning. Further, the philosopher acknowledges that humanity bears within itself an innate need for purpose that compels it to search for and impose meaning on its environment. Kant allows this aesthetic dimension of human nature to exercise itself and find satisfaction in the realm of the beautiful and the sublime.

In his work, Kant clearly identifies the limitations of pure rationality. If humanity is not able to unify the analytical mode of knowledge with its transcendent need for purpose and meaning, then existence may correctly be considered meaningless. Kant insists that substantial forms in creation (phenomena) must ultimately find their meaning in the transcendent. Rationalism alone will lead to a “dead universe” of time, space and form without significant meaning thus negating the reality of humanity’s drive toward transcendence; negating as well a basis for morality and ethics.

That Kant should seize upon “beauty” as a significant subject to consider within the philosophical quest for the true nature of reality is significant. Together

with his insight that left unmediated by the transcendent, pure rationality will lead to a dead meaningless universe intimates the impact of rationalism on the pending loss of beauty as a central intuition in human thought. Beauty, either physical or spiritual beauty, appealing primarily to the realm of the metaphysical, impacts upon the individual at an affective rather than cognitive level of experience. Beauty operates at precisely that place into which rational analysis alone is unable to penetrate.

The dilemma of the subjectivity of “beauty” is a constant within the realm of philosophical aesthetics. A similar problem is recognised in the work of David Hume, a contemporary of Kant. In “Of the Standard of Taste” (1757), Hume’s most detailed analysis of aesthetics, the philosopher concludes that judgements of beauty or ugliness enjoy no factual status, but arise from sentiment and taste. Because sentiment is based solely on one’s personal response to any object or state it cannot be said to contribute knowledge to the observer. As such, Hume suggests that beauty does not inhere in an object under consideration but is a value placed on an object by the observer. If one is to discuss beauty in a meaningful way, it is essential to determine a standard by which judgements of taste lead to an ascription of beauty. Is it possible to determine standard “rules” for taste and sentiment? Can these rules be applied universally? Hume concludes that such principles do exist but that they are themselves elusive, “difficult to discern and impossible to formulate” (Cooper 1992:47). Thus it must be concluded with Mothersill (1991) that Hume’s conclusions are themselves too obscure to be meaningful. It is like positing that “there are moral principles but that it is not possible to cite examples” (Cooper 1992:47).

The elusive nature of beauty renders it eternally problematic for the secular philosophical community which must be able to examine its “object” with empirical precision leading to a clear and well defined conclusion.²⁶

²⁶ It is significant that Kant’s attempt to engage beauty as a philosophical consideration is the last extended study to appear on the subject. Following Kant, philosophical aesthetics moves into the area of art and art criticism wherein beauty itself is but a sub category. It is the opinion of this writer that the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity that haunts philosophical aesthetics persists as an inescapable “fact of life” which is only complete when both subjective and objective considerations are recognised as intended aspects of the whole. Neither aspect has meaning apart from the unity of the observer. Thus, the theoretical view put forward by Garcia-Rivera (1999) (reminiscent of Orthodox theology and Platonic thought to some extent) presents a more coherent

However, within the Christian context, the concept of beauty need not fare so badly. This fact is evident in the Eastern Church which has maintained the notion of “mystery” as a valid concept within theological discourse as it attempts to articulate the nature of reality. Similarly, discussing “beauty” from a Latin-American perspective, Garcia-Rivera (1999) is able to circumvent the persistent difficulties that inhere in any discussion of “beauty” by appealing to the notion of the symbol in a manner similar to the Orthodox East. Primarily, Garcia-Rivera suggests that the question should not be “what is beauty” but “how is beauty.” This shift in perspective allows him to engage “beauty” semiotically. The notion of “symbol” serves well to mediate the unbridgeable chasm that in secular philosophy is perceived as the breach between subjectivity and objectivity. Although a similar division *is* evident in Christian discourse in those discussions concerning apophatic theology and kataphatic theology, Garcia-Rivera’s (1999) particular contribution to a theology of beauty provides a useful, if not exhaustive, tool with which to address the problem. Here, the concept of apophatic beauty is aligned to the notion of intellect and objectivity; while the complementary notion of kataphatic beauty is concerned with the subjective and evident “forms” or images – the beautiful” - which derive from the Primal Beauty of God. The symbol draws these two aspects together in such a way that kataphatic beauty mediates the objective apophatic beauty of God. The symbol then preserves the objective and singular designation of Beauty (as it inheres in God) while maintaining that the kataphatic “beautiful” mediates the meaning and reality of his ineffability. Thus for the Christian, it is possible to state that the subjectivity of beauty which includes the human response to the beautiful image is conditioned by the primal form of Divine Beauty. Thus the kataphatic “beautiful” serves to illumine and clarify the apophatic and objective reality “Beauty” without compromising its singular and ineffable nature. This partial solution to the problem of subjectivity and objectivity is precisely the solution that allows the Orthodox East to speak of Divine Beauty and

analysis of the problem wherein the objective (apophatic reality) is mediated by the kataphatic symbol.

created beauty without confusing the categories or confounding the essence of God with the evidence of his “Divine energies” that abound in the natural world. Yet, this solution is incomplete according to the criteria demanded by of Enlightenment thought. Here clarity is achieved yet it is not the exhaustive and definitive clarity of explanation but of the clarity of the primordial necessity of “mystery” that undergirds the very ground of existence.

Impact of the Enlightenment

From the brief historical outline of the rise of rational philosophy it is clear that the church is no longer a dominating force within the cultural milieu. The era of modernity inherits a cultural consciousness that increasingly focuses on the phenomenal world of form and substance. Culture is alive with diffuse and conflicting views of reality, which filter into the consciousness of society at large. As the swell of enthusiasm gathering around the primacy of rationalism and empiricism begins to abate, the impact of these Enlightenment themes remain as a pervasive legacy in Western culture exerting their influence over all aspects of life at every level.

The Age of the Enlightenment ushered in a new cultural climate of intellectual restlessness, of striving toward certainty and progress in both the realms of the natural and social sciences. If the Enlightenment failed to achieve the positive “certain” ends toward which it pushed, it must still be considered a time of positive advancement. Thus despite the negative effects that modernity inherits, the quest for knowledge represented in this time period corresponds perfectly with humanity’s innate needs for purpose, meaning, progress and knowledge. It is entirely positive that humanity responds with intellectual vigour to the “reality” into which it is born. The individual is a sensate being; the power of observation, the capacity to logically and minutely scrutinise and define the environment, the drive to know and be at “home” within the created world are constituent parts of innate human creativity and consistent with the scriptural view of humanity. In Genesis humanity is given the dual tasks of “subduing and filling” the environment. Both charges are creative directives derived from the will and mind of God and reflect much more than simple functions

or behaviour. More completely, the directive, subdue and fill, correspond to the manner in which human beings are intended to encounter the physical environment and adapt harmoniously with it. That this period of history has opened the way for man to intelligently and creatively engage the environment is without doubt. Stanley Grenz (1996:81) clearly articulates the positive value of the Enlightenment era:

The ideals of the thinking self knowing itself and of the mechanistic universe opened the way for the modern explosion of knowledge under the banner of the Enlightenment Project.... (from that period) to the present, the goal of the human intellectual quest has been to unlock the secrets of the universe in order to master nature for human benefit and create a better world. This Enlightenment quest, in turn, produced the modern technological society of the twentieth century. At the heart of this society is the desire to rationally manage life, on the assumption that scientific advancement and technology provide the means to improve the quality of human life (Grenz 1996:81).

If it is possible to speak of “error” in the Enlightenment period, it is not an error of task but one of misplaced faith and optimism. Truth severed from the meaning and purpose of which Kant speaks, or from the motions of the heart to which Pascal alludes, is reduced to simple data and wisdom to the realm of simple information.

As “natural science” undertakes to describe, circumscribe and prescribe the motions of the natural world, so too the empirical approach to knowledge extends itself to a search for moral law to be discovered, not in the transcendent or metaphysical realm, but in the very nature of humanity itself. Morality and virtue become no less the domain of “scientific” enquiry than are the physical sciences themselves. The problem, however, inherent in reducing moral philosophy to the same stature as physical science is two fold. First, forced by the very nature of the scientific method which it has inherited, humanity is predisposed to suspect the reality of an “intuitive” sense on which personal moral values will be based. Second, it is forced to view morality and virtue from the perspective of “self” which is conditioned by the elusive variables of human experience. Taking seriously humanity’s affinity with the material order, a predominantly rational and mechanistic society has failed to provide an adequate answer to humanity’s predisposition toward transcendent or

metaphysical questions. Modernity, masterful in presenting humanity with a careful and accurate articulation of the “what” and “how” of creation, fails to integrate that information with the intangible “why” that humanity is compelled to answer.

The lament of modern society is echoed by T.S. Eliot:

The endless cycle of idea and action;
 Endless invention, endless experiment,
 Brings knowledge of speech, but not of silence,
 Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
 All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance
 All our knowledge brings us nearer to death,
 But nearness to death no nearer to God.
 Where is the Life we have lost in living?
 Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
 The cycles of heaven in twenty centuries
 Bring us farther from God and nearer to the dust (Eliot 1940:72).

Eliot’s intuition that humanity has lost something significant in the unrelenting advancement of “ideas and action,” “invention and experiment” echoes Kant’s fear of a dead universe. The catalogue of “effects” toward which Eliot points are well documented in sociology, psychology, anthropology and philosophical texts dealing precisely with the subjects of modernity and postmodernity.²⁷ Four significant effects of “rationalism” that account most profoundly for the loss of beauty as a serious subject in contemporary thought can be recognised in the modern tendency toward *atomisation or specialisation*, in its *rootlessness, relativity* (the notion of the “global village”); and in the profound importance placed on *utilitarianism* (the dominant assumption that equates “value” with function).

Atomisation and specialisation

The proliferation of ideas and information to which contemporary society is subject is particularly the product of intellectual specialisation, which allows aspects

²⁷ See (Grenz 1996) *A Primer on Postmodernism*; (Veith 1994) *Postmodern Times – A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Both books provide a clear analysis of the impact of the transition from Enlightenment to Modernity and the contemporary age of Postmodernity. See also: MacIntyre (1984) *After Virtue* and Niebuhr (1951), *Christ and Culture* who also confirm the erosion of Christian culture in the contemporary era.

of problems or areas of interest to be studied in their constituent parts. Hence social sciences such as anthropology, sociology or psychology, which focus on significant, are approached as separate areas of study that are further broken down into subsets within the dominant category. Positively, the focus and concern given to each area has fostered an overwhelming advancement in understanding the nature and development of the individual. Negatively, however, this same tendency toward categorisation has fostered a profound fragmentation in the way that individuals encounter and experience their personal lives. Western society, profoundly compartmentalised, is one in which the divisions between private and public life, between vocation and avocation, and between the spiritual and material world are more profoundly felt than at any other time.

This fragmentation, evident in all areas of Western life, is particularly relevant to the study of beauty. Here, the penetrating and coherent understanding of beauty so evident in the works of the Church Fathers is starkly absent in current studies in Aesthetic Philosophy which, in a contemporary context has been given over to the theory of art criticism. The dominant barrier to a formal study of beauty in this broader category of aesthetics lies in the difficulty of defining “beauty” in a manner consistent with the rules of objectivity, rationalism and empiricism externally imposed on academia by the dominant culture. Cooper (1992:44) identifies a fundamental problem that ensues in any attempt to discuss beauty in a relevant manner:

Beauty is a topic of great philosophical interest and one that is relatively unexplored. Few would deny its importance, and yet the mere suggestion that it be defined drives intelligent people to witless babble. They suppose that the first and obvious requirement is to prove that beauty is “objective”; that it is not, as they like to say, “in the eye of the beholder.” They assume that the burden of proof lies on those who maintain ‘O is beautiful’ are either true or false, and they also assume that no proof will be forthcoming, that only very unsophisticated persons think that such judgements are objective. The suggestion is, that until what is assumed to be impossible has been achieved, there is no point in talking about beauty (Cooper 1992:44).

The truth of this analysis, predicated on the elusive nature of beauty, is seen precisely in the rise of art criticism as the subject matter of aesthetic philosophy while

the less tangible and seemingly vague notion of “beauty” is once again relegated to peripheral edge of philosophical thought. Significantly, the work of Kant provides the last sustained effort in secular academic thought to focus on “beauty” and not the more easily defined theme of Art.

Rootlessness and Relativism

The spirit of modernity is also evidenced in the rupture between the private and public spheres of life, and in the ideals of democracy and equality that pervade Western culture after the French and American revolutionary movements. Human rights, very much in the forefront of seventeenth and eighteenth century thought, propounded by both Locke and Rousseau lead inevitably to a social order that recognises the rights and potential of the individual within the larger context of the state. Consequently, the hard won freedom resulting from the two revolutionary movements and their social impact serve to elevate the individual to a place of personal autonomy in the spheres of political and social life (Newbigin 1991:25-26). The fresh assertion of the value of the individual gives prominent place, in the attending social milieu, to both personal opinion and the rights of the individual to which the social order now affirms each person is entitled. In this instance personal taste, preferences, and standards of behaviour in the private domain remain unchallenged by the political and social structure in general until such time as they might conflict with societal laws enacted to protect the population as a whole. In this particular cultural setting, the growing emphasis on the rights of the individual leads inevitably to a culturally sanctioned sense of individualism wherein “self” and “self interest” become dominant themes in personal life.

Progressively, this rise of individualism leads to a desire for self-sufficiency which ensures the individual’s “freedom” from unnecessary dependence on governmental systems, while in turn, self-sufficiency begins to erode previously held notions of inter-dependence within the greater community. Economically, the greater the wealth one amasses is translated not into happiness, but into a growing sense of independence from external criteria necessary to sustain the necessities of life.

Economic freedom in such a scheme enhances personal autonomy but ultimately effects a society overtaken by materialism and consumerism. Independence, in this sense, serves to sever relational ties in a way not experienced in previous times. Extended families give way to independent and increasingly self-sustaining units particularly as society moves from an agricultural base to an industrial foundation. At its most profound level, the individual gives him or herself over to an autonomous “self” now primarily independent but increasingly “rootless” and isolated from the meaningful structures of relationships. Culture, understood as a complex of religious beliefs, history and ethnicity, which in previous times provided an individual with a sense of personal identity and fundamental value, is lost to independence and autonomy.²⁸

Similarly, the void created by the loss of interdependence and rootedness are filled, in the modern social order, with a vivid sense of the “global village” made all the more concrete by the technological advances that bring cultures together through new modes of communication. In this new societal model, the immediate awareness of “other” cultures, “other” opinions etc., lead to an openness to a multiplicity of beliefs and values without demanding commitment to any of them. In the spirit of openness and acceptance that posits no threat to an individual’s personal autonomy, relativism naturally displaces the notion of and a perceived need for absolute truth. No longer predominantly identified in history, nationality, or religious thought and transmitted primarily through one’s relational life in the context of extended family, ethnic identification etc., values are now based on the criteria of convenience, desire, and utilitarianism directed primarily toward sustaining a sense of personal autonomy. While those belief systems that presuppose “absolute truth,” such as Christianity, are increasingly perceived as anachronistic institutions from an irrational past.²⁹ Here the

²⁸ See: Newbigin (1991) this book presents a cohesive and clear analysis of the significance of the loss of a Christian world view within secular Western society. Cf. Niebuhr, R (1951) and Niebuhr, R (1964).

²⁹ See Brown (1968:119-134) A continuing debate in philosophical circles deals precisely with the place and notion of “absolute truth,” that is, a permanent and unchanging “reality” to which all knowledge and understanding is both subject and with which all true knowledge will conform. It is the quest of philosophical study to ascertain that which is “real” and that which “is.” Thus the history of philosophical thought revolves to a great extent around this profound question. Until the

demise of notions of the *absolute* and *absolute truth* particularly challenge the church to interact with this culture effectively without compromising the objective criteria of its doctrine which includes the a priori assumption of *absolute truth*. Contrary to the problem experienced in previous eras, the Christian church in the context of modernity, is increasingly constrained to confront not individual objections to specific doctrinal statements but more seriously an objection to the notion of "Truth" itself.

This particular shift away from absolute standards and from the experience of "rootedness" in a primary context, be that family, community or culture, has both a negative and positive impact on the notion of beauty. In this cultural milieu "beauty" need not define itself in the manner demanded by the rational movement of the past. Here personal experience of beauty is by far the most convincing "argument" or criteria for analysing "beauty." Negatively however, this same openness to a discussion of beauty will crash on the rocks of relativism before any serious conclusions concerning it will be reached. Kant's insight that some "universal" criteria for beauty must be met ensures that "beauty" will not be defined so broadly that embracing "everything" it loses all meaning entirely. But equally true, Kant's own conclusions concerning beauty and the objective criteria necessary to posit "universally" acknowledged instances of "beauty," itself floundered on the imposition of an implied "absolute" standard compelling a universal response to the criteria of the sublime. If the church is to offer a unique and compelling argument concerning the significance of "beauty" to contemporary culture, her message cannot rest on

eighteenth century Western culture maintained a prevailing adherence to Christian doctrine as "truth." However, as empiricism became the dominant criteria of truth an intensification of philosophical investigation revolving around "truth" and what could be ascertained through human investigation and logic took place. Influential thinkers such as Hegel (1770-1831) and his student Feuerbach (1804-1872) introduced the notion that reality consisted of the outworking of the Absolute Spirit which is not over and above creation but inheres in creation. Following the death of Hegel, Feuerbach extended the view of his teacher, stating that this spirit was in fact "nature" itself. Ultimately, the conclusion of this philosophical movement was the conviction that knowledge of God is more accurately knowledge of "self." Philosophical debate moves back and forth between those systems that maintain an Objective Absolute God distinct from creation, and those which posit that ultimate truth is accessible to humanity through reflection and speculative thought that is centred on the physical universe. The dialogue, however, resists resolution. In contemporary thought, the dilemma of "truth" is finally abandoned by Richard Rorty and other pragmatists, suggesting that the criterion with which one must construct a notion of truth is that of efficacy. This progressive loss of absolute truth will be discussed at length in that section dealing with postmodernity.

doctrinal statements alone. Rather, the articulation of truth communicated with rational integrity must be attended by a visibly discerned participation in the beauty which is being professed. A Christian theology of beauty must, and can, bridge the gap between subjectivity and objectivity without compromising the criteria of universal applicability which truth demands.

Utilitarianism

Personal values, now uncircumscribed by a sense of the “Absolute” or any other criteria external to the individual (with the exception of societal law), are increasingly determined according to utilitarian notions of personally perceived concepts of the “good.” Ultimately, this social construct invites the individual to determine “value” on the bases of utilitarianism alone while traditional values of truth, goodness and beauty no longer compel personal commitment or personal action. Although the possibility of acting according to altruistic values remains, such values no longer exert a dominating influence on society providing an essential common ground on which social constructs are built.³⁰ The converse of this situation is not, as might appear, a situation wherein coercion enforces behaviour in the sense that the Inquisition might help to compel faith. Rather, the doctrinal themes that constitute the articulation of Christianity, must take “form” in the actual life of the believer in such a way that the “truth” inherent in Christianity is manifest through doctrine integrated with a spirituality consistent with the truth being expressed. Primarily, the life of the believer, in the manner in which it authentically expresses an image of Christ, becomes in Christian thought the primary witness or apologetic for the faith.

Concurrent with the utilitarian mindset that is fostered within modernity in the Western world is its propensity toward “reification” – the objectification of the world. Here, the “object” and in this instance the “human as object” is increasingly perceived

³⁰ This change is evidenced in Western society by contemporary attempts to re-evaluate notions of family and marriage, by the radical attempt to maintain the separation of church and state in all political decision making. It is evidenced in the contemporary clash of “pro-choice” advocates and the right to life movement. In its final expression it is evidenced in the growing swell of activism which asserts the notions of preference and convenience over previously upheld notions of the Judeo-Christian ethic on which Western society has been based.

as a “means to an end.” As a mechanistic universe introduced by Newton becomes the controlling or compelling metaphor in contemporary society, and rational and empirical knowledge ensure the progress of such a culture, Western culture is lured to adopt and embrace a pragmatic mind-set which equates value with function. In this philosophical construction “truth” itself is no longer recognised. Rather, the ultimate criteria for adopting a particular action, such as commitment to faith is determined by the effectiveness of a decision in attaining the end to which it points.³¹

If modernity has to a large degree prepared a foundation that promises to ensure the physical progress of the culture, it has left the human predisposition for affective, relational encounter virtually unattended and unnourished. And although Christianity remains evident in such a culture it too has been impacted by the paradigm shift that postmodernity expresses. Christianity now occupies a place that is parenthetical to the greater culture. However, it is precisely this culture to which the church perceives herself called to offer her message and vision of absolute truth.

In the aftermath of these dramatic cultural shifts, the significance of “beauty” is lost to cultural consciousness. Although beauty may be appreciated as a private motion of personal taste that evokes delight, it fails to contribute any substantial and quantitative “good” to society at large and is thus relegated to the peripheral edge of human experience.

³¹ Pragmatic philosophy, formally articulated in this century in the United States by William James (1847-1910) asserts that any theory is primarily true if it works in experience – in James’ classic work, truth is not absolute but functional. In his studies, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1909) and *The Will to Believe* (1897) James concludes that it is the dispositional nature of the human being, which will determine adherence to religious belief and not an appeal to absolute truth. Ultimately, James’ pragmatism dominates the popular North American culture, which embraces the notion that there is no dependable way to investigate truth or falsehood of theories or ideas except in terms of their functional effects. criticism of pragmatist belief, which revolves around the questionable notion that truth is determined by effect, is dismissed in pragmatic constructions of philosophy as an attempt to reintroduce obtuse and abstract principles to the understanding of knowledge. This view will re-emerge in the work of Richard Rorty, as a figure in contemporary philosophical thought.

Rupture between Doctrine and Spirituality

That Christianity in its various expressions, Catholic or Protestant, liberal or conservative, has not escaped the impress of modern culture is evident in four significant ways. First, Christian theology itself has become the domain of the scriptural or doctrinal specialists. The variety of concerns to which Christianity addresses itself has produced theological subsets and specialities within the greater “science” of theology thus diminishing a perception of the profound unity to which each subset points, as well as diminishing her unique emphasis on the nature of humanity itself. Second, the church, in her attempts to retain a degree of relevance for a culture wherein particular values and a belief in the “absolute” cannot be presupposed, has articulated a proliferation of “modern” approaches to Christian truth. These new models range along an extended continuum of belief from the most conservative, demanding a rigid and literal acceptance of Scripture, to radically liberal and sceptical expressions of the faith. Both extremes demonstrate a profound distortion of “absolute truth.” In the former category, truth is restricted to the limits of the written witness and demands strict conformity based on adherence to specific laws and duties, thus positing a reality entirely defined and maintained by judicial constraints. The latter construction is equally deformed as evidenced in Robinson’s *Honest to God* (1963) followed by *The Myth of God Incarnate* edited by Hick (1977). Within these works the church clearly demonstrates her own pessimism concerning “absolute truth,” to which traditional expressions of Christian faith point, by offering in its place modified versions of truth to suit individual tastes.

A third effect is the church’s adoption of a persuasive approach to evangelism which attempts to convince and compel adherence to its tenets by systematic argument alone. This rational approach to evangelism seeks to evoke a rational response of acquiescence to its primary thesis. In this case communication of the faith is presented in an apologetic manner while the content of the faith itself is deeply allied with the transcendent and metaphysical universe. The power that affectivity and emotion exert on an individual’s decision making process are ignored in an attempt to evoke a strictly rational judgement.

A fourth change, and most significant to the topic of beauty, is the rupture between theology as an articulation of doctrine and spirituality as the holistic expression of Christian truth. The church has lost her ability to present an effectively convincing holistic message wherein the gospel message and its spiritual implications necessarily inhere. In modern constructions of theology this tendency is expressed in a profound confidence in biblical criticism, a historically reliable tool through which the truth of Christianity will be discovered. The significance of the exegetical enterprise cannot be underestimated in Christian understanding wherein Scripture stands as a historical witness to the truth of faith in Catholic thought, while in Protestant understanding it constitutes the sole authority on which the faith is based. However, in a culture increasingly given over to a rational and empirical worldview, modern biblical criticism has adopted the stance of a "science." This "scientific movement" has led, in contemporary academic circles, to protracted arguments concerning the historical reliability of the documents in the first instance, and the more difficult elements of the document's contents that are not consistent with strict logical deduction. The twentieth century struggles with a content that might be conveniently designated by the term "mystery."³² This tendency of modern Christian scholarship is addressed by Kourie (1998), who suggests that the way forward in biblical interpretation is the recovery of a "mystical" hermeneutic wherein the message and content of Scripture are mediated by relational encounter with Christ. It is primarily this relational encounter that enlivens scripture and preserves the trans-historical nature of both Christ and his word.³³

³² Thus Rudolf Bultmann is able to find within the church an acceptance for his radical attempt to demythologise Scripture and posit a "Christianity" that is purified from the superstitious notions of the supernatural. In the early twentieth century, an understanding of Christianity devoid of notions of the supernatural, of grace, of a personal universe finds its way into popular culture particularly in the work of J.A.T. Robinson (1963) and John Hick (1977). Robinson follows Bultmann in an attempt to demythologise Scripture and renders the notion of a personal God inherent in traditional Trinitarian belief, to one wherein God is recognised as the "ground of being." The series of essays presented by Hick represents a scholarly approach to an attempt to systematically do away with Christianity's adherence to the supernatural and in some cases the historicity of Christ himself. Christianity."(Groeschel 1984:13).

³³It is the opinion of this writer that God as Trinity is eternally personal. This conclusion does not imply that a complete knowledge of God is available to the believer. Nor does it imply that all humans will know and experience God in the same way. Thus this statement does not imply that

A similar difficulty arises whenever Christianity is reduced to a system of doctrinal issues wherein its dominant themes are primarily communicated in a catechetical document, wherein content of belief is severed from a confrontation with the dynamic evidence of truth mediated relationally. In *Word and Redemption*, Hans Urs von Balthasar observes:

If we consider the history of theology up to the time of the great scholastics, we are struck by the fact that the great saints, those who not only achieve an exemplary purity of life, but who also had received from God a definite mission in the church, were mostly great theologians. They were pillars of the church, by vocation channels of her life: their own lives reproduced the fullness of the church's teaching, and their teaching the fullness of the church's life. This is the reason for their enduring influence: the faithful saw in their lives an immediate expression of their teaching and a testimony to its value, and so were made fully confident in the rightness of teaching and action. It also gave the teachers themselves the full assurance that they were not deviating from the canon of revealed; for the complete concept of truth, which the gospel offers us, consists precisely in this living exposition of theory in practice and of knowledge carried into action. . . . It was by virtue of this unity of knowledge and life that the great teachers of the truth were able, as was required by their special office, to be true lights and pastors of the church (von Balthasar 1965:50).

A similar thought is proffered by Alisdair MacIntyre (1984). Although dealing particularly with the notion of values and the language of morality, his insight serves as well to underline the implications of the division between the word of Scripture and

those outside the Christian tradition will not experience the God who "is" and are thus somehow excluded from the gift of salvation. However, that God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit implies that personal relationship in love is a permanent "quality" within God – yet his objective existence is experienced subjectively by his creatures. This belief allows for some degree of reconciliation between areas of contemplative experience outside the Christian tradition with the experiences of Christian mystics. The "personal" in God calls all humanity to a transcendent experience – to completion. Whether that is named as participation in Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is not contingent on the "personal" nature of God but to a certain degree on the context of one's full experience of culture. In this respect, one could conclude that the articulation of mystical experience, dependent on language and concepts, will be expressed in various ways. This reciprocal relationship between cultural context and mystical experience constitutes an ongoing debate in theoretical mysticism between contextualists and perennialists but does not negate the fact of mystical events. As expressed by Benedict Groeschel (1984:12) Christians must honour and respect the deep spiritual traditions of other faiths, while maintaining with the Dalai Lama, that traditions are very different: "Buddhism is Buddhism, and not Christianity" (Groeschel 1984:13).

the spirit contained therein. He suggests that after the passage of time what we are left with “are the fragments of the conceptual theme, parts possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, [of morality]” (MacIntyre 1984: 2).

Postmodernity

Balthasar’s penetrating understanding of what constitutes a theologian interpreted from the statement above shatters the predominant twentieth century view of a theologian as an objective articulator of Christianity. Von Balthasar focuses attention on the observable unity between the content of the message and the spirituality of the “theologian.” Later in his far ranging work in which he develops a theology of aesthetics, it is the notion of holiness to which von Balthasar ultimately focuses attention first in the person of Jesus and later in the saints of the church (von Balthasar 1982).

It is the unity of word and content that authenticates the insights and truth of Christian theology, and finally, it is this consistency which must attend the proclamation of the Gospel and without which theology is reduced from being an ontologically relevant theme to the status of information alone. Von Balthasar’s concern reflects a significant imperative, if the church is to encounter the emerging postmodern epoch in a manner sufficient to overcome the pervasive scepticism and pessimism by which it is identified.

The chronological divisions between the Middle Ages, the scholastic period, between the Age of Enlightenment and modernity are determined by an examination of cultural shifts evident in those periods. The movement from Modernity to postmodernity represents a particular difficulty. Contemporary society exists on the cusp of the two movements and, as might be expected, demonstrates a rejection of some elements of modernity while maintaining and absorbing those characteristics that best serve its own particular ends. Further, postmodern thought is represented

first by its formal philosophical articulations but secondarily, is also recognised in the “popular” postmodern expression of Western culture. Formal articulations of post modern thought, systematic in their presentation of “deconstructionism,” have produced and encouraged a social order that is largely intent on the destruction of “archaic” cultural systems while equally disinterested or unable to reflect systematically on the presuppositions with which they attempt to fill the cultural void. This tendency leads to a new cultural “norm” that is at ease entertaining and adopting contradictory belief systems under the guise of “open-ness” and “political correctness”

Formal articulations on postmodernism are presented in the philosophical works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty.³⁴ A brief review of the dominant concerns of postmodern philosophy represented in the thoughts of Foucault, Derrida and Rorty is sufficient to demonstrate the movement of contemporary philosophical scholarship away from dependence on the positive structural foundations of modernity and Enlightenment thought. The operative word within the postmodern movement is “meta-narrative.” This “meta-narrative” is understood as an enduring but erroneous structure of belief that assumes a central core of “truth” which governs the perceptions of all those who attempt to understand the nature of reality and to which all interpretations of reality have been traditionally conformed. It is the intention of postmodern philosophy to liberate thought from these artificial and erroneous preconceptions – thus freeing humanity to experience reality with a new, fresh and more accurate understanding of what reality does and does not consist.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

In general, postmodernism and postmodern philosophy represents a rejection of all those former categories of knowledge and truth by which both Enlightenment thought and modernity have structured and dominated human articulations of reality. Michel

³⁴ See: *A Primer for Postmodernism*, Grenz (1996). Grenz’s discussion of the contribution of each of these scholars to the formal articulation of a postmodern philosophy (Chapter 6) carefully analyses the basic linguistic presuppositions of postmodern thinking which gives rise in the twentieth century to a profound rejection of Modern and Enlightenment thinking.

Foucault has been termed “the quintessential Nietzschean disciple.” Within the framework of Foucault’s postmodern thought is the theme that all traditional categories of authority as properties by which truth and reality are articulated are contextually determined (Grenz 1996:124). Foucault’s corpus of work is almost exclusively related to his attempts to deconstruct these traditional categories of authority. This emphasis is apparent in Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1988) and in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Science* (1994). In this construct meaning does not reside within the object under consideration but is created by the language and discourse used to express thoughts concerning the object. Meaning exists solely in the context in which the discussion of the object is taking place. Foucault extends this view to suggest further that language is the tool utilised by one group to exert power over another (Pannenberg 1985:454). Foucault’s analysis of Enlightenment and modern epistemology leads him to the conclusion that knowledge is power - a suggestion that is intensified in his later work to suggest that knowledge is in fact violence. Thus cultural structures are conceived and articulated specifically to control or conform the behaviour of a less dominant social group to the standards of the primary social group – be that political, economic or religious (Grenz 1996:124-138). For Foucault, as for other postmodern philosophers, articulations of postmodern philosophy tend to focus on the primacy of “language” to the construction of ideologies and to the communication of social beliefs and values.

The positivism of Enlightenment and Modern thought posit that “real knowledge” or truth that is open to human detection and understanding (a dynamic structural core of “truth”) at its most basic level, exists. Postmodernity, however, asserts that truth itself is the product of language, determined by the common experience of a social group. The descriptive content of an experience transmitted through language is accorded in postmodern thought the status of “truth.” As experiences change, however, so too do the dominant issues and experiences of the social group which then responds with new descriptive categories that constitute the only “reality” that is available to the individual. In this construct “truth” and “reality” are in a constant

state of flux. At the heart of postmodern philosophical notions is, ironically, the foundational tenet that there are *no* foundational and perennial structures on which beliefs may be built.

Jacques Derrida (1930-)

Following a similar line of reasoning to that found in Foucault, Jacques Derrida's contribution to Post Modern philosophical thought is equally concerned with the power of language to construct social norms which are based on the contextual milieu in which the language develops. Derrida's insights are largely aimed at the literary world wherein he posits that texts must be understood to hold their own meaning in relationship with the reader and independent of the author. Again, in Derrida's work the underlying structure of reality is attacked and replaced by a systematic attempt to "deconstruct" the maze of social laws and conventions that attempt to limit the interpretation of data and through which social constructs impose an arbitrary and restrictive limitation on the process of interpretation and the discovery of meaning. The deconstructionist movement of Derrida's work is seen in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (1997). Further, Derrida's work focuses on the written word in particular and equally on the social sciences which are articulated through language constructs (Derrida 1991). The structural rules and conventions that underlie literary works serve, in Derrida's view, to impose an unsatisfactory restriction on those who approach the work under consideration. By extending his attack from the realm of literary works into the realm of the sciences emphasising "anthropology," Derrida asserts that no real knowledge concerning humanity is to be discovered through the avenue of written communication as it currently exists. Derrida further suggests that the modern and Enlightenment notion of an "objective observer" of reality is an impossibility. All observers, be they philosophers, scientists, theologians, anthropologist et.al., bring to bear on their observations, the subjective biases conditioned by their own inclusion in a social order. All are conditioned by the erroneous "meta-narrative" that attends human thought. Again, "truth" is lost in the maze of socially conditioned and

erroneous conclusions reached by those who have undertaken their studies in a manner consistent with rational and empirical studies. Derrida, further suggests that reality consists of those experiences to which an individual is subject and that are most clearly and truthfully expressed through the spoken word, which disappears the moment it is uttered. Consistent with his iconoclast understanding of language and structure, Derrida's own work is expressed playfully, graphically, and with little regard for the conventions with which he is so uncomfortable.

Richard Rorty

The third postmodernist to be discussed is Richard Rorty who adds a distinct element to the postmodern experiment while continuing to expound the central postmodern theme. Rorty's contribution to the new epoch, is the reintroduction of a radical "pragmatism" presented in *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays, 1972-1980* (Rorty 1985). The foundation on which Rorty stands is his perception that the attribution of "knowledge" traditionally assigned to philosophers and those who provide scholarly commentary on society as a whole is itself a misconception. His primary attack then is lobbied against the traditional notion of "the mind as a mirror" capable of discerning truth from illusion. An understanding of the "mind as mirror"³⁵ has controlled Western epistemology. In Rorty's view, fully explicated in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty 1980), "without the notion of mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself." In the same vein, Rorty continues:

Without this latter notion (mind as mirror), the strategy common to Descartes and Kant – getting more and more accurate representations by inspection, repairing and polishing the mirror, so to speak, would not have made sense. Without this strategy in mind, recent claims that philosophy could consist of "conceptual analysis" or "phenomenological analysis; or "explication of meanings" or examination of "the structure of the constituting activity of consciousness" would not have made sense (Isenberg & Thursby 01:14:00).

³⁵ The use of "mind as mirror" in Rorty is not to be confused with the same phrase used in mystical theology where the concept is used to suggest the reflection of Divinity within the soul.

“The mind as mirror” implies that there exists a pre-experiential realm of knowledge that is accessible to human intellection by which statements of “truth” and “falsity” may be measured. Traditional philosophy has asserted that this truth is available through scientific investigation and reflection. The “scientific” mindset that Rorty recognises within academic philosophical study is based on the unwarranted conviction that philosophical enquiry is able to posit unequivocal statements concerning “external reality.” “Truth, reality, and all such predicates have meaning by virtue of the current consensus of the users of those terms” (Isenberg & Thursby 01:14:00). Thus all statements concerning “reality” are thoroughly biased conclusions conditioned by an erroneous presupposition. Rorty determines that the inherent predisposition to search out reality and truth is irreparable. The solution to the dilemma is not, in Rorty’s view, to search for a more accurate lens by which to examine the social milieu, but to refuse in the first instance to see “reality” as a problem, to discard the concept and move on. Inherent in Rorty’s view is the belief that no reality exists outside of culture. As Isenberg and Thursby state concerning this perception, “Judgements about reality are culturally conditioned judgements about culturally shaped experiences based on culturally determined criteria about...and so around the circle”(Isenberg & Thursby 01:14:00). Rorty’s solution is the introduction of a radical “non-essentialism” or pragmatism. Rorty postulates a coherence theory of reality “statements are ‘true’ in so far as they cohere with the entire system of beliefs” while the aim of investigation into reality is not to discern an irreducible “truth” but to bring a coherence to one’s belief system whatever that may be (Grenz 1996:153-156).

In all three postmodernists discussed it is evident that the paradigm shift that so radically marks the postmodern epoch is the dissolution of the notion of “truth” itself as an irreducible and structuring reality by which and through which positive statements concerning the nature of existence may be measured.

The Positive Impact of Postmodern Thought

From a Christian perspective wherein the absolute truth of God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, necessarily structures her own self-understanding, the negative impact of postmodern thought stands in stark relief against this most basic tenet of Christian belief. As long as postmodern thought abandons the notion of “truth” the structure of Christian thought and that of postmodernism will remain diametrically opposed. However, it is further true to suggest that postmodern thought has positive value for both the individual and for the church. The postmodern experiment serves to alert the church to the “power” of language to construct and articulate the truth in a manner consistent with the “private agenda” of the dominant group. Herein the church must examine itself in light of its own self-perceptions in order to determine whether its primary agenda (be that evangelism, ministry, or the message of salvation) is an accurate and expansive reflection of the “Gospel.” The charge lobbied against the church concerning the imposition of “cultural standards” by one group over another that has at times plagued the “missionary” enterprise is a serious one. If the Christian foundation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is true, then the message of Christianity must be broad enough to incorporate the manifest diversity of cultures in which the Gospel is preached. Further, the church must discern the essential from the non-essential. Hence the church must examine herself paying particular attention to the dissemination of ecclesial “imperialism” that is unable to authentically incorporate the diversity that exists and is readily experienced in a pluralistic society (Newbigin 1991). In a similar manner, postmodernism calls the church to examine those culturally determined traditions that serve to exclude particular groups from a full participation in church life (the poor, women, the mentally and physically challenged, etc.).

Further, postmodern concerns alert the church to the consequences of depending exclusively on apologetic discourse as the fundamental tool in its evangelical pursuits. Here, the church is both reminded that her fundamental “message” must be mediated in such a way that the integrity between doctrine and life is manifest substantially in the lives of those who profess the faith. Thus, in an era

where argument alone will not compel belief, the church's profound message, which includes an experientially affecting and cognitively satisfying dimension that strongly support her deepest convictions and insight, must become evident. Similarly, postmodernity can encourage the church in that the presuppositions to which postmodern life adheres, are equally supported by Christian belief. Specifically, the church is vitally concerned with the "whole" person as body, mind and spirit wherein the affective and intuitive motions of the "heart" are accorded value alongside cognitive capacities. The church traditionally recognises that human nature is indeed expressed and matured in "communion" first with God and then within the body of the church. In Christian belief the primacy of communion is embedded in the very doctrinal statements concerning God himself. Similarly, postmodernism calls into question the belief that human intellection will ever plumb the full depths of "truth" despite the endless and energetic pursuit of truth to which philosophy or the social and natural sciences have applied themselves in the past. Inherent in Christian belief is the adamant conviction that "truth," in its final manifestation, is dependent on Divine revelation and not human intellection. Hence the deepest convictions of the early church up until the present are in agreement with the basic postmodern presupposition that the essential "truth" of reality remains hidden from the most minute scientific and rational investigations. Finally, in its own way the church's doctrine of the Holy Trinity serves to support the postmodern assumption that left to its own insights, descriptions of reality will conform to the consensus of human experience. Herein, however, the question must be asked of postmodernity "wherein lies the 'consensual cultural experience' that discloses "Trinity" itself?" The doctrine of the Trinity reveals God in a manner entirely foreign to human experience. Hence as an intelligible theological construction, the Trinity propels human intellection beyond the limits of common created experience and defines a reality that is most accurately defined as "mystery" as an inconceivable reality entirely unrelated to ordinary human experience. It must, however, be reiterated that the church and postmodernity are often diametrically opposed belief systems – both calling for a commitment of faith – be that faith in God or faith in a whole range of possibilities.

Hence the postmodern mindset, opens the way for Christianity to speak passionately to the concerns of society at large – community, justice, affective encounter, spiritual reality – but neither compels Christian belief or denies its possibility.

For the church to ignore these openings afforded her through the postmodern reaction to modern and Enlightenment thought would be a serious error. However, she must not sacrifice her deepest convictions in order to “win over” the new societal model. The negative aspects of postmodernity must be exposed and confronted at every level.

The Negative Impact of Postmodern Thought

The main target then, of postmodern philosophy, is in fact past philosophical models themselves that have attempted to discover and articulate the nature of “truth” and of reality while adhering to belief structures that are understood as invalid. The postmodern scheme exists to deconstruct those epistemological categories most closely associated with the metaphysical realm wherein the proposition of ultimate or absolute truth necessarily reside. In postmodern thought, the primary error of the past has been seen as an unabashed naiveté that has allowed humanity to believe in and be influenced by those constructs which support the notion of “absolute truth.”

Thus, the postmodern alternative suggests the deconstruction of an oppressive, constrictive and false social order that is based on the a priori error that “truth” exists, beginning with an examination of the structure of “language” within the social order. The subtle movement of postmodern thought is an erosion of the values and beliefs of the past. In their place postmodernism asserts a confident new articulation that suggests human nature, human experience, and the commonality of personal views ultimately constitute “reality” and “truth” which are in postmodern thought merely descriptive linguistic constructs. Positively, viewed against the dark background of the techno-mechanistic sterility of the modern era the postmodern synthesis offers a certain light. Individualism is displaced by the emergence of new social groups; tendencies toward viewing reality in isolated units (specialisation) gives

way to a new concern for unity; reliance on the inherent dependability of scientific and rational thought is itself questioned. Each of these effects are clearly evident in “popular” Western society which reflects its growing tendency toward experience as the basic criteria of truth.

However, it is equally evident that the criteria on which postmodern assumptions are built remains largely unexplored by society as a whole. This very fact suggests the overwhelming capacity for “language” to construct a “cultural norm” consistent with its own assumptions. The ability to create cultural norms through language, however, is not in question. In the Western world media has understood the persuasive capacity of words demonstrated in its profound impact on consumerism. Nor does the persuasive power of words demonstrate in any way the postmodern hypothesis that “truth” defined in a manner consistent with theological thought and much philosophical thought, is basically non-existent or that its existence is unimportant. Recalling the conclusion of Von Rad (Dyrness 1985:23) that the notion of beauty is of no particular significance [to Israel or apostolic Christianity] because it moves in the place of the experience of beauty common to all men” suggests that perennial understandings of concepts do persist trans-historically. Herein, a reconsideration of Karl Rahner’s assertion of the “primal word”(Rahner 1974b) supports the notion that truth concerning reality need not be discarded due to the malleability of human convictions. The most devastating effect of the postmodern understanding of “reality” is the ease with which it has been disseminated in Western society, wherein the human capacity to reflect on its own “consensus” has been sorely eroded by the pervasive nature of techno-communications. Scientific and technological advances however, gained throughout the earlier period, form the foundation, on which postmodernity both depends and flourishes. Thus postmodernity is equally recognised by its own tendency toward eclecticism. However, it is precisely modernity’s absorption with the “tools” of progress that has effected a discernible atrophy of the relational and affective motions of the heart to which Pascal and Kant allude. Consequently and positively, the radical loss of affective encounter, has propelled the postmodern world into a frenzy of activity that

seeks to re-address the human propensity for affective encounter and to re-discover its own interior depth. While negatively, an examination of postmodern philosophy reveals the concomitant fact that human being-ness is ultimately empty consisting solely of the fleeting experiential moments of a finite life.

To recover and align itself with the transcendent world, from which it has been severed, postmodern popular culture asserts its hunger for a sense of community by the new emphasis placed on the formation of social groupings and the resurgence of affiliations to ethnic cultural norms. Further, the postmodern concern to recover a spiritual dimension for its life is evidenced by a culture that by embraces any and all forms of spirituality. In the West, pagan spiritual traditions thrive, Asian meditation techniques thrive, popular psychology thrives – the catalogue of “popular spiritualities” presents ever-increasing spiritual motifs from which the consumer might choose. Further, this unrelenting tendency to re-establish a human connectedness with the transcendent, remains, in the West, unmediated by any notion of “absolute truth.” Hence, the dominant characteristic of postmodernism is reflected primarily in its insatiable appetite for non-rational experiences that promise to overcome the deepening sense of isolation, loneliness and affective sterility that modernity has imposed without compromising an individual’s sense of personal freedom.

Loss of Mystery: A Postmodern Challenge

A significant effect of modernity on the church has been the erosion of the church’s own consonance with the dimension of mystery which undergirds the truth of Christian theology as alluded to above. In the context of Christian belief, “mystery” refers exclusively to that which is only knowable or apprehended through God’s self-revelation. Thus, the church in a postmodern culture must cultivate, within the faithful, a well established reliance and confidence in “intuitive” knowledge which must attend the “spiritual” life and becomes the dominant “organ” of receptivity to Divine revelation.

Mystery and knowledge in the Christian context is neither allied exclusively with rationality or pure affectivity. Rather, “mystery” is the complex of reality which

is primarily meta-rational and knowable when it is disclosed by revelation but ultimately inaccessible to human intellection left unattended by Divine communication. Further, mystery within the church relies on notions of image and symbol, evidenced in the Orthodox understanding of sacrament. Herein “symbol” serves as a primary vehicle of communication. Within the transcendent realm of Christian experience meaning is disclosed in encounter with God himself, rather than arrived at through a process of discursive reasoning. In this sense Christianity agrees with Pascal: “The heart has its reasons that reason knows not of.”

Because the Age of Enlightenment was a Western phenomena its more severe effects are thereby limited to the Western Church while the Orthodox church has not experienced such a drastic incursion of secular beliefs into her own life. The balance between rational discursive reasoning and intuitive knowledge in Eastern thought might well serve as a model to the West in this area. Regardless of the political and social changes that have taken place in Eastern society, the church has continued to assert herself as the bearer of Truth and maintain her self-understanding as the exclusive context of reality both in its material and transcendent expressions. Despite the movement and often intentional denial of the content of Orthodox truth by the dominant culture in which she exists, Orthodoxy has retained and guarded her own identity which emphasises the notion of mystery. The notion of “mystery,” guarded by Orthodox Tradition, is that element of her life that permits Orthodox liturgy and life to coexist with consonance in a belief system that will not give up her deepest intuitions to an imposed standard of cultural values. Orthodox allegiance to the reality of “absolute truth,” that may not be denied and which is open to all as an experiential encounter, has allowed the church to embrace the full aesthetic content of reality including “beauty” unabashedly and with a celebratory spirit. In a postmodern culture, the Western Church must in the first instance recover the confidence necessary to assert her controlling presupposition: “absolute truth” exists and is knowable in relational and transforming encounter with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.³⁶

³⁶ Future studies might well undertake an exploration of the relationship between intuitive knowledge and discursive reasoning, and the impact that a balanced perception of “knowledge” might have on the contemporary church. A good beginning is found in Karl Stern’s (1965) *The*

The church in a postmodern era is presented with a unique challenge. The holistic content of Christian belief perfectly meets the spiritual hunger that has overtaken Western culture. However, the extent to which the church has adopted the basic assumptions of modernity serves to nullify the validity of the life she proclaims. This assertion is not to suggest that a rational and intellectual content of belief is unimportant. Rather, the rational content of faith, within the community of the church, serves primarily to direct and validate her experiential content – to discern the spiritual from the imaginative and emotive but to deny the validity of neither. Certainly the church has undertaken this work of validation and authentication of experience in the past evidenced by the Eastern Church’s understanding of “spirituality” which has deepened into the expression of an assumed movement of the faithful toward a holy life.

A Christian Response to Postmodernism

In the postmodern era the church must recover the heuristic art of communication – which evokes commitment through an empathic understanding of the individual while entirely conscious and aware of the holistic nature of “absolute truth.” By adopting the methodology of rationalism in her public proclamation of the truth, the church confronts culture in a judicial and magisterial manner rather than as positive and empathetic “encounter.” In the West the focus on both sin and individual relationship with Christ, reduces the cosmological proportions of Christian belief to the narrower focus of “individual salvation” with little consideration given to the new life that attends “new birth” within the “new community” of the church. More comprehensively, Western Christianity must reclaim her position as *the* expression of “reality” as opposed to *an* expression of reality that co-exists with other systems of

Flight from Woman. Stern identifies the basic differences that exist between intuitive or poetic knowledge associated with the feminine distinguished from the masculine predisposition for discursive reasoning. The implications of Stern’s work is significant and bears not only on the theme of knowledge but further indicates the “value” of the feminine mode of cognition thus presenting the basis for a re-evaluation of the church concerning the positive and essential contribution women make to theological thought.

belief, be they sciences, philosophies or theologies. Specifically, the church must consent to encounter “the world” with love and truth mediated not through the imposition of doctrinal statements alone that demand acquiescence to the “truth” communicated with the methodology of persuasive argument. A postmodern approach must include a heuristic element which invites participation through a vivid and compelling encounter with the life of Christ himself within a church whose very being reflects the comprehensive and demonstrable proportions of authentic “reality” as Christian truth. The church must begin to recognise that indeed, particularly in a postmodern culture, the “medium is the message”

If the church has anything of value to offer the postmodern world, that value lies primarily in her ability to express a life that is in conformity with the “absolute truth” of her doctrine. As bearer of “absolute truth” and unified in regards to the dominant themes of her message, redemption, love, meaning and purpose, despite denominational differences, Christianity must reclaim for herself her own centrality in the cosmic scheme. Specifically, within the greater society, the church must resist and counter the parenthetical role which popular culture places on her and through both word and action demonstrate the nature of reality that begins in and with a relational God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In a culture wherein “absolute truth” is not recognised, the church may with integrity point to that Truth as a presupposition of Christian belief and not as a variable open to discussion and modification by the larger culture. Beginning with her allegiance to the notion of absolute truth the church is then put in the position wherein her defence of truth is verified by her life and not through the clever articulation of persuasive argument.

Similarly, the church, insisting on the presupposition of absolute truth is further able to articulate a theology that reflects an integrated perspective on the apparently disjunctive notions of physical and metaphysical reality. Reality does not consist in the substantial and empirical world or in the metaphysical realm but is entirely and primarily that which is both physical and metaphysical, material as well as spiritual. The tendency toward any duality is the first error of rational thought as well as that of purely metaphysical thought. It is a division that is entirely defined by the

intellective capacity of humanity and not by a controlling vision of reality as a unified expression of God's will concretised "for us" in the substantial universe but not limited by the intentional and substantial expression of creation. Yet what can be understood of created reality is indeed important to the theological enterprise. Deriving from the depth of creative love expressed by the Holy Trinity, creation is included within the unitive reality of a personal and relational God Who in love creates *ex nihilo*. Thus theology, a formal construction of human intellection based on revelation, is able to attend to the task of making positive statements concerning creation and the nature of reality which unite both the physical and spiritual realm most profoundly in the Person of the Son. Further, the church's statements concerning the transcendent nature of God's essential being, which remains always beyond human comprehension, remains uncompromised – the church is free to articulate in a full systematic manner that which is open to human intellection concerning God without the attendant risk of reductionism concerning God's essential ineffability.

A distinctive aspect of Christianity's understanding of reality is that it is infinitely personal, indeed an infinite person, Jesus the Son who is "Truth." Hence the person of Jesus, co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit, unites the material and spiritual realm in his very being and exists as the ultimate expression of reality both as Creator and as Participant. Jesus statement, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" is utterly inclusive of reality. The extravagance of this statement may jar the contemporary ear. Objections made concerning the meaning of Christ's statement revolve around the concept of "truth" (Greek *aletheia*: Hebrew *'e met*). The Hebrew concept of truth is not concerned with "abstract" ideas. Rather, "truth" is allied in meaning to faithfulness and firmness implying relationship. As Jepson (Brown :1980:887) indicates the closest English word might be "reliability." Truth, as faithfulness, is that which can be relied upon and this primarily as it resides in God. This understanding of truth is not shared by Greek Classical usage wherein *aletheia* carries a number of connotations. These include "truth" as opposed to a lie, true and false statements, what is real as compared to "appearance." This final usage is clearly

seen in Plato's understanding of the "ideal" as a transcendent quality of reality. Yet this transcendental use of "truth" is not evident in the scriptural witness. A compelling argument can be made that Classical Greek thought does not share the intense notion of relationship that is found in the Hebrew use of "truth." Yet the New Testament witness consistently includes a relational sense in the word "*aletheia*" as a dependable witness. Those exegetical arguments that impress themselves into N.T. theology, are concerned most often with determining whether the writer is using the term in Hebrew or Greek sense. Thus in the passage under consideration, exegetes look for instances of Johannine affinity to either one or the other usage. Here Bultmann and Dodd argue that John "sees truth primarily as reality in contrast to falsehood" (quoted by Brown 1980:889) insisting that this demonstrates a Hellenistic view on the part of John. While other scholars Kuyper, Barrett, Morris and Brown (Brown 1980:889)³⁷ show evidence that John's usage is most characteristic of Hebrew use – maintaining that John often implies the Hebrew sense of "faithfulness." However, Colin Brown (1980) repudiates this approach entirely, suggesting that any interpretation which relies on a vague notion of the writer's affinity with one meaning of a concept over another is unreliable. Rather, Brown, through detailed analysis of the use of the word in the Old and New Testament demonstrates that a full constellation of meanings attend the word in the writings of John. With specific reference to John 14:6, Brown's conclusions are significant. He writes:

There are several passages in Jn. in which the meaning of *aletheia* or *alethes* is too broad to be equated with any one of ...the categories discussed above. One the most important of these is Jn.14:6 where Jesus declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me."...Dodd and Bultmann interpret this verse along the lines of a Hellenistic or gnostic dualism, to mean that through Christ the soul ascends to the heavenly realm of truth (Brown 1980:891).

Although Brown disagrees with this conclusion he does concur that Bultmann is correct when he writes: "He (Christ) is the way in such a manner as to be at the same

³⁷ See: Kuyper (1964) ; Barrett (1982); Morris (1994) for a full explication of the term *aletheia*.

time the goal; for he is also *he aletheia* (the truth)...as the revealed reality of God.”

Finally, he concludes:

To say that Jesus is the way as well as the truth means that the discovery of this *aletheia* is not something... at man's disposal... Jesus is the truth; he does not simply *state* it . One does not come to him to ask about truth; one comes to him as the truth. Since the way leads to the Father, I stress that “the way” is primary, and that “the truth” describes the way. Nevertheless, as the truth, Jesus is also the goal of man's search, for “he who has seen me has seen the Father” (v.9). When he declares that he *is* the truth, therefore, a number of distinct ideas are combined. Firstly, truth is not abstract or supra-historical but revealed in the actual personal life of the Word made flesh. ...Secondly, Christ is also the truth because he is the revelation of God, and therefore his own witness is valid... Thirdly, truth also stands in opposition to deception or falsehood. In the case of Divine revelation, this means that Christ is both *truth and reality* (Brown :1980:893).

Brown's concluding statement manifests the profound presupposition of Christianity: it is the “absolute truth” to which all else must remain subservient. Ultimately, it is Christ's own declaration and confirmation of himself as the “form,” “substance” and “accessibility” of Beauty Itself.

Deep Structure: The Word of God

In keeping with the postmodern emphasis on language and the nature of reality, the church has her own contribution to make. Here the church offers a strong and compelling alternative to the postmodern assertion concerning the nature of reality. It is not a coincidence that Scripture and the church bear witness to God's self-revelation using the term “Word.” In its Christian context the use of “Word” or “logos” in the first instance places “communion” and by extension, language at the very heart of the relationship between the Creator and his creation. The New Testament clearly states that the “Word” was with God and that the “Word” was God. Here Scripture declares that the very nature of “reality” as the thought and substance of Divine Truth lies in God's intention to reveal or communicate his own essential nature to his creation, to manifest himself as Word and Being. Earlier, in the

Genesis account of creation, humanity is said to be made in the “image and likeness of God” which, as will be shown in Chapter 5, bears on the God-like tendency within humanity toward relationship and thus communion and communication.

The Divine Word as Christ the Son, is in himself the fundamental structure of truth, not as propositional statements but as Image, as substance, and Personhood. This “Word” is the “Word of the Father” - the perfect reflection of his Being and Nature. Not open to human intellection, the nature of Christ and the Father is revealed through the ongoing dialogue between Christ and the Father, between Christ and the church, and between Christ and creation. This communication as Word is effected through the Holy Spirit who imparts a cognitive and affective awareness of the reality that is Word. In the Christian understanding, “Logos” is the Truth, the unchanging and structuring reality which undergirds and expresses a unique formulation of Truth as Person, as communion, as Love.

Although certainly used in a metaphorical sense and hence of little value to postmodern philosophical thought, at its deepest and most unwavering centre, reality is Christ the Word. It is Christ “who is and was and is to come”- an unchanging structure of Truth, in whose being “reality” exists and through whom reality is communicated to the created realm. Thus, God speaks, with audible clarity to those who are open to listen.

Reality itself then is not a static representation of what is visible or what is “spoken” in the context of cultural or social dialogue, but in the very specific language of *revelation*. Here, it is possible to state that Christianity may assert with the postmodern voice, that language is constitutive of reality but a specific and content-full reality of God as “the way, the truth and the life.” Moreover, if reality reflects an ongoing and historically authentic dialogue with God as he seeks to reveal himself to the created realm, it is also true to suggest that language of God is that which calls humanity into relationship, into a deep realisation of the “glorious structure” of reality. Within the created realm it is possible to suggest that the vernacular of God is that of *beauty*. It is precisely the nature of beauty to draw an individual towards itself and continually beckon the observer to relational

participation in the object under consideration, or, as in the case of contemplative prayer, *with* the deepest and infinitely personal beauty of Being itself. Beauty then, speaks of God, reflects God, compels relationship with God and thus structures the inter-relatedness of the cosmos itself – as the manifestation of the perfect and loving intention of God to communicate Himself to creation and to humanity.³⁸

Beauty in the Postmodern Church

In the church's self-understanding as the authentic context of "reality," the definite contours and significance of beauty – Beauty Itself - largely ignored by contemporary thought, may naturally be brought to the forefront of Christian concern and allowed to assert its particular influence over the comprehensive landscape of reality. If beauty remains an elusive and unruly theme in secular thought as Mothersill (1991) suggests, Christian thought is able to speak specifically and intentionally about beauty. The church is further able to define beauty by appealing to objective criteria and is, further, able to resist demanding that the specific criteria will predicate a particular and undifferentiated response by each individual: beauty, objectively defined is subjectively apprehended. The significance of beauty for Christianity cannot be underestimated. Ultimately, when beauty is authentically perceived as the objective and controlling manifestation of God's very being, the believer discovers that he or she exists as an intentional and personal subject within a full Divine reality conceived as love, joy and freedom. Nor is a particular individual response to such an awareness compelled by an imposed imperative as in Kant's analysis, but by the spontaneous and natural impulse of one's heart, now aware of and alert to the significant meaning and purpose contained in the gift of "being" itself. A theology of beauty, inherent in a Christian understanding of reality is able to elucidate the subject of beauty in three inter-connected aspects. First, it is able to make specific statements concerning God as he is in himself. Second, it is able to articulate a Christian anthropology wherein beauty is both the source and object of human personhood. And, finally, a theology of

³⁸ Cf. Thomas Dubay *The Evidential Power of Beauty* (1999: 335)

beauty will speak specifically about the essence of the infinite and eternal “space” which God himself occupies wherein creation “lives and moves and has its being.” It is precisely these issues which will form the content of Section Two of this work.

Although a number of utilitarian reasons for which the church in the twenty-first century might postulate a theology of beauty are implied and these far ranging benefits are not to be ignored, ultimately, a theology of beauty need not appeal to utilitarian ends in order to receive a hearing in a postmodern society. Rather, a theology of beauty itself transcends mere functionality – beauty, in its final articulation reveals a universe that is entirely gift in which all creatureliness is a celebration of joy and love – wherein, if humanity fails to praise and give thanks, the very “stones would cry out.”

Beauty tends to move the believer toward love and joy, toward God Himself - and in so meeting and engaging the heart propels it outward from the narrow strictures of self into the heart of its Creator. Herein, life becomes worship while God himself pipes the melody of all that exists.

As alluded to earlier, however, in the postmodern world, the difficulty inherent in introducing “beauty” as a significant theme both in the church and in the larger cultural sphere will be confronted in the a priori supposition of postmodern society that objective and absolute truth does not exist. In this context, the only sufficient “evidence” for the “truth” of Christianity and by extension, beauty as the manifestation of that truth, will be the *manifest beauty* inherent in those who profess Christianity - the integration of life and belief, word and action. In a postmodern world evidence of “truth” must be visibly discerned as the authentic integration of doctrine and life, as holiness – the manifestation of true personhood. This issue will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Six wherein “contemplation” will be examined as the precise landscape wherein “personhood” is both found and appropriated.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: SECTION ONE

Section One has presented a general overview of the place of beauty as it is discovered in Scripture and in the church, and has concluded with a discussion of those philosophical and cultural shifts which have served to displace “beauty” as a significant theme in contemporary thought (Chapters 1,2,3 and 4). From this overview certain conclusion may be posited. A review of the vocabulary of beauty as it is encountered in both Old and New Testaments, demonstrates that beauty is evident throughout the witness of Scripture. Despite the negative conclusions of Von Rad and Grundmann, beauty is a pervasive and important thematic element in Scripture. This more positive view is supported by the exegetical work of William Dyrness (1985) as well as by both John Navone (1996:1999) and Patrick Sherry (1992). Further, “beauty” in Scripture is concerned both with spiritual beauty and that of the physical world, creation itself, proclaimed both good and beautiful by God in the opening passages of Genesis. The notion of beauty, within Scripture, is also discovered to be qualified and enhanced by the motion of love, and particularly the self-emptying love of Christ visible in the Cross, which John’s Gospel suggests most fully expresses the glorification (manifestation) of God. Similarly, both Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar, recognise the centrality of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ to a deep understanding of beauty. Not limited in its scope to sentimental experiences as might be seen in romanticism, beauty truly embraces the totality of human experience which itself is circumscribed by darkness and light, by intensities of despair and joy and is manifested in self-giving love.

Chapter Three was concerned to locate the concept of “beauty” in the life of the church whose first thousand years provide a common heritage for all Christians. Whereas the church in the East and West diverge practically, in the manner in which their self awareness is asserted, both articulations are able to fully incorporate the other’s emphasis without damaging the coherency of their thought. Hence, the Eastern emphasis on the glorified Lord is not opposed to the Christocentric emphasis of the West. Rather, in the words of John Paul II, they might be correctly perceived as “two lungs” of the same body. Thus the ease with which the Eastern Church

utilises the concept of beauty and reflects beauty in liturgy, sacramental life, and in her understanding of the pursuit of holiness are consistent with traditional Roman understanding. Similarly, the church in both East and West share a common understanding that the revelation of Divine Truth is evident outside of the church as well as within it. Hence, the church is able to recognise and embrace those articulations of truth evident in the works of Plato and Aristotle et.al. and incorporate them into her own self-understanding without compromising or sacrificing the central appeal to “absolute truth” inherent in Christian thought. Thus, beauty is primarily articulated in Platonic terms which express the transcendent nature of spiritual beauty but none the less acknowledges the sacramental “signs” of Divine beauty in the created universe (Garcia-Rivera 1999; Schmemmann 1988a).

Between East and West a significant divergence of thought is effected by the Western Church’s embrace of scholastic methodology in her attempts to articulate the faith which never occurred in the East. Further, it is possible to conclude with Patrick Sherry, that in part this divergence of thought is correctly attributed to a failure in the West to reflect adequately on the work of the Holy Spirit. Scholasticism then in its attempt to articulate the church’s doctrines in a manner consistent with human intellection - to define the ineffable through analysis and systematic constructions - initiates the profound cultural shift that will ultimately displace the church’s confidence and faith in intuitive knowledge with an increasing dependence on rational and empirical knowledge which permeates the Western world. Equally, the impact of Reformation thought was seen to further displace those traditional beliefs associated with contemplative life, mystical experience and the attendant awareness of “beauty” to which the spiritual life points. Thus “beauty” both physical and spiritual that occupied a significant place in Christian thought in the past has become increasingly marginalised in the West. This loss is the result of the fact that as dominant cultural concerns have shifted from God centred values to the adoption of values more fully defined by self-concern and self-interest.

Chapter Four focussed on those dramatic cultural movements which have ultimately propelled the Western world into a social order devoid of any true sense of

metaphysical reality leaving it starved for affective encounter and spiritual meaning. Here, rationalism and empiricism, the quest for certain knowledge and a desire to assert dominion over the created order have effected a spiritual vacuum driving the postmodern world into a passionate reassertion of its “spiritual” roots. This profound hunger is evidenced in postmodernity’s willingness to embrace any and all forms of “spiritual encounter” available to it with little concern to examine or confirm the fundamental beliefs embraced, relying solely on “experiential” satisfaction as its criteria for acceptance of any particular system. The basis on which postmodern thought has been based reveals the underlying logic that has eroded an understanding and belief in absolute truth. The movement of postmodern philosophical thought has sought to deconstruct past philosophical and rational attempts to locate a deep and perennial core of truth accessible to humanity. Rather, postmodernism posits a radical “relativism” wherein reality and thus truth is experienced with reference to the ebb and flow of personal concerns within a social order.

Section Two of this thesis will begin by examining beauty as it is encountered in the works of Thomas Aquinas, Jonathan Edwards and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Aquinas contributes to the study at hand a definition and understanding of the nature of beauty which continues to inform both theological and secular thought. The work of Jonathan Edwards will also be reviewed in the context of a theology of beauty written at the height of the Enlightenment era from the perspective of American Protestant Evangelical thought. Finally, the theology of beauty profoundly evident in the work of Hopkins as both priest and poet will be discussed as it relates specifically to a sacramental view of reality which is most completely understood as “beauty.” The concluding chapters of this thesis will present my personal contribution to the development of a theology of beauty. Thus, the second section of this work will attempt to demonstrate the fully inclusive nature of beauty and its centrality to the mission of the church as the bearer of “absolute truth”, as bearer of “reality” to a world dominated by the illusion of relativism and the centrality of “self.”

SECTION TWO**CHAPTER FIVE****THREE APPROACHES TO BEAUTY:****THOMAS AQUINAS (1224-1274), JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703-1758)****AND GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS (1844-1889)**

In the preceding pages it has been shown that in the past, beauty has enjoyed a rich and significant place in Christian thought. However, over the course of time, the concept has been pushed to the very edge of academic and religious concern. Beauty, resonant with ontological significance, has become a lost value in the Western world. Herein the church is afforded the opportunity to re-assert to a postmodern generation the affective and intellectual content of her faith that devolves from the reassertion of beauty, and which will serve most specifically to address the deepest needs of the contemporary world. Nor are the effects of a loss of beauty confined to those outside the faith. Rather, beauty within the church is similarly neglected in articulations that deal with spirituality and the incarnational potential inherent in an individual's inclusion in the kingdom of God effected sacramentally through Baptism. The concern of this chapter will be twofold. In the first instance, it will serve to introduce specific articulations of theologies of beauty as they are discovered in the works of Thomas Aquinas and Jonathan Edwards. Finally, it will look at the "theology of beauty" as it radiates from the poetic insight and sensitivity of Gerard Manley Hopkins. In this final instance of a theology of beauty, the concern will be not only to demonstrate, in a formal manner, the poet-priest's theology, but will move outside the boundaries of "formal" explication to consider the deep and transforming potency inherent in the poet's vision of reality. This transforming potency of beauty, so clearly envisioned in the poet's work, is entirely available to a world that desires to participate in it. The second purpose of this chapter will be to lead into a discussion that will deal more specifically with the vast implications of the resurrection of a theology of beauty for the day to day existence of the believer.

THOMAS AQUINAS (1224-1274)

Theology of Beauty

The choice of Thomas Aquinas for this study is not arbitrary. Thomas, writing as a scholastic presents a clear, if somewhat technical articulation of the theme of beauty.³⁹ Further, basing his insights on the earlier work of Dionysius, Aquinas appeals to the earliest years of Christian thought – a common basis shared by Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism. From its earliest years the church has expressed sensitivity to the notion of beauty both as an ontological category of God as well as the goal of spiritual maturation – deification or *theosis*. In the early post-apostolic years the attribution of beauty to God and the church's sensibility to its significance, was largely unattended by a thorough going explication of this particular intuition. Rather, the comprehensive use of beauty received from Greek philosophical thought, was accepted, refined and expanded by the Christian understanding of reality and was incorporated with ease into her own vision and self-understanding. Nor does this suggest that the notion of "beauty" as recognised by the church is without justification. Platonic thought reflects a clear affinity to the full notion of truth to which Christian belief points. Whereas Platonic thought intuits the centrality of the "Ideal" or "Archetype" (the One), Christian revelation is able to refine that thought and give it concrete substance in the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity and in the Incarnation event. The "God" of the Greeks is not unknown. The church, recognising

³⁹A profound distinction exists between monastic articulations of theology which tend toward allegorical interpretations of Scripture and scholastic theology which are more closely linked to the literal text of Scripture. Similarly scholastic theology, a particularly Catholic phenomena, differs from contemporary articulations of Protestant theology in the primary significance accorded Scripture in the later Protestant works. Hence scholastic theology interprets Scripture and faith in accordance with both tradition and the scriptural witness of the church while contemporary conservative Protestant theology will rest more fully on the authority of the "written Word." Further, in more liberal Protestant circles, theology will often abandon traditional views of Scripture as authoritative in the first instance, and formulate its theological constructions in accordance with cultural norms as they exist in a given environment. See Leclercq (1988) for distinctions between monastic and scholastic theology and compare Hick (1977) for an example of a more modern method of theological interpretation. Catholic contemporary scholarship continues to reflect the historical view that tradition and Scripture form an authoritative basis for theology.

the internal harmony of Greek philosophical thought in Plato's concept of *kalokagatha* and the system of hierarchical beauty within the Platonic construction, was able to adapt the concept to specifically Christian ends without compromising her doctrinal integrity.

Similarly, Aristotelian metaphysics with its emphasis on categories of form and matter opened scholarly thought to the methodology of empirical analysis in the epistemological pursuit. Both strands of philosophical thought proved valuable to continuing attempts by Christianity to define herself in the face of those heresies that threatened the early post-apostolic church and that re-emerged in later periods of history.

Particularly, the ancient heresy of Manichaeism, strenuously asserting the duality of light and darkness, of matter and spirit and a distinction between the God of the Old Testament and that of the New, re-emerges in the medieval Western World in the ascetic cult of the Cathari or Albigensians. Thus, the proliferation of systematic and minutely detailed doctrinal texts produced by the growing class of scholastics during the medieval period address issues of deep significance concerning the coherency of Christian faith. With reference to the rise of the Cathari movement such works examine and defend the coherent nature of created "being" – asserting the Creator as the source of all that exists – and the nature of created reality as "good."

It is within this context that Thomas Aquinas develops his *Summa Theologica*. The concept of beauty is discussed within this larger work. Primarily, it is from the *Summa* as well as Aquinas' *Commentary on the Divine Names* that Aquinas' theology of beauty will be constructed. Throughout the middle ages, the consciousness of beauty and medieval sentiment concerning beauty derive from the work of Dionysius and that of the eighth century Irish theologian John Scotus Erigena whose work constitutes an expansion of the themes of his predecessor Dionysius. Umberto Eco describes the expansive and inclusive nature of Erigena's work as *pankalia* which embraces all of nature as it reflects the beauty of God. However, as Eco indicates, the problem inherent in the expansive nature of Erigena's treatment, lies in its tendency to conflate the Creator with the created, suggesting *pantheism* rather than *panentheism* or *pankalia*. Ultimately,

the church condemns Erigena's work – yet his sensibilities toward the beauty of the created order persist (Eco 1988:25).

The Pseudo-Dionysian text, *On the Divine Names* strongly considers beauty in Christian Platonic terms. Dionysius lauds the magnificence of Beauty while distinguishing created beauty from the Divine perfection of Beauty:

We call “beautiful” that which has a share in beauty, and we give the name of “beauty” to that ingredient which is the cause of beauty in everything. But the “beautiful” which is beyond individual being is called “beauty” because of that beauty bestowed by it on all things, each in accordance with what it is. It is given this name because it is the cause of the harmony and splendour of everything, because like a light it flashes onto everything the beauty causing impartations of its own well-spring ray. Beauty “bids” all things to itself (whence it is called “beauty”) and gathers everything into itself. And they name it beautiful since it is the all-beautiful and the beautiful beyond all. It is forever so, unvaryingly, unchangeably so, beautiful but not as something coming to birth and death, to growth or decay, not lovely in one respect while ugly in some other way. It is not beautiful “now” but otherwise “then,” beautiful in relation to one thing but not to another. It is not beautiful in one place and not another...Ah no! In itself and by itself it is the uniquely and eternally beautiful. It is the superabundant source in itself of the beauty of every beautiful thing.... From this beauty comes the existence of everything and is the source of all things. It is the great creating cause which bestirs the world and holds all things in existence, each being exhibiting its own way of beauty. For beauty is the cause of harmony, of sympathy, of community. Beauty unites all things and is the source of all things. It is the great creating cause which bestirs the world and holds all things in existence by the longing inside them to have beauty. And there it is ahead of all as Goal, as the Beloved, as the Cause toward which all things move, since it is a longing for beauty which actually brings them into being. It is a model to which they conform. The Beautiful is therefore the same as the good, for everything looks to the Beautiful and the Good as the cause of being, and there is nothing in the world without a share of the Beautiful and the good as the cause of being (Luibheid & Roem 1987:76-77).

The impact of the Dionysian understanding of beauty on the consciousness of medieval society and culture is profound and constitutes within it a “received tradition.” However, this understanding or shared sensibility toward beauty in medieval society, is

largely an unexamined one and in the rising wave of heretical thought requires some degree of analytical validation. Hence the Dionysian text serves as a prelude to Aquinas' own contribution to the subject of beauty which is diffused throughout his work. Hence a coherent system of Aquinas' "theology of beauty" will be constructed with particular reference to relevant sections of the *Summa Theologica* and his Commentary on the Dionysian work, *On the Divine Names* (Eco 1988:passim).

As shown above, Dionysius discusses the beauty of God in his consideration of the archetype "good" or *kalos*. He begins his treatment of beauty with a cascade of praise for the glory of "light" in its illuminating, unifying and differentiating potency (Luibheid & Russell 1987:72). The sun, in its superabundant capacity to infuse light on all that exists is analogous to the superabundant Good which has created all things and in which all that exists partake, each in its own capacity, from the most insignificant to the hierarchy of celestial beings themselves. All exist and radiate the goodness, light and beauty from which they derive.

Transcendentals

The place of the concept of transcendentals is significant, not only to a discussion of the concept of "beauty" but to those unchanging presuppositions that inhere in Christian thought. Transcendentals refer specifically to those qualities that constitute existence without modifying it in any way. Specifically, transcendentals refer to "properties of being." Hence transcendentals, as unchanging properties of existence, consist of such things as *unum*, *res*, *ens*, *aliquid*, *bonum* and *verum* (the one, a thing, a being, something, the good, the true) (Eco 1988:21). Christianity speaks of the transcendent being of God by which it means that God exists above and beyond the realm of human intellect and immediate apprehension and further, that those attributes existing in God such as love, goodness, truth etc., exist perfectly as transcendent qualities inherent in God's being. Thus to attribute the transcendental quality of beauty to God is to suggest that in God, beauty exists in fundamental perfection and is thereby, the source of all beauty. Those transcendentals that inhere properly in created being are understood as unchanging properties that constitute existence. To the degree that

created existence participates in the Divine as the source or cause of existence, so too does it participate in Divine Beauty, as the source of beauty itself.

The question arises whether Aquinas considered “beauty” a transcendental. As Eco (1988:30), indicates, the list as it appears in Aquinas’ *De Veritate* is not intended to be an exhaustive one and hence it is possible to extend the list to include beauty, if beauty is found to be consistent with the unchanging, extensive and universal nature of a transcendental. The implications of positing “beauty” as a transcendental are significant: beauty adds a universal and undeniable dimension to the inherent quality of creation and also magnifies, rather than modifies, the nature of God himself. If Aquinas’ thought is in itself consistent then beauty must be co-extensive with the Divine Nature as a transcendental in that, lesser beauty exists, pointing toward the Perfect Beauty of its Divine Source. Significantly, Neo-Thomistic thought, based on the consistency of Aquinas’ rationale, includes the notion of beauty as a transcendental thus specifying “beauty” as universal and objective.

Jacques Maritain (1954) concurs that with the conclusion that beauty is a transcendental and further, recognises its comprehensive nature:

The classic table of transcendentals...does not exhaust all transcendental values, and if the beautiful is not included, the reason is that it can be reduced to one of them (to the good; the beautiful being that which in things confronts the minds as the object of pleasure in an intuition. St. Thomas affirms that the beautiful and the good, metaphysically, are the same thing in reality and differ only conceptually. ...[Beauty] is in fact the splendour of all the transcendentals together. Wherever there is something existing there are being, form, and proportion; and whenever there are being, form and proportion, there is some beauty. Beauty is in the things of sense, it is also and par excellence in the things of the spirit. The honourable good has a spiritual beauty, a thing is said to honourable (*honestum*) when it possesses some excellent quality worthy of honour because of its spiritual beauty (Maritain 1954:133).

Summa Theologica

The *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas (Hutchins 1952), represents a consistent and rationally determined explication of Christian doctrine, of theology “the sacred science.” Herein, the theologian applies well disciplined philosophical analysis to

persistent and transcendent questions of God and existence and it is here that Aquinas frames the thought of his “theology of beauty.” The discussion of Aquinas’ theology of beauty as it is determined in the *Summa* is discovered primarily in those sections of his works concerned with the nature of God: the Simplicity of God,” the Goodness of God, and The Names of God (Hutchins 1952:14ff, 28ff, 62ff), as well as in his *Commentary on the Divine Names* (Eco 1988:passim).

Simplicity of God

An understanding of the “simplicity of God” serves as a background to Aquinas’ work that is more specifically related to the concept of beauty. In previous sections of his work Aquinas has ascertained God’s existence using the Aristotelian terms of the Unmoved Mover, the Uncaused Cause etc. In the section under consideration, Aquinas goes on to demonstrate the Uniqueness of God, his irreducibility to strictly human concepts. However, Aquinas does not affirm that God is only to be understood in terms of negation alone. Aquinas does not deny that negation preserves the ineffability of God. But similarly he is not convinced that ineffability and negation constitute all that can be known of God.

Human language concerning God, that may indicate that he is separately good, kind, just or strong etc., as found in Scripture, reveals not a division within God but humanity’s intellective limitations which cannot adequately describe the coextensive nature of God as perfectly One and Unified. Human beings “know” and understand according to their own nature which is composite, and their own manner of perception which leads to the constructions of simile, metaphor, and analogy as modes of communication. Hence when theological language discusses those transcendental qualities that are correctly posited concerning God, they are not understood as composites but as inhering in God as One. They exist in an entirely distinct manner from their counterparts in the created realm and hence perfect semantic equivalents do not exist. To assert that God is love or God is beauty, however, is not to assign anthropomorphic categories to the Godhead. On the contrary, it is an assertion, more

correctly, that assigns Godly characteristics to intelligent created beings for whom “language” attempts to articulate and communicate the nature of reality. Nor when such words are used of God, are their meanings circumscribed by the limits of human intelligence. Rather, in God they exist as superabundant manifestations of these qualities as they are in their perfection.

Simplicity of God – Complexity of Creation

The simplicity of God determines that the existence of God and his essence are One, unlike created being wherein existence, “being,” and essence are separate realities. Similarly, created being is both actual being in its existence and potential being in that it moves toward an end. In God “being” is entirely actual. In God there is no movement toward an end. God, in himself, is his own Alpha and Omega. In God essence and existence are perfect conditions of his Oneness. God’s perfection – God’s end - is contained in his “Being” itself.

On a human level, however, existence is determined by actual form and by the potentiality of form. Thus human complexity consists in its capacity to be motivated toward a particular end - to strive toward that which is not present in the actual. Essence, is most closely associated with the mode of being, i.e. whether an animate or inanimate being, whether an intelligent being or non-intelligent. In humanity, the essence of created being is recognised in the entire constellation of abilities or tendencies toward which a person is predisposed by virtue of being human. Thus created being moves toward an appropriate end consistent with its form and with its essence. To be essentially human presupposes those notions that set humanity apart from other forms of being, animals, plants, minerals etc., whereas the scope of “existence” is limited to form and substance. In God, on the other hand, who is One, existence and essence are not separate aspects of his nature. Rather, because God exists and is essentially One – his existence inheres as his essence. God is pure and simple Being who, in his superabundant perfection, imparts both existence and essence to the diverse forms of created matter. In God, qualities or virtues do not subsist as elements of his existence apart from his

essence; nor do they exist as composite features of God's essence subsisting as particular elements. All exist in God essentially, fully, perfectly and as the actuality of essence and existence, through the simplicity of his Being One, perfect and full.

It is the nature of created being to exist as a composite – both in its possession of form and substance, and in the essential qualities that inhere in the individual species. Thus, a dog is essentially a dog owing to its existence as having the form of dog, and also as an essence – participating in those elements that pertain essentially to being a dog. In created being “*is-ness*” is separate from “*thing-ness*” The same is true for humanity. The fact of being, *existence*, is separate from the essence of being human, the composite of “things” that specify the nature of humanity. Whereas a human being may properly be reduced to his or her constituent parts, either those pertaining to form or those pertaining to essence, this is not the case with God whose essence and existence are irreducible. Because created existence subsists in the will and creativity of Divine existence as its source, created being participates in the Divine nature while remaining distinct from it. Created reality subsists and participates in the Divine Essence/Existence in the same way that a piece of art subsists in the mind of the artist – distinct from the artist's being but entirely conformed by the essence of the artist himself.

Potentiality in Being

Aquinas is concerned to demonstrate that a unity persists between God's perfection and the evident imperfection inherent in the created realm. In Aquinas perfection exists in creation as the perfection of existence alone. Here an understanding of perfect existence and that of potential within created being is an essential one. Created being remains perpetually in a state of action that is effected by the motion of “potential.” Simply, all that exists is perfect in the sense that it “is” but not in the manner of “how it will be.” Each species or genus contains within itself essential elements pertaining to its particular nature. Thus created existence contains within it the potential to “become” that which is its true and intended end. Simple existence, then, is attended in the created realm by “potential” existence. Aquinas then posits that existence, as

being, is perfect, while potentiality as movement and the addition of composite features, may or may not produce the end to which an individual existence is intended to move. Hence the perfection present in created being through existence continues to persist in the objects “*is-ness*” and through its potential to reach the perfect “end” toward which it is intended. In this regard, Aquinas discusses virtual perfection, formal perfection and eminent perfection as it pertains to existence and potentiality. Virtual perfection is recognised in the manner in which a parent contains the perfection of the human nature of its child. Formal perfection is recognised in the potential of a seed to contain the perfection of its species within itself in the way an acorn contains the perfection of an oak but is not itself an oak. Finally, eminent perfection resides in the manner that the perfect form of a piece of art resides in the mind of the artist. In this situation the form of the piece is perfectly eminent to the artist. It is in this last manner that creation is eminent in God and participates in Divine perfection. Thus the fact of created existence is perfect – not in the perfection of its essence – but in the simple fact that it exists. It is evident therefore, that the simpler a created object is, the more perfect it is. A rock is perfect in its form, substance, and dimensions. Similarly, the more complex a created being is in the physical realm – from plant life to human life the greater the possibility that “deformity” or in Aquinas’ terms “evil” will interrupt the natural progression toward its intended end.⁴⁰

Goodness, Happiness, Delight

The “good” as it is applied to being in Aquinas’ thought is not related, in the first instance, to moral goodness but more accurately to the quality of desirability that constitutes the motivation for actions. In Aquinas’ thought, creation is God’s out pouring of his own essential Goodness.

God’s motive in creation was the diffusion of God’s
goodness: being good, God wanted to share God’s goodness with

⁴⁰ “Evil” in the work of Aquinas refers specifically to the absence of the “good” therefore alludes to those circumstances that inhibit the perfect development of created being. In this initial instance of Aquinas’ use of evil he is not positing a “moral” definition.

others....Aquinas claims that the Divine beauty is the motive of creation. Because God loves God's own beauty, God wishes to multiply it as far as possible by communicating God's likeness to creatures. God is the cause of their radiance by sending down to all of them a share of God's luminous ray. Each form imparted to a creature is a beautifying participation in the Divine radiance, "a kind of irradiation coming forth from the Divine brilliance: and since being comes from form, we can say that beauty is the font of the existence of all things" (Navone 1999:108).

God, in his simple actuality, is both Good and Goodness itself - perfect and without defect. Whereas the potentiality inherent in created existence implies a perpetual motion of change and growth – a movement toward some definite end. As such, potentiality in created being further implies a degree of incompleteness which compels action toward a perfect and desirable perceived good consistent with its own kind or being. The good is that which is perceived as beneficial and worthy of obtaining, while the end to which the "good" points is that of happiness - the state wherein desire is satisfied and appetite sated etc.. Essential to humanity, as a manifestation of the "image of God," is its possession of intellect, which affords an individual cognitive perception. Herein lies the human ability to chose and discern what constitutes the good or desirable, and thus move towards a particular goal in order to possess the "good" end that is perceived.

Epistemology

Here Aquinas' understanding of "connaturality" is significant. Aquinas states that "knowledge occurs by virtue of the fact that the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower" (Hutchins 1952:53). Intelligent being is formally one with the greater creation and is thereby able to recognise and know it in a connatural manner. Because humanity is oriented toward sensory knowledge as well as toward conceptual abstraction, human intellection is able to perceive sensory data and through it recognise a universal form. Humanity, then, is able to know God, although in a limited fashion, through the natural world – not in the sense that humanity and God share the same existence or essence, but in the human ability to know a particular cause by its effects. Thus humanity is able to perceive in created beauty the universal "beauty" of which all created beauty is but a reflection. In this case, existence leads to the acknowledgement

of a *First Cause*. Similarly, for an individual to desire something that is perceived as “good” leads to the knowledge of a supreme “Good” from which all lesser good derives. Finally, to the degree that the perceived “good” is recognised as in some way participating in a Supreme Good, the existence of the “good” leads an individual to a certain knowledge of God as the Source or Divine Cause.

As Aquinas moves towards a proof for the Divine Source of beauty, he is not concerned with aspects of particular instances of beauty but with the broader contours of “organic beauty” – beauty as the expression of the essential relationship of parts to the whole (Eco 1986:74-83). Aquinas sees beauty as unitive, a view challenged by Duns Scotus. Herein, Aquinas diverges from the Franciscan sensibilities which are suspicious of scholastic explications of theology which tend to explain the mysteries of God with an exactness and rigidity that is inconsistent with the very nature of God.⁴¹ Duns Scotus’, contesting Aquinas’ understanding of beauty, offers a definition of beauty that illuminates the difficulty that is encountered if Aquinas’ view of beauty is accepted without reservation. He states:

Beauty is not some kind of absolute quality in the beautiful object. It is rather an aggregate [aggregatio] of all the properties of such objects – for example, magnitude, shape and colour, and the sum of all the connections between themselves and the object (Eco 1986:86).

As Eco explains: “For Aquinas, when a number of forms converge to produce a ‘mixed’ body, the human body for instance, they lose their own proper substantial form. The body is invested with a new substantial form, that of the compound....In maintaining the unity of substantial form, Aquinas was led to view that an organism was above all something unitary (1986:86).” Scotus on the other hand maintained that a composite whole includes the being of all its parts, and the partial being of many parts or forms. For Scotus, any composite object is actual because of the actualisation of its parts. Its

⁴¹ This difference in perspective will be addressed in that section of this thesis which discusses the poetic vision of Hopkins. Franciscan sensibilities arising from the work of Duns Scotus are, in this period, concerned that scholastic methodology and articulations of the faith, fail to take into account the manifest diversity of creation and suggest, if not state, a duality between the universal and the particular.

unity depends not on the unity of its form, but on the natural subordination of partial forms to the ultimate form (ibid.). Ultimately, this emphasis on the actualisation of parts led Scotus to a less unitary conception of beauty than that of Aquinas (Eco 1986:86). Thus Scotus is able to affirm “particular beauty” within creation as opposed to the concept of a universal beauty which concerns Aquinas. In short, whereas Aquinas recognises the unity of forms, Scotus’ aesthetics was concerned with multiplicity of forms and thus introduces a relational component to the concept of beauty. Further, Aquinas’ understanding that beauty relates specifically to the appropriateness of form to function suggesting a functional view of beauty is not shared by Scotus. Rather, as will be shown in a different context, Scotus, introduces the concept of *haecceitas* (“thisness”) which affirms the unique value of individual objects, and by extension, implies the unique beauty of individual forms. The question must be asked: are these views diametrically opposed?

It must be asserted that Aquinas is not, in the first instance, concerned to prove anything at all about “particular” beauty, and his own sensibility to “particular beauty” is not evidenced in his *Summa*. It might be deduced however, that the medieval sensibility to beauty, as it is received from the tradition of Dionysius and also that of Erigena would indicate that Aquinas’ own *personal views* on beauty might well extend to “particular beauty.” However, it is the “universal” form which constitutes Aquinas’ concern in his *Summa* and in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. Here it is significant to note that Aquinas is writing to counter the heretical claims of the Cathari whose views are antagonistic to the whole order of creation. Thus, Aquinas is concerned to demonstrate that created substantial forms are good as opposed to evil. Hence his concern is not with particular instances of beauty but with the *concepts* of good and beauty themselves which are manifest as created forms. However, it is equally evident that Aquinas’ view of beauty has its own genesis in the Neo-Platonic articulation of Dionysius while Scotus offers a fresh and original view that rests more firmly on the concrete objects that substantially exists in the physical environment. Both views, *when taken to the extreme*, are shown to be lacking. Aquinas offers a universal concept of beauty that exalts the “whole” and by so doing tends to diminish the beauty of the particular while Scotus’

view could be understood to suggest that beauty exists in created objects in isolation with little or no dependence on a Divine Source. Neither extreme, however, does justice to the individual theologian. Rather, Aquinas is profoundly concerned with the physicality of the world in which he exists. If it were otherwise, there is no need for a theology of beauty in the first place. Similarly, Scotus is profoundly aware of the Being of God who undergirds not only his writing but his very life. When *not* taken to the extreme, neither view negates the value of the other. The universal sense of beauty to which Aquinas alludes gives meaning and significance to the instances of particular beauty to which Scotus appeals. Similarly the unique instances of beauty with which Scotus is concerned clearly suggest the beauty of their organising Divine Source. If neither view is pressed beyond its reasonable limits both serve well to inform the other. This synthesis, I believe, is apparent in the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins for whom the transcendent beauty of God and the created beauty of the physical world are not in opposition. Rather, Hopkins' theology of beauty, not presented with the forceful rigour of a theological argument but with the awe and wonder of a participant within the vast grandeur of creation, suggests that the transcendent beauty of God and created beauty exist as a dynamic and eloquent dialogue of delight and of praise.

Further, Aquinas, consistent with traditional Christian thought, agrees that full knowledge of God is entirely beyond human intellection.⁴² God is ineffable, transcendent, beyond conceptualisation – yet, he is knowable to the human creature. If humanity is unable to attain a full knowledge of God through the power of cognition, Aquinas also asserts that knowledge of God remains available to humanity through the mode of revelation, which lifts the mind beyond its formal limits and opens it to the perception of “Divine glory.” Relationship with God and intimate encounter is therefore a significant aspect of potential being inherent in the nature of being human, which leads in humanity to a connatural knowledge of God and of those aspects or attributes that are predicated of God. God himself draws an individual towards a full perception of his own

⁴² Here the term “full” refers to the fullest knowledge of God possible in the created world and its intensification in the next. There is no indication in Aquinas that human intellection will ever attain a knowledge of God that perfectly comprehends His nature.

infinite beauty and thus elevates the limited perception of human intellect. In this motion, God who is radiant simplicity lifts the created and complex being toward a participation in his Divine Good. Hence humanity is able to recognise not only the fact of God through his effects, but to a certain degree, the essence of God as he is in himself through contemplative participation in the Divine Being to which humanity alone is drawn through the potentiality of its essence. The same movement of the human being toward knowledge of the transcendent world, through connatural knowing and the gift of revelation, applies to all that is considered appropriately of God. For Aquinas, to encounter God through the natural world is sufficient to compel faith. However, it is the surpassing gift of revelation which leads to a living and cognitively satisfying encounter with the perfect wholeness of God in the fullness of his Trinitarian Being.

If God is perfectly good and goodness itself, he is also perfectly happy and happiness in himself as the mode of his being. Similarly, any other quality that is separately perceived in the created realm such as love, mercy, compassion etc. (except evil) exists in God in its essential fullness, and is contained perfectly as his very Existence/Essence. For Aquinas, this supposition is no less true for the notion of beauty which is inseparable from his understanding of good and of happiness.

Happiness, on the human level, is that “end” to which humanity moves because it constitutes the state wherein desires are satisfied or sated. However, for humanity, happiness is an elusive state and although degrees of happiness attend human existence, humanity remains in continual movement towards a perceived greater happiness which is only satisfied when an individual is able to participate in perfect happiness – entirely free and undiminished. Thus in the created realm perfect happiness remains for an individual an unfulfilled desire. Similarly, delight, which lifts the heart and compels joy, is experienced within the created realm in a limited manner. Happiness and delight are actual experiences for the individual but they remain episodic, fluctuating and untamed. In this sense happiness, delight and joy, in fact all that constitutes the highest desires of human existence, are destined to remain only partially fulfilled until they encounter the

perfection of the Divine Essence/Existence partially through contemplative experience in this life, while fully in the life to come.

The Good and the Beautiful

Aquinas concludes with Dionysius that the “good” and the “beautiful” represent two aspects of the same form.

Beauty and good in a subject are the same, for they are based upon the same thing, namely, the form; and consequently good is praised as beauty. But they differ logically, for good properly relates to the appetite (good being what all things desire, and therefore it has the aspect of an end (for the appetite is a kind of movement towards a thing). On the other hand, beauty relates to the knowing power, for beautiful things are those which please when seen. Hence beauty consists in due proportion, for the senses delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind – because every sense is a sort of reason, just as is every knowing power. Now, since knowledge is by assimilation, and likeness relates to form, beauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause (Hutchins 1952:26).

However, Aquinas introduces a unique consideration to the union of the good and the beautiful in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*. Aquinas adds the notion that beauty endows the good with a visible form. He states:

Although the beautiful and the good are the same in the subject – because both clarity and consonance are included in the nature of the good – they are conceptually different. For beauty adds something to the good, namely an order which enables cognition to know that a thing is of such a kind (quoted by Eco 1988:31).

Further:

Since the good is what all things desire, anything which has the explanation of its appetite within itself can be seen to pertain to the notion of the good. Of this sort are light and beauty...(quoted by Eco 1988:32).

Thus, Eco concludes, “the beautiful therefore – like light, love, ecstasy and zeal- is considered as the object of an appetite and is assailable to the good. It seems reasonable to say, therefore, that in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*, Aquinas thinks of the

beautiful as a way in which the good makes itself manifest (Eco 1988:32). To specify “beauty,” then, is to bring into consideration different aspects of a form – those that pertain particularly to visual apprehension. Thus Aquinas asserts three specific criteria for a formal understanding of beauty: integrity, proportion and radiance. Each aspect adds a particular emphasis to Aquinas’ understanding of beauty. Objectively, Aquinas asserts that:

Three items are required for beauty: first integrity or perfection (*integritas sive perfectio*), for things that are lessened are ugly by this very fact, due proportion or harmony (*debita proportio sive consonantia*); and third, brilliance (*claritas*) (Bourke 1960:263).

Further, each of these three distinct elements have their roots in the intellective capacity because

[The] light, that makes beauty seen, and the establishing of due proportion among things belong to reason. Hence because the contemplative life consists in an act of the reason [choosing to contemplate the Good] there is beauty in it per se and essentially (Hutchins 1952:609).

Further, Aquinas distinguishes humanity from other animal forms by stating that “whereas the other animals take delight in the objects of the senses only as ordered to food and sex, man alone takes pleasure in the beauty of sensible objects for its own sake” (Hutchins 1952:487).

Definition of Beauty in Aquinas

It is possible to recognise that Aquinas’ understanding of beauty as that which pleases or delights when apprehended (Hutchins 1952:26) is far more significant than the mild sounding definition may appear to a modern ear. The beauty of which Aquinas speaks must be appreciated both as it relates to the physical beauty of the universe, and in its sense of the transcendent or superabundant beauty which is God himself. That which pleases gives delight and produces happiness. It is, therefore, the good and in this manner, the beautiful. The suggestion of Benedetto Croce that Aquinas’ definition of beauty is so broad that it is virtually unassailable implies further that it is virtually

unusable. The criticism however reflects the difficulty inherent in a modern philosophy entirely cut off from the notion of God and not a defect in Aquinas' thought.⁴³ Within the coherency of Christian doctrine and the Christian understanding of reality, Aquinas is making a fully defensible and significant statement that supports the conjecture of Dionysius that God is Beauty itself. For Aquinas, as for Dionysius, the Good and Beauty are one and to speak of "good" or of "beauty" is to approach the same form from different angles. The simplicity of Aquinas' definition draws together notions of good, happiness and delight, suggesting that "beauty" in the perception of the beholder, is the "goal" to which humanity moves in its pursuit of happiness and "the good." Perfect Beauty, God himself, is then the most fulfilling "vision" toward which humanity strives. Aquinas' view that beauty stands as a transcendental is evident in his appropriation of the Dionysian understanding of beauty. However, as Eco demonstrates, Aquinas extends the Dionysian understanding significantly by adding a final statement to the concept in his *Commentary on The Divine Names* which demonstrates the notion that beauty is a physical and visible manifestation of the coherency of the more elusive quality of the "good."

A more substantial criticism of Aquinas' insight is suggested by Patrick Sherry who demonstrates that a problem arises in Aquinas' work by the theologian's insistence that all three "categories" must inhere in an object if it is to be considered beautiful. The "trinity" of unity, radiance and integrity, do not hold true for each object that is generally designated as beautiful: the sky which has radiance and form is devoid of true integration because it lacks parts standing in proportion one to the other. This limitation leads Sherry to conclude that Aquinas' analysis is too wide to cover what might be called "beautiful simplicity" (Sherry 1992:33). Sherry's criticism seems well founded. However, Aquinas' construction is understandable in the light of his primary purpose in writing the *Summa Theologica*. Herein, Aquinas attempts to offer a coherent and systematic explanation of Christian belief that is mindful of those particular heresies that

⁴³ In 1931 Benedetto Croce wrote: "The fact is that his ideas on art and beauty are, not false, but extremely general. This is why they can in a sense be always accepted as correct....For this reason,

seek to undermine the content of Christian belief in general. The heresy of the Cathari, which posits the innate evil of created matter, suggests that in the first instance Aquinas is concerned with “beauty” as “goodness” in its material forms. At the same time, it must be reiterated that Aquinas does not suggest that his own views exhaust the knowable dimensions of beauty.

The Beauty of God consists in the perfection of his essence and existence as pure simplicity in which each attribute although discussed separately resides in God as a unified and essential perfection. Created being consists primarily in the fact that it participates in God from whom it receives its being as form and existence. The “form” of a created object – species, in Aquinas’ thought is beautiful in itself, having derived its very existence and essence from the Divine Perfection- from Beauty itself. However unlike God, the essential nature of created being is that its existence is both actual and potential. Inherent in the potentiality of created being is “motion” which propels it towards its own perfect end according to its mode of being. The perfect end of created being then is to express its coherent nature as “beauty” by manifesting its intentional end. In general, beauty, is an objective reality in created being in that it possesses integrity, proportion and radiance which manifests the true end of the object. The integrity of which Aquinas speaks, implies that together with a harmony of parts, a being is well ordered to its own end. Thus that which “is” coincides in fact and truth with that which is meant to be. *Claritas*, is the very radiance, which manifests beauty and allows it to be apprehended and understood as beauty. Thus beauty in Aquinas’ construction is manifest both as an objective form and in its subjective intensity.

Beauty and the Son of God

If beauty is to be recognised as a formal concept in Aquinas’ theology then the question must be asked, “how does God manifest his beauty in the physical world?” The answer lies in Aquinas’ understanding of the relationships that exist within the Holy Trinity and the manner of the procession of the Son and Spirit as it impacts upon his

understanding of “image.” The question is answered in the manner in which Aquinas determines if the “names” attributed to God by the Church Fathers are adequate and fitting. Among the various attributes Aquinas considers are those posed by St. Hillary : eternity, *species* (which means both species and comeliness) and enjoyment (*usus*) (Eco 1988:123). *Species*, is attributed to the Son of God and bears on his identification as “image of the Father.” Hillary uses species to express the impress of an image on an object through which the image takes on the exact form of the original. Therefore its image is its species or form. If then, God is considered Beauty in himself, as the impress *image* of the Father, the Son is, in his own form or species, the image of Beauty. And, as co-eternal with the Father, and of equal status, is therefore Beauty itself in his own manner of Being – as species – form – beauty (Eco 1988:124). Finally, the Son is the expressed *image* of the Father as his “Word” constituting his radiance and splendour as a manifestation of the perfection of the Father. “The Son of God then, is a perfect image, an entity adequate to his own nature, harmoniously in accord with the Father, and resplendent with an expressive life – for he is Word – which is profoundly rational, a *splendour intellectus* (Eco 1988:125). In the Son, the three elements of beauty, integrity, harmony and *claritas* are vitally present in their most perfect created form. For Aquinas as for von Balthasar, Jesus is the perfect embodiment of Divine and human beauty. He stands as a true mediator between the “vision” of God and humanity which unattended is not able to perceive in any other way a vision of Divine Beauty.

Aquinas’ understanding of the “form” of Christ is in direct continuity with that of the early post-apostolic Church. The appropriateness of the form of Christ, to the life of the church, was acknowledged by the resolution of the Iconoclast controversy of the seventh and eighth century. Therein, the Son as “form” is duly acknowledged as his own Being – wherein the two natures of Christ, human and Divine, co-exist. In Christ, the uncircumscribable unites with the circumscribed, the limitless with the limited, the formless one with the “well formed.” “For this reason Christ is depicted in images and is seen” (Theodore the Studite 1997:21). Aquinas, consistent with the tradition of the church, reasserts the formed perfection of Christ – and in him Divine Beauty.

The Beauty of Created Being

For Aquinas, the beauty of created being, is recognised in the perfection of the form which is perfectly suited to objective being. By this, Aquinas draws attention to the suitability of the parts for their individual functions within the whole. Beauty, for Aquinas, is dependent on the notion of suitability for function and not on function (utility) itself. To clarify this point, Eco uses the example of building a saw. Although building a saw from glass, which is a far nobler element than metal, would make a more attractive specimen, functionally it would remain useless to its purpose. A beautiful saw, is one wherein the form, substance and matter perfectly coincide with the purpose of the object. Hence a glass saw may appear lovely but it is entirely unsuitable to the object “saw” (Eco 1988:126).

In the created realm the highest form of created beauty is that of humanity whose own existence is ordered to both the physical and spiritual realm. Hence humanity represents the most noble and most beautiful of created objects. First, the human form itself is perfectly suited to its place in the hierarchy of created being. The individual is upright, and capable of facing both the earth and heaven. Thus the mediatorial function of humanity as steward of God’s creation is reflected perfectly in its form. The subtle, proportionate, and complex harmony of the parts of the human form to their specific functions are perfectly suited to the human vocation to love God and nurture the created world. All the individual aspects of the human form are perfectly adapted to their individual functions while the unity of the human elements are perfectly suited to the purpose of humanity. Similarly, all “lesser” forms of created reality radiate their own beauty precisely in the suitability of form to purpose. In another context, Aquinas concisely summarises the nature and meaning of beauty:

All beautiful attributes showered throughout the world in separate drops flow together whole and complete, and move toward the font of goodness. When we are drawn to the graciousness, beauty and goodness of creation, we are to be borne away to the One in whom all these little streams commingle and flow (quoted by O’Meara, 1997:41).

Contemplation, Intellection and Beauty

Beauty resides in humanity in the same manner that it resides in all created being. In humanity, however, the actualisation and perception of beauty are raised to a greater level through humanity's cognitive or intellective ability to perceive beauty and order its life toward that perfect end which is God, Beauty Himself. It is the nature of humanity, created in the image of God, and distinguished by its capacity for reason and knowledge, to choose to move toward the "Good" and the "Beautiful," to participate in it and thus move towards its perfect end. Contemplation is the avenue of participation in Divine Beauty in Aquinas' thought. Hence, in speaking of the contemplative life, Aquinas alludes to Gregory the Great's definition of contemplation that consists of loving God, "in so far as through loving God we are aflame to gaze on His beauty" (Hutchins 1952 :608). This observation is significant in two respects: first it confirms that to some degree, if not perfectly, human existence is ordered to a perception of Divine Beauty, and further, that the notion of beauty within theology is entirely consistent with human motions of affectivity. Later, Aquinas will further make a necessary distinction between purely animal appetites and the more sublime motions of human longings expressed in the desire for God emphasising the efficacy of "a clean heart" to the pursuit of contemplation and thus to a perception of beauty. Consistent with the early post-apostolic church Aquinas embraces that aspect of ordering the physical appetites so as to not impede the soul's contemplation of God, and its connatural sensitivity to beauty, both in God and in created being.

The starkness of Aquinas' style, perfectly suited to the didactic and systematic nature of the *Summa*, does not allow the author the scope to reflect within his work on the affective implications of what he is stating with exuberance similar to that of Dionysius. For Aquinas, the task that he has undertaken reflects a philosophical interest and the construction of a dogmatic scheme that will, in the future, allow the church to rest securely in a rational and intellectually satisfying explanation of its presuppositions. Aquinas underlines and defends the logical and analytical basis on which the more subtle

movements of spirituality are based. In short, the church rests on the detailed work of Aquinas' thought which frees her to express her own life with integrity and peace.

The work of Aquinas, however, was not received uncritically by all his contemporaries particularly those who are specifically concerned with affectivity and beauty. Rather, the more reflective Franciscan sensibility toward the natural world, which will be discussed in the context of Hopkins, recognised within Aquinas an emphasis on the universal nature of beauty with, as previously shown, little concern for "particular beauty." Herein lies the limitation inherent in an "aesthetic theology" as opposed to a "theological aesthetic" as distinguished by von Balthasar. Aquinas' work seriously examines the concept of beauty and asserts its significance in the Christian world. He does not, however, take "beauty" as his first word. Hence it is not to be expected that his treatment on the subject will exhaust the subject of beauty for theology. Aquinas discusses beauty as it sheds light on his own dominant concern: to articulate the faith in a coherent and intellectually satisfying manner. Nor does this limitation in Aquinas' work imply that he is unaware of the affective implications of the truth of Christian belief as it compels devotion and love both for the created reality and for the Divine Goodness, Truth, and Beauty that is God. It is not insignificant, that Aquinas' philosophical expositions are balanced in his own life with a poetic sensibility. This balance is reflected in his hymnography which unquestionably reflects the adoration, love and sublime perception of the spiritual reality to which his dogmatic writings point. For Aquinas theology presupposes participation in the fullness of life which is opened to Christian experience and leads to new depths of life and love.

Thomas Aquinas does not present a static theology. Beyond the parameters of the structured analysis of theology for which he is most admired, Aquinas demonstrates that he is fully aware of the dynamic relationship between theology and Christian anthropology, philosophy and psychology. In his less well known works of poetry and hymnography the theologian moves the individual beyond conceptualisations of abstract notions into the realm of affective spiritual encounter. Herein the theoretical construction

of a theology of beauty articulated by Aquinas in his formal theological writings becomes an experiential reality in the heart of the disciple.

JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703-1758)

Jonathan Edwards' contribution to a theology of beauty is a unique for two specific reasons. First, he writes from the perspective of a sixteenth century American Protestantism strongly influenced by Calvinism. The continuity between Edwards' understanding of beauty, particularly in the created world and that of Calvin is demonstrated by Butler (1990).⁴⁴ Edwards' work, therefore, represents a "theology of beauty" that is strictly formulated according to the scriptural witness demonstrating the compatibility of Protestant thought with a fully developed and philosophically consistent "theology of beauty." Second, Edwards stands as a Protestant Christian spokesman for the transition period between the Age of Faith and that of Reason. As such, Edwards' theology of beauty expresses a clearly articulated system of thought that responds to the dangers of the Newtonian world view without sacrificing the theological integrity of Christian belief. Edwards is thoroughly aware of the philosophical and scientific climate in which he writes, and his own extant writings reflect a vast intellectual background allowing him to interact with the dominant philosophical themes of his own time.

The centrality of beauty, in the thought of Jonathan Edwards, is unique in Protestant Christian thought. Pre-dating Karl Barth by 200 years, Edwards articulates a "Theology of Beauty" that insists not only on the ontological principle of beauty as it pertains to God, but further, sees beauty as an epistemological category, and as the unifying principle of creation. The centrality of beauty can be recognised within the full scope of Edwards' writings – both those dealing specifically with philosophy and

⁴⁴ Butler focuses on similarities that exist between Edwards' and Calvin's view of natural beauty. However, Edwards extends Calvin's original insights on the beauty of nature in order to formulate a distinct theology of beauty which places "beauty" at the forefront of all his theological considerations.

science, and those that more directly focussed on theological issues (Smith, Stout & Minkema 1959:1-5).⁴⁵

Why Edwards' theology of beauty has not entered the mainstream of Christian thought or impacted the witness of the Western church to a greater extent than it has remains a mystery. Two answers, however, suggests themselves. First, the ultimate assertion of rationalism and empiricism over the more sublime movements of affective theological thought predominate throughout the academic community during Edwards' time. And second, Edwards' own unexpected death that occurred just prior to the theologian taking up his appointment as President of Princeton University in 1758 prevented Edwards from influencing the academic community directly.

Edwards, as both a skilled intellectual and theologian, was challenged to interact with the new philosophical systems that stressed a reliance on scientific and rational thought as a means to "certain" knowledge, perceiving in them a threat to traditional Christian belief. In Edwards thought reason itself holds a high place without which "all our proof of God ceases." However, reason without revelation is entirely insufficient for a knowledge of God (Houston 1984: xi). Thus, Edwards brings to his theology of beauty a philosophical skill and theological sensitivity which unite and allow him to express his vision of beauty while maintaining the intellectual integrity of both disciplines.

Edwards' theology is strictly in line with Calvinist thought, and assumes the *five points of Calvinism*: the total depravity of man; unconditional election; limited atonement; irresistible grace; perseverance of the saints. Hence, central to Edwards' thought and consistent with Calvinist belief is his understanding of the "unregenerate heart" entirely blind to the things of God. Concerning this view, Edwards states:

The Apostle teaches us that he [unregenerate man] is far from it, that he knows nothing about them, he is a perfect stranger to them, the talk of such things is all foolishness and nonsense to him, he knows not

⁴⁵ *The Spider Letter* written by Edwards in 1723, demonstrates the continuity in Edwards between his scientific interests and his own delight in the manifest goodness and providence of God indicated, in this instance, by the intricate patterns observed in a spider building its web (Smith, Stout & Minkema (1959:1-8).

what it means. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them; because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:14) (Smith 1959:204).

Grace and Light

Edwards is concerned to distinguish the difference between the nature of "light" as it is experienced in the unregenerate individual and that which is present in the "saints." He asserts that "common grace" which leads a person to recognise right and wrong is from the Spirit of God but acts only so far as to "assist natural principles." Conscience then is a natural principle present in the unregenerate and by which the individual is held accountable for personal choices and actions. Similarly, beauty in its simplest form, wherein proportion and harmony, colour, texture, taste, etc., combine to present an agreeable exterior image, is also a perception open to the unregenerate individual that speaks of "common grace." That grace, however, that is contingent on salvation, is of an entirely different order. The very nature of "saving grace" is of such magnitude that through it God truly "unites himself with the mind of a saint, takes him for his temple, actuates and influences him as a new supernatural principle of life and action."(Smith, Stout & Minkema 1959:108)

The regenerate individual, through the impartation of the Holy Spirit, is given the gift of a "new sense of the heart" which effects a new and deep perception of reality entirely defined by the beauty of God. Inherent in personal salvation is this gift to an individual of a "supernatural light" through which he or she directly experiences the excellency of Christ and further, is convinced of the truth of Christian belief circumscribed in Scripture. In the thought of Edwards the gift of salvation effects this "new birth" which includes an experiential awareness of the "delightful apprehension of Divine Beauty" and a conviction of the truth of Divine revelation. Beauty, then, unfolds, in Edwards' thought, as a central and controlling theme both philosophically and theologically. The individual, brought to fullness of life through the light of the Holy Spirit, "truly sees the Divine, transcendent, supreme glory of those things which are Divine"(Smith 1959:298). Edwards' concludes:

[This individual] does as it were know their divinity intuitively; he not only argues that they are Divine, but he sees that they are Divine; he sees in them wherein divinity chiefly consists; for in this glory, which is so vastly and inexpressibly distinguished from the glory of artificial things, and all other glory does mainly consist the true notion of divinity: God is God and distinguished from all other beings, and exalted above 'em (sic), chiefly by his Divine beauty, which is infinitely diverse from all other beauty (Smith 1959:298).

Edwards, like von Balthasar, takes “beauty” for his first word and as the dominant ontological principle of all that exists. For Edwards, the “new sense of the heart” constitutes an eradication of the defilement of sin inherited from the fall and opens the eyes of the believer to a vision of beauty which reveals the primary nature of the new life in Christ in which the regenerate shares.

The significance of beauty, reflected in Edwards’ statement, is of primary importance and constitutes the essential ontological principle of Divinity. It is the “the measure and objective foundation of the perfection of being – of excellence, goodness, and value” (Delattre 1968:16).

Beauty as an Epistemological Category

God, in Edwards’ understanding, is known by the regenerate person through a direct experience of the apprehension of Divine Beauty recognised intuitively through the “new heart.” It is the apprehension of this Beauty which serves, in humanity, to re-orient the individual toward a growing awareness of God’s goodness and glory. Hence, beauty effects a transforming change in the life of the individual. The knowledge imparted to an individual is, in Edwards’ terminology, “cordial knowledge” impacting the heart in such a way to compel action consistent with the impression of God’s majesty and excellence which Edwards defines as the dual aspects of greatness and beauty.

Expanding on the notion of excellency, Edwards describes “how” proportion and harmony serve to unify and thus present an “agreeable” orderliness to the observer. “Simple equality of parts, without proportion, is considered the lowest kind of regularity, and may be called simple beauty” – thus two lines of equal size and positioned in a

regular fashion is pleasing to the eye. However, when proportion is added to simple beauty, the effect is “complex beauty.” From this explanation of simple and complex beauty, it is possible to perceive that beauty is magnified by the complex addition of proportional forms as they exist in created reality. Further to Edwards’ thought is his understanding that beauty consists relationally through the similarity of objects, while similarity consists in those equalities and proportions that exist between objects. Simply, regularity of form (equality in its simplest expression) and proportion (the complex existence of relationships between objects) give pleasure when they are perceived. This is not experienced when disproportional or unequal objects are perceived (Smith, Stout & Minkema 1959:22-27). Harmony, then, is an essential element of Edwards’ theology. The created world reflects an every increasing number of harmonies and proportional relationships. The harmony of parts so evident in the natural world are thus beautiful. Similarly, music, taste, colour, smells and touch, all arise from the proportions or harmony of motion.

The organs are so contrived that, upon the touch of such and such particles [sound waves, light particles etc.] there shall be a regular and harmonious motion of the animal spirit and further, the reason why equality thus pleases the mind and inequality is unpleasing, is because disproportion, or inconsistency, is contrary to being. For being, if we examine it narrowly, is nothing else but proportion. When one being is inconsistent with another being, then being is contradicted. But contradiction to being is intolerable to perceiving being, and the consent to being most pleasing (Smith 1959:26).

Continuing his own thought Edwards returns to the notion of “excellence” which adds the element of “similarity” between objects to the criteria of beauty. Similarity consists in such varied likenesses as those of direction or of timing etc. The excellence of which Edwards speaks is defined by the concept of consent or agreement to “being:” the consent of being to being (an agreement of being to its own existence) and of beings’ consent to entity (the consent of an object to its own function and form). As the individual “consents” more and more to the nature of God, as “consent to Being” which derives from God so she or he participates in Divine Beauty.

In this way, Edwards is reminiscent of Aquinas' understanding of integrity and harmony. Again similar to Aquinas, Edwards acknowledges that in God, who is pure entity and who is perfectly in agreement with his own nature, both orders of "consent" exist as one. God then is, in his being, perfect excellence and thus superlative beauty.⁴⁶

Edwards distinguishes various categories of beauty. Among these are primary and secondary beauties which are so designated according to distinctions in the perception of the beauty afforded the unregenerate and regenerate individual. Primary beauty refers specifically to those concepts associated with truth, morality, spiritual beauty, and Divine or original beauty, while secondary beauty, refers specifically to "natural beauty" as it is perceived in the created realm. Secondary beauty, recognised through the perception of design and those external categories such as form, number, regularity etc. appeals to the unregenerate individual and is experienced as "pleasing," "delightful," etc. Primary beauty, on the other hand, is spiritual in nature and thus is associated solely with the perception afforded the "regenerate" heart effected by the "infusion of Divine beauty" into the heart which constitutes the essence of salvation (Smith 1959:264-266). For the regenerate, therefore, God is "most truly and fully known in the perception and enjoyment of His beauty" (Inagaki 1994:76).

The infusion of Divine Beauty into the heart is significant in its transforming potency. Edwards is concerned to demonstrate that this infusion which constitutes the impartation of "new life" is an experience of dramatic and awesome proportion and is not in anyway ordered to the sentimental. Rather, Edwards writes:

⁴⁶ In those works, which focus on "beauty," Edwards refers to the notion of "consent to being" and "consent to being in general." These phrases are most clearly defined by Edwards in his Treatise *The End for which God Created the World* (01:17:00) where he defines "Being in general" as "the system...comprehending the sum total of universal existence, both Creator and creature." However, as Inagaki (1994) points out in her unpublished Th.M. thesis, Edwards does not have a monistic or panentheistic world view, rather "this metaphysical expression, "Being in general" came out of his apologetic scheme of including divine being in his arguments to the non-religious public." Delattre (1968:23), also sheds light on the ambiguity of the concept of "consent to being." "Beauty is constituted by objective relations of consent and dissent among beings, relations into which the subject (or beholder) may enter and participate but the beauty of which is defined by conformity to God...rather than by the degree of subjective pleasure."

A sight of the awful greatness of God, may overpower men's strength, and be more than they can endure; but if the moral beauty of God be hid, the enmity of the heart will remain in its full strength, no love will be enkindled, all will not be effectual to gain the will, but that will remain inflexible; whereas the first glimpse of the moral and spiritual glory of God shining into the heart, produces all these effects, as it were with omnipotent power, which nothing can withstand (Smith 1959 :264-265).

In Edwards' epistemology, knowing God consists precisely in apprehending his Divine Beauty.

Thus, it is precisely the awesome nature of Divine Beauty which compels the regenerate individual to engage in a life that is characteristically ordered to "true virtue." For the unregenerate, however, the perception of beauty is limited to the enjoyment of the categories of unity, harmony, order, colour, etc., in short, to an external appreciation of beauty as its apprehension produces sensory pleasure alone. The natural beauty of creation, in its secondary form, is a manifestation of God's joy, love and delight in his own beauty and open to the perception and enjoyment of the unregenerate individual while the intensity of its meaning remains hidden. An appreciation of natural beauty is a creational predisposition within humanity and represents "consent to being" in its most basic form as a propensity to participate in the greater dimensions of primary beauty. Thus, Edwards does not suggest that the unregenerate individual is insensitive to secondary beauty. The appreciation of beauty, however, is deeply circumscribed by external criteria. It is only the regenerate heart, infused with Holy Spirit, for whom the depth and seriousness of Divine beauty is made comprehensible and which compels a life that is consonant with the superabundant, majesty, glory, and beauty of God. This ensuing life is one of true virtue which in Edwards constitutes the beauty of holiness itself.

True Virtue

Fundamental to Edwards' understanding of "true virtue" is that it is only ascribed to beings that have perception and will, and that it consists in the "beauty of those qualities and acts of the mind that are of a moral nature." Specifically, "true virtue" pertains to a

disposition of the will or of the “heart” which compels loving action, not by any value that may inhere in an object but, more purely, because of a clear consent to Being in general (Smith, Stout & Minkema 1959:244). All acts of “true virtue” reflect an unqualified disposition to demonstrate benevolence toward all that exists regardless of the appearance of beauty within the object. In this, Edwards’ concept of “benevolence to being” demonstrates the contours of “unconditional love” as the first and habitual orientation of the heart and constitutes the beauty of virtue. Further, true virtue consists in love that is neither motivated by a perception of beauty in the object of the benevolent action, or by a particular love for the object of the action. Rather, Edwards asserts, created being is beautiful because God loves it; and is not loved because it is beautiful. *True virtue* demonstrates this prior condition of love that is motivated by participation in Divine Beauty and is not concerned with the immediate object of the benevolent action. Significant to Edwards’ understanding of “true virtue” is the notion of “habit” which is not simply the conditioned repetition of behaviours. Rather, the concept of habit (*habitus*) implies a particular disposition “an active and ontological abiding power that possesses a mode of realness even when it is not in exercise” (Inigaki 1994:81).⁴⁷ As such, God is understood as the “Divine disposition of beauty or the Divinely beautiful disposition.”

Disposition and beauty are co-ordinate categories and they refer to one and the same thing in a different way...Beauty articulates the character of the Divine disposition and gives it concreteness while disposition articulates the dynamic or expansive character of the Divine beauty (quoted by Inagaki 1994:83).

True virtue, in Edwards, as it is demonstrated within God, is the precise disposition of heart that is infused into the regenerate individual. In the created realm, the beauty of which Edwards speaks is not confined to a purely “spiritual mode” of existence. Beauty is a dynamic and concrete manifestation in the life of the individual wherein the nature of God is increasingly revealed in the transformed “being” of the individual whose presence within the created realm constitutes a gracious and active

⁴⁷ Here Inagaki is quoting Lee (1988:83)

“love” consistent with the disposition of its Creator. In this manner, the individual participates and extends the disposition of beauty within the created realm.

Beauty and the Holy Trinity in Edwards

The disposition of beauty, inherent in the Godhead is recognised in the Triune nature of God which is itself the expression of God’s expansive beauty that in love, is made manifest in relational life. Edwards asserts that the disposition of beauty, which is the essence of true virtue, is impossible to a solitary life. “One alone without reference to another cannot be excellent; for, in any such case, there can be no manner of relation, and therefore no such thing as consent”(Inagaki 1994:85).⁴⁸ In his *Essay on the Trinity*, Edwards begins simply with the notion of God’s perfect happiness wherein God perfectly loves and rejoices in his own essence and perfection. “From hence,” Edwards states, “arises a most pure and perfect act or energy in the Godhead, which is the Divine love, complacency and joy” (Edwards 01:17:00). If God is to behold himself in such a way as to delight (complacency in Edwards’ thought) and experience joy in himself, God must become his own object. God’s very “idea” of himself which is a perfect, full, and clear expression of self-understanding - is God himself.

This representation of the Divine nature and essence is the Divine nature and essence again: so that by God’s thinking of the Deity must certainly be generated. Hereby there is another person begotten, there is another Infinite Eternal Almighty and most holy and the same God, the very same Divine nature (Edwards 01:17:00).

In a similar manner, the Holy Spirit is understood by Edwards as the substantial procession of the love between the Father and the Son – “the sacred energy” (Edwards 01:17:00). Hence the very nature of God is dynamic and expansive representing a continual expression of Himself as Three Persons whose essence is delight, and joy, and love manifest comprehensively as beauty. Further, there is no sense in which Edwards suggests that the Trinity represents modalities of being. The Trinity is the actualised

⁴⁸ The superlative, *excellence*, in Edwards’ thought is reserved for that quality of relational beauty that is shared magnanimously, fully, and freely and thus is not possible for the solitary being. God, as Trinity is the perfect expression of “excellence.”

manifestations of God's own being as distinct persons. God then, in his own being consists as an expressive reality – an ever expanding manifestation of his own delight and love actualised in the relationship between the persons of the Holy Trinity. It is the expansive self-expression of God's delight and joy which leads him to the act of creation, which in Edwards' thought manifests God's own propensity toward an unending multiplication of relationships characterised by "love." "God's holiness is the infinite beauty and excellence of His nature, and God's excellency consists in His love to Himself" (Edwards 01:17:00). It is God's self love, then, which is expressed as Three Persons existing in mutual consent to the Being of one another which, in the perfection of the Godhead, represents the fullest expression of Divine Beauty.

Glory of God

A significant aspect of Edwards' "theology of beauty" is his understanding of the "chief end" for which God has created the universe. In this context, the "end" or goal, of creation serves to frame his thought on beauty. Simply expressed, creation and particularly the moral creation (humanity), exist to "glorify God" as the Alpha and Omega of love, delight, and joy – to reflect back to God a substantial *image* of his own Triune Beauty. Creation, then concretises and expresses, the perfect happiness of God – his delight, his joy in his own being, his love – that in his expansive and radiant mind, creates substantially, that which he most dearly loves and in which he fully delights. Creation, then, utterly separate from its Creator, is purely a Divine expression of God's own delight "to share" with creation the same glory and love that exists within the Trinity itself. There is nothing that creation adds to the perfection of God hence creation reflects no lack in God but rather his own profound joy in Being which he desires to expand and share within a created cosmos. Simply, creation is the externalisation of God's internal glory:

God communicates himself to the understanding of the creature, In giving him knowledge of his glory; and to the will of the creature, in giving him holiness, consisting primarily in the love of God: and in giving the creature happiness, chiefly consisting in joy in God. These

are the sum of the emanation of Divine fullness called in Scripture, the glory of God (Inagaki 1994:74).

Within the context of Edwards' Calvinist background, the fall has introduced a profound rupture between God's primal intention for creation and the actual expression of created goodness. In Calvinist thought, the fall effects a deep spiritual blindness that impacts upon "moral agents" within God's creation – humanity itself. The first point of Calvinism's Five Point scheme is its presupposition of the "total depravity of man." Further, lesser aspects of the created world in their subjection to humanity suffer in their own nature the effects of the fall through human insensitivity to the harmony of created existence. In all this, Edwards reminds his readers of God's original judgement of the whole landscape of creation as "good." The whole drama of redemption history then represents God's intervention in re-establishing the perfection or wholeness which is lost by the "fall."⁴⁹ It is specifically, through the impartation of a "new heart" which re-orientes humanity to God and re-establishes the individual as a "moral agent" who serves to further re-establish God's intentions for creation through living in a manner consistent with the beauty of "true virtue."

Christ, therefore, as the Son of the Father is fully the expression of the end toward which moral creation is intended to move, manifesting in his own being the beauty and wholeness of God and that of humanity. Further, Jesus, in obedience to the Father, allows himself to die to effect the salvation of the highest objects of God's creation, his "moral agents," manifests through that act, the fullest and most clear revelation of the nature of God. Jesus, God the Son, consents to being and to Being⁵⁰ in general, demonstrating in his self-less act perfect virtue, the willingness to love

⁴⁹Although not specifically discussed in Edwards' work, a comprehensive study of his writings indicates that the theologian is not concerned to demonstrate that the "fall" itself is confined to the literal description found in Genesis. Rather, I would suggest that Edwards subscribes to a position wherein the literal description of the "fall" written in Scripture is primarily a reflection on the effects of the fallenness of creation and not primarily an account of the historical facts. It must be acknowledged, however, that consistent with the historical period in which he writes, it is possible that Edwards would subscribe to a literal interpretation of the fall. It remains however, equally true that the "effects" of the fall are of central concern to the theologian.

⁵⁰ Jesus consents to the nature of his own being as Son of God as well as to the broader aspects of "Being in general" which, in Edwards' thought, represents the composite of all that exists.

unconditionally and effect a re-establishment of the greatest good - humanity's own participation in Christ's consent to Being in general.

That God as Trinity exists as an ever expanding contemplation and expression of his own beauty says a great deal concerning Edwards' understanding of the intra-Trinitarian nature of God. However, it remains to be shown how the glory of the Trinity is manifest within the created realm. Edwards, following the explicit teaching of Scripture, demonstrates that the chief end of a moral creation resides in the human vocation to "glorify God." As such the end to which humanity is ordered is the expression of the beauty, love, and delight inherent in the Holy Trinity and made possible to the "moral being" through the possession of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the intra-Trinitarian nature is externalised in the created world by those moral agents – consisting of the regenerate – who through salvation, reflect in both their being and in the nature of their actions, the same qualities, though in a limited manner as they pre-exist in the nature of a Holy God. In this connection we are reminded of Edwards' assertion:

God is God and distinguished from all other beings, and exalted above 'em (sic), chiefly by his Divine beauty....the Holy Ghost being the love and joy of God is His beauty and happiness; and it is in our partaking of the same Holy Spirit that our communion with God consists: (2 Cor 13:14) "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all, Amen." They are not different benefits but the same that the Apostle here wisheth, viz., the Holy Ghost: In partaking of the Holy Ghost, we possess and enjoy the love and grace of the Father and Son, for the Holy Ghost is that love and grace...(Edwards 01:17:00).

The chief end of any object lies in the fundamental use to which the object is to be put. The question, however, arises concerning the "chief end of humanity"? To this most basic of all questions Edwards presents a systematic analysis of Scripture to demonstrate the end toward which humanity is oriented. "There are some things in the word of God which lead us to suppose, that it requires of men that they should desire and seek God's glory as their highest and last end in what they do" (Edwards 01:17:00).⁵¹ For Edwards,

⁵¹See *A Dissertation Concerning the End for which God Created the World* Jonathan Edwards (01:17:00). In this work, Edwards presents a detailed argument based on Scripture to support his

the highest beauty of humanity is found in its participation in God's own desire to effect and extend the beauty that he has placed in creation – to co-operate fully and devotedly with God's own "consent to Being in general." Herein lies the nobility of being human, its priestly goal – the manifestation of Divine love.

For Edwards "beauty" is the concept that enfolds, expresses and comprehensively unifies all that exists and constitutes creation as a substantial manifestation of God's inner life. Such an assertion developed both philosophically and theologically, presents an understanding of creation that merits a great deal of consideration. That Edwards supports his view from Scripture strongly places a theology of beauty within the Protestant world. Indeed, many of Edwards' insights reflect a direct continuity with the church of the past. Certainly, similarities between the major themes of Edwards and those of Aquinas are apparent, while both writers demonstrate a continuity with Augustinian thought particularly in their reliance on the traditional Western understanding of Trinitarian life. The impact of those differences which exist between Edwards and Aquinas, in the manner in which an individual experiences salvation and the impact of the sacraments to a continuing and growing cognitive awareness of Divine Beauty remain to be answered in another forum. It is clear, however, that for both theologians a dynamic manifestation of God, afforded the faithful through salvation, is comprehensively circumscribed by the concept of beauty.

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS: (1844-1889)

Unlike either Aquinas or Edwards, Hopkins' theology of beauty is not circumscribed by the rigorous parameters of academic discourse. Hopkins, in his vocation as priest and poet, reveals the content of his "theology of beauty" most fully in the dynamic movement of perception, form and rhythm as they surface from the poetic depths of Hopkins' mind and heart. His work therefore, serves as bridge wherein a "theology of beauty," having taken root in the depths of the poet's heart, is manifest

understanding of the end for which God created the world. Beginning with his understanding of God, the place of Christ as the perfect revelation of the Father and this most perfectly seen in John's account of the death of Jesus as the hour of God's "glorification," Edwards with precision presents a close analysis of those passages which support his conclusion.

actually, substantially and affectingly in a poetic vision that will not be constrained by the imposed structures of traditional form. Hopkins' poetry itself "flames out like shining from shook foil" demonstrating a radical internalisation of the theological theme of beauty. This section on Hopkins will present a brief biographical sketch of the poet, a discussion of the theological influences on his life, and will conclude by examining his poetic structure and specific poems as they demonstrate his understanding of beauty in nature, in humanity, and finally in gracious beauty of God himself.

Born into a Anglo-Catholic family in Essex in 1844, Hopkins was the eldest of nine children. Sensitivity to the artistic world is evident in Hopkins' household. In 1843, Manley Hopkins, Gerard's father, wrote a volume of poetry dedicated to Thomas Hood while two of Hopkins' brothers were professionally engaged as artists. Gerard, himself demonstrated a sensitivity to poetic endeavours winning the Highgate School Poetry Prize in 1860 with his poem *The Escorial*. In 1863, Hopkins entered Balliol College in Oxford as a student in Classics. It was at Oxford that Hopkins came under the influence of John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement, which attempted to counter liberal incursions into the Anglican Communion. Through his encounter with the Oxford Movement and after deeply considering the problems in the English Church, Hopkins converted to Roman Catholicism and was formally accepted into the church in 1866. Hopkins' decision to enter religious life as a Jesuit priest followed his conversion almost immediately and is reflected in *The Habit of Perfection*. Written the same year as his conversion, the poem, presents a meditation on the ascetic life which Hopkins desires: "*Elected silence, sing to me/And beat upon my whorled ear,/Pipe me to pastures still and be/The music that I care to hear*" (Gardner & MacKenzie 1990:31).

Satisfying his desire, Hopkins entered a Jesuit noviciate in 1868. For Hopkins, entrance into the Jesuit order of priests was experienced as a "new beginning" wherein his resolve and intention to live a life surrendered to God and to Church authority, is demonstrated in his decision to destroy his poetry written prior to his conversion to Catholicism. As a Jesuit novice, Hopkins is brought under the influences of both St. Ignatius of Loyola as well as that of Duns Scotus who together with his classical studies

and Protestant scriptural heritage will converge in Hopkins' work to produce a uniquely expressed vision of nature, humanity and God. Hopkins' intuitions of beauty will flash out from his lines of poetry presenting a cascade of images and music commensurate with the Divine beauty of which they are only a shadow.

A primary influence for any Jesuit is that of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the order. As previously mentioned, Ignatian Spirituality encourages a strong Incarnational spirituality that was and continues to be fostered through his *Spiritual Exercises*. In its opening paragraphs, the *Exercises* disclose the preoccupation of Ignatius and the attending focus of Ignatian spirituality, that "man is created to praise, reverence and serve God our Lord." The motto of the Jesuits, underlines this central theme: *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* (to the greater glory of God). It is Hopkins' particular emphasis on beauty, which expresses most clearly his commitment both to the Ignatian concern for "the glory of God" and his own sensibilities to the explicit union between that glory and the beauty of the natural world. For Hopkins creation teems with a splendour that finds its source in the glory and beauty of God. As such, created existence resounds with an echo of praise as its essential vocation. Humanity is called, then, *to give beauty back...to God, beauty's self and beauty's giver*" (Gardner 1953:54). Despite the rich perceptions of physical beauty that Hopkins offers his reader, material beauty does not exhaust the poet's concern. When the poet poses the questions to himself, *to what serves mortal beauty* and how it is to be understood by one graced with its perception, his answer is significant and echoes throughout his work: beauty is to be embraced as *heaven's sweet gift*, and a home made for it in one's heart. For all this however, once recognised and valued, it is to be left behind – allowed its own existence – leaving the observer with an insatiable desire to move towards *God's better beauty – grace*. Hopkins' deep and arresting love for physical beauty is clearly secondary to the perfect beauty of God, a consideration that tempers all the poet's work.

In 1872 Hopkins encountered the work of the medieval theologian Duns Scotus whose own work was written from the perspective of Franciscan spirituality. As such it was a work that departed strongly from the traditional theological system of Aquinas to

which Jesuit scholarship adheres. Scotus rejected the subtle rationalism of Aquinas and asserted that objects are truly knowable in their individual natures. It was Duns Scotus' understanding of *haecceitas*, the principle of individuation, that spontaneously evoked an assent from Hopkins whose sensitivities were already alert to the notion of individuation as a principle by which an object could be known, distinguished and defined by the particularity of its own being.⁵² Hopkins own term for the principle of individuating existence is "inscape." In his Journal entry for July nineteenth 1872 Hopkins describes his encounter with the work of Scotus:

At this time I first begun to get hold of the copy of Scotus on the Sentences in the Baddley library and was flush with a new stroke of enthusiasm. It may come to nothing or it may be a mercy from God. But just then when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus (Gardner 1953:126).

A continuation of Hopkins' previous thought concerning Scotus is his admission of regret that "sadly [the] beauty of inscape was unknown and buried away from simple people and yet how near at hand it was if they had eyes to see it... it could be called out everywhere again" (Gardner 1953:126). It is a part of Hopkins' concern that this very beauty, so close at hand and which itself serves to praise and glorify God, should be seen, known, sensed and valued for the rich gift that it is. Specifically, inscape is a being's individual-distinctiveness, a unified complex of characteristics which constitute the outward reflection of the inner nature of a thing. The complex of detail is for Hopkins, "the fundamental beauty which is the active principle of all true being, the source of all true knowledge and delight – even religious ecstasy"(Gardner 1953:xx). Speaking of catching sight of a bluebell, Hopkins records in his journal:

⁵² In 1879 Hopkins writes his sonnet *Duns Scotus' Oxford*. In it he refers to the theologian "*Of reality, the rarest-veined unraveller.*" In this designation Hopkins refers specifically to Scotus' understanding of individuation and the notion of "realism" that he expresses in his theological constructions. The concept "*Haecceitas*" is also discovered in the work of the Fathers, as Evdokimov (1990:11) states: "...the vision of the archetypal *logoi*, or the thoughts of God concerning beings and things, builds up a grandiose visual theology, an iconosophy. Each thing possesses its own *logos*, its "interior word," its "entelechy" which is closely tied to the concrete things itself."

One day when the bluebells were in bloom I wrote the following. I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it. It[s inscape] is [mixed of] strength and grace, like an ash [tree] (Gardner 1953:120).

The external contours that make an object uniquely itself (its inscape) is expressed by the dynamic impulse of *instress*, another expression coined by Hopkins: “that energy of being by which all things are upheld, for that natural (but ultimately supernatural) stress which determines an inscape and keeps it in being”(Gardner 1953:xx). *Instress* is not the simple stress that bears on all things to keep them alive and actual, it is the particular stress that maintains the being of an object as itself. One final concept that appears in the writings of Hopkins is that of *pitch* (Hainsworth 1996:11). *Pitch*, in the poet’s thought is understood as a particular place one occupies in one’s being. It is in a sense a measurement toward perfection or more correctly toward maturity of form and of being itself. Thus, according to the notion of *pitch* a child is no less “perfect” than an adult – childhood is the proper, vital and particular *pitch* consistent with being a child, but entirely inappropriate in an adult. Similarly, blossoms exhibit their perfection and beauty appropriately as blossom, while the young bud is perfectly and appropriately “bud.” It is understandable that Hopkins would find a companion heart in Duns Scotus, who as a medieval scholar found a significant place for the concept of individuation in his own work. One difference between Hopkins and Scotus however, has been recorded. For Scotus, the individuation of objects effects their distinction one from another but is a distinction perceived intuitively (Eco 1986:74-91). Hopkins, on the other hand, responding to his own sensitivities to the unique *inscape* and *instress* of real objects, contradicts Scotus on this one point (Hainsworth 1996:14). Hopkins believes that objective individuation is the manner of an object’s being. It is knowable and loveable in its uniqueness. It is God’s manifest work. Hopkins’ own perceptions of reality led him to his own conclusion.

Returning to the influence of Ignatian Spirituality, it is possible to see the continuity that exists for Hopkins in those theological streams that so deeply impact upon him. Ignatius confirms Hopkins’ own insight that created beauty is intended to “glorify God,”

to praise and offer itself to God in all the minute perfection of its form and energy. The Ignatian emphasis on imaginative contemplation that affirms creation as a place of vital encounter with God, frees Hopkins to express his own giftedness in the perception of intrinsic and extrinsic beauty. Similarly, Scotus affirms the poet's intuition that particularity exists, and creation participates in a Divinely ordered process of individuation. Both theologians then, contribute to Hopkins' vocation as poet and priest through which he is free to celebrate both the harmony of creation's manifold details which constitute the glorious "particularity" of the complex parts. They further confirm Hopkins' insight, that in creation itself, a Divinely willed distinction exists between "it" and "this." It would be an error, however, to suggest that either Scotus or Ignatius be viewed as determinative of the poet's uniqueness. Rather, both serve to affirm, from a theologically sound perspective, the intuitive self-understanding that so deeply bears on Hopkins the poet. It is, however, true to suggest that for the poet, both Ignatius and Scotus serve to clarify his own *inscape* as one compelled by love to give concrete form and definition to his own particular insights. It must not be expected that Hopkins' poetry will offer up its delicate and pervasive insights concerning beauty, its place within the created order, and finally its place in the profound design of God, with exacting explication in the manner of Aquinas or Edwards. Rather, Hopkins offers the reader a deeply affective encounter with beauty itself through which his audience is invited to share in the poet's intimate encounter with the gracious and glorious *inscape* of both created and Divine being. Consequently, it is advantageous to now turn to Hopkins' work itself to demonstrate his perception of reality as a profound dance of beauty "*ad majorem dei gloriam.*"

God's Grandeur and Pied Beauty: Creation

For Hopkins, nature resonates with the beauty of God that is evident in both sonnets under consideration: *God's Grandeur* and *Pied Beauty*. In the former poem, the vast panoply of the created world is alive, "charged" with God's grandeur which continually enlivens the landscape. In his sonnet, the poet emphasises the *instress* of creation which *gathers to a greatness* and *flames* out in its own blaze of light. The

opening lines of the poem rise to a crescendo of motion wherein the power of beauty pushes its way onto the landscape –like the *ooze of oil*. The next line, however, opens with the abrupt and halting word “crushed.” Hopkins’ inclusion of the word is literally arresting and introduces the notion of destruction. The poetic vision that Hopkins aims to elaborate pivots around this single word through which he turns his readers’ minds and hearts toward a perception of the spiritual truth rising in his own heart: God as the creator, saviour, and sustainer of created beauty perpetually tends his creation with love and providential care.

The glory of nature gives itself over sacrificially to humanity through which it is deformed by the successive generations that have carelessly *trod* across it. In this regard *all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;/And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell*. It is “*crushed*.” The poet’s vision expands considerably with the introduction of *crushed* and the reader is taken back to Garden of Eden, and the spoiled beauty of the providential creation wherein humanity is condemned to toil, sweat and endure hardship in order to survive (Gen.3:18-19). Similarly, the word also draws to consciousness an image of Christ who in the perfection of his created being, is himself “crushed” and continues to be crushed. Regardless of the dull, brute generations which have “trod” and crushed the earth and Christ, too, in his true manhood, Hopkins writes *for all this, nature is never spent*. Rather, hidden in the depth of external appearance *there lives the dearest freshness deep down things... The brown brink eastward, springs* offers all hope and restoration. The poet draws attention to the Eastern light, the daybreak of hope, ultimately the resurrection and this *because the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings* (Gardner 1953:27). For Hopkins, then, it is apparent that creation is alive and aflame with the glory of God and continues to assert its own dynamic *instress* on a seemingly dead and dull landscape. Beauty, then, is sustained by the presence of God who lovingly broods over his creation and in brooding stirs it again to life and love.

Pied Beauty, again celebrating the beauty of the external world is more concerned to create in words a canvas of beauty. The poet praises God for *all things counter, original, spare, strange*, for *dappled beauty* and the glorious flood of colour

and detail that coincides in the material forms of “things” both in nature and as Garcia-Rivera (1999) maintains in the creative artistry of humanity. Both aspects of beauty radiate from the beauty of the creative impulse of God who *fathers forth* and whose own *beauty is past change*. This closing line is significant to the thought of Hopkins. For the poet, God is the well spring of beauty. Together with the former poem, considered above, it is equally clear that Hopkins’ theology of beauty embraces the fullness of the Holy Trinity. The Father is the source of beauty, the Son, in his created humanity, reflects the Primal Beauty of creation in his purity of form, his purity as “human innocence,” and ultimately in the purity of his sacrificial love, while the Spirit brings to fruition the dynamic life of beauty which in the creative impulse of Divine love is never spent but continually exerts its Divine creativity renewing and reiterating beauty in the “*dearest freshness deep down things.*”

The Windhover and Sacrificial Beauty

It is Hopkins’ own belief that *The Windhover* with its ascription, “to Christ our Lord” is the finest poem he wrote. In this sonnet, Hopkins, in characteristic fashion, circumscribes in words the full beauty of the kestrel in its flight. Its strength and majesty, range and freedom dominate the morning sky, while the bird itself unmindful of its own power commands the attention of the poet just as its soaring commands the morning sky.⁵³ The inscape of the kestrel is brought to the foreground, wherein the poet’s heart in *hiding/stirs for a bird – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!* Of particular significance to the theme of beauty are the concluding six lines of the sonnet.

*Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air pride, plume here
Buckle! And the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous. O my chevalier!
No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermilion
(Gardner 1953:30).*

⁵³ Critical studies of Hopkins poetry offer a range of interpretations for the opening lines of the sonnet from the straight forward description to more demanding interpretations wherein the kestrel, Hopkins and Christ, are all suggested in the opening lines. See: McKhesney (1968).

In this final section of the poem, Hopkins' thought moves more specifically to the topic of beauty. The *brute beauty* of the kestrel, which is evident to Hopkins, refers to its physical majesty. As such it is a beauty inherent in all created being that moves and lives in harmony with its own nature. Furthermore, such beauty and dignity are also a source of "danger," tending an individual toward self-sufficiency and arrogance. *Valour, act, pride, plume* which in the sonnet refer to the kestrel, have been further understood as referring to Hopkins himself as a man called to surrender his entire life to God in his vocation as priest. Further, a reference to Christ himself is suggested. In this instance the perfectly beautiful one, Christ who, in his very nature as God and man, is perfectly suited to command the created horizon as does the kestrel. In Christ, however, that position is not grasped and clung to. Rather, Christ, "being in the form of God did not count equality with God, something to be grasped... but humbled himself becoming obedient unto death"(Phil.2:5-8). Whatever appears in creation as natural virtue or goodness pales in comparison to the extraordinary beauty of sacrificial love. Here, Hopkins adds the surprising command *here/Buckle!*⁵⁴ External beauty does not exist for its own end. Rather, all that is good and worthwhile is only a shadow of Christ-like sacrificial beauty - the inner beauty which, like fine ointment, gives up its fragrance when its jar is broken. Hopkins, having drawn attention to "Christ our Lord" in the poetic ascription, recognises in him the deep and wondrous motion of self-sacrificing love – that leads to death on behalf of creation – and for Hopkins too. The poet's life is one of encounter and surrender to the nobility of Christ (*O my chevalier*) and equally as a life surrendered in intimate love to Christ (*ah, my dear*) thus demanding of him a sacrificial disposition of himself in imitation of his Lord - a truth borne out and affirmed in the teaching of St. Ignatius and the entire Jesuit tradition. It is in the motion of self-sacrificing love that true and abiding beauty is released, *when blue-bleak embers...fall, gall themselves, and gash gold vermilion*. For Hopkins, then, a life willingly "lost" sacrificially, as Jesus himself demonstrates in his own being and

⁵⁴ At this point, critical studies indicate three meanings for the word "buckle" – that as clasping together, that of collapsing under strain, or the noun "buckle" the clasp itself. All three fit in the context of the poem but for the purposes of this section, comments will be limited to the concept of "collapsing" which seems to fit the context naturally.

toward which he points his disciples, is ultimately “found” to be in Christ, more perfectly beautiful than could ever have been anticipated.

A close reading of Hopkins’ journals, sermons, and poetry repeatedly confirm the poet’s view of created beauty as a song of praise to the glory of God. In humanity, that beauty is deeply intensified by a life surrendered to God in love, wherein Christ himself brings to fruition perfect individuation of any life given over to its particular vocation in love and joy that like ointment will exude its particular fragrance where ever it is encountered.

In his sonnet, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire* (Sonnet 34) Hopkins provides an extended treatment of the subject of individuation as it determines the perfection of created beauty.

As Kingfishers Catch Fire: Individuation

Beauty, as it is manifest in humanity, is not, in Hopkins’ view, defined exclusively by external criteria as shown in his sonnet, *The Windhover*. But neither does beauty consist in any external acts of apparent piety. True beauty, the “beauty of Christ,” is discovered primarily in an individual’s living according to the deep and abiding *inscape* and *instress* by which he or she expresses their own individuation. In this sonnet Hopkins clarifies much of his understanding of beauty as it is manifest both in the created realm and primarily in humanity. Each created being is called to celebrate its own particularity, *to fling out broad its name* and to exist with complete congruity to its innate nature that expresses the perfection of its creational vocation. Here Hopkins speaks passionately of the “selving” of being – each individual is inherently created to express the truth of its own being in its essential particularity. The profound significance of Hopkins’ insight cannot be overestimated. First, the created form serves to express the inner essence of the being. *Each mortal thing does one thing and the same/Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;/Selves – goes itself; myself it speaks and spells: Crying what I do is me/ for that I came.* This motion toward true beauty, however, is not to be confused with “individualism.” Rather, the beauty, inscaped as particularity, serves to ally the creature with the loving will of God, wherein it terminates as an

expression of God's intended beauty which, as observed in the previous discussion, most perfectly consists in a life given over to God in loving surrender. Thus,

*...the just man justices;
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces:
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is-
Christ... (Gardner 1953:51).*

From this statement it is fair to conclude that Christ-likeness, or the imitation of Christ which effects true beauty is not primarily concerned with those actions which might be considered and recognised most easily as "piety." Rather, true holiness or beauty resides in living out one's deepest heartfelt intuition of self as that is discovered in intimate encounter with God who both creates the individual and in love, *keeps the individual in grace*. The final lines of the sonnet speak eloquently of the profound nature of the gift of "self" as it is individuated by God:

*...for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces
(Gardner 1953:51).*

As suggested earlier, Hopkins' theology of beauty, is not explicated in the manner of Aquinas or Edwards, rather it sings itself in the corpus of Hopkins' work which in all its notes and harmonies comes back to the dominant melody of his Jesuit vocation: *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*. One final thought completes an understanding of Hopkins' theology of beauty and speaks for itself. Tucked away in his poem *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, Hopkins expresses the desire of his own heart, the vocation of created human existence, and the source of all beauty. Of Christ, he writes:

*Let him easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us,
be a crimson-crested East (Gardner 1953:23).*

DEFINITION OF BEAUTY

From the discussion above it is possible to offer a definition of beauty, in terms of natural beauty and of the perfect beauty of God. As such "*beauty*" is *the relational aspect of forms, conceived by God as an expression of his own interior perfection and offered, in love, to humanity as "gift."* Inanimate beings offer up their meaning in the

perfect coinherence of matter and form directed toward a concrete end and offered to humanity as providential love. In this understanding there is no sense of primary or secondary beauty. Rather, beauty exists as an expression of love which, in God, is unlimited in its extension and is apprehended by both believer and unbeliever alike. It is the more splendid gift of “knowing” beauty’s source and the nature of the benefactor that sets the believing individual apart from his or her non-believing companions. Thus a further differentiation is made between the believer and non-believer and that is his or her conscious response to the object of beauty as praise, thanksgiving, and holy joy. Moreover, degrees of beauty reside, not in objective forms, but in humanity’s subjective capacity to apprehend and appreciate the apparent forms with which it is confronted and in them to perceive intended meaning. Beauty, as the manifestation of Divine Love, present in the universe as cosmos (order) as opposed to chaos (disorder), is congruent with reality, which presupposes a proper ordering of matter to the intention of the Creator.

Consistent with this understanding of beauty, therefore, is the fundamental Christian understanding that humanity is created in the “image and likeness of God.” The perception of beauty then, is conditional on the degree to which an individual moves toward the perfection of his or her own *image* within the created realm. The degree to which objective beings digress from their God intended signification, constitutes a failure to manifest the *beauty* inherent in the union of an object with its particular meaning or intention and which constitutes an objective manifestation of the “good.” The perception of beauty is limited, and thus may be spoken of as greater or lesser beauty, while the extent of beauty as the form of “reality” is objective in its dimensions.

The inclusion of love in a definition of beauty implies that an essential “freedom” must pertain to beauty. This freedom then resides primarily in God’s Divine sovereignty to create those substantial forms which most perfectly coincide with both his own nature (because beauty devolves from Divine beauty) which is unconfined, and his own interior motions of love. Hence, created beauty must reflect both the tenderness of God and further, his uncontainable majesty, dominion and power. A close continuity exists therefore between beauty and awe or as Scripture puts it, “the fear of the Lord.”

Beauty is perceived not only in those gentle motions of creation, but further, in the pounding terror of nature in all her freedom. One is compelled to recognise beauty in both its expressions as demonstrative of the inherent beauty of God from whom they are derived.

Thus a definition of beauty must further reflect upon the profound deformation to which creation is subject, of those instances of destruction and pain which so deeply impel human distaste. A definition of beauty, such as the one posited, does not negate the possibility of beauty's opposite – ugliness. The negation of “ugliness” might be expected if beauty is recognised as an effect of Divine Love. In this case one would expect that “love” itself would mitigate against the possibility of ugliness. Yet, beauty is not an effect of Divine love but is the substantial and distinct expression of God's own being which includes both infinite tenderness and infinite power. Beauty is no less beauty because of its potential to express itself with power and freedom. Herein, the insight of Edwards (reflected throughout his works) and that of Patrick Sherry (1992) regarding the revelatory nature of the Holy Spirit is an essential condition for the appropriate perception of beauty. Specifically, the Spirit of God, in the communication of its own being as love, frees the observer from the inordinate concern for individual well being, and allows God to disclose himself freely both as tender beauty and as beauty in unconstrained power.

Beauty therefore, is experienced relationally and understood primarily in terms of God's definitive self-revelation of his perfect nature in Christ, wherein power, majesty and dominion, are constrained by self-imposed meekness and tenderness, but not negated, and through whom love is perfectly manifest in the fullness of its kenotic nature. The awesome nature of God, hidden in the meekness and gentleness of Christ, does not diminish the limits of beauty but discloses the awesome power of beauty constrained by love. The perception of beauty, inclusive of its formidable nature, is tempered by an individual's continuing and expanding relationship to Christ himself in love. Chapter six will discuss the nature of this relationship as it is expressed primarily in the Triune Nature of God, and experienced on a human level as the fruit of an abiding union with God encountered in contemplative embrace. Further, the relationship

between God, beauty and authentic personhood will be addressed. Chapter six will then conclude with a discussion of beauty as it relates to a postmodern culture.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From the discussion of the works of Aquinas, Edwards and Hopkins certain features concerning “beauty” are common to all three men. Of primary importance is that each man is concerned with beauty as it is understood in a Christian context. Each explication of a theology of beauty discussed devolves suppositionally from God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is the centrality of God’s triune nature that allows Aquinas, Edwards, and Hopkins to focus on beauty and articulate positive and coherent statements concerning the subject which elude the contemporary secular philosophical community for whom “beauty” stands as an obvious but vague shadow on the landscape of reality. For the Christian, however, beauty represents an objective and substantial form, has specific meaning and profound significance. Aquinas’ statement that beauty consists of harmony, integrity and clarity, is of little importance if it is severed from the notion of a personal God who in love reveals himself to his creature. Without the presupposition of faith Aquinas’ harmony degenerates to accidental pattern, integrity loses the notion of purpose and truth which must constitute the object under consideration, and while “clarity” may irradiate the form, the form itself is rendered meaningless. Beauty outside of the presuppositions of Christian faith is an illusive category that must ultimately be reduced from a concept pregnant with ontological meaning to the subjective categories of taste and preference. Naming God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the prerogative of Christian faith, allows Aquinas, Edwards and Hopkins, to express their understanding of beauty in such a way that the concept is clearly delineated and defined.

For each theologian discussed, beauty is an ontological principle of God. Aquinas expresses this notion in his understanding of the “simplicity” of God wherein existence and essence are one, and all that pertains to God, perceived separately by created beings, are perfectly constituted in the Godhead. Edwards’ understanding of the unity of perfection in God is similar to that of Aquinas. Thus in Edwards, created beauty is a manifestation of the perfect beauty of God who exists as an ever expanding

contemplation and expression of his own being (and that as beauty). Further, for Edwards, the highest beauty attainable for humanity is that of participating in God's own delight in extending his beauty and sharing his joy. Hopkins also rests the integrity of his poetic vision on the notion that God in love has created beauty as a manifestation of his own glory wherein created being exists as an answering hymn of praise.

Further, each theologian demonstrates that beauty is a unique expression of an object's depth and meaning. In Aquinas' construction, form and matter are perfectly suited to function, hence for Aquinas the form is a substantial expression of meaning in the created realm. So too, for Edwards, recognising in the congruity of creation a perfect ordering of parts to their function expressed as pleasing qualities of proportion and simple equalities, proposes proportion, equality and similarity as the form by which a created entity reveals its "consent to being"- the manifestation of its beauty. This same notion of "consent to being" finds its echo in the work of Hopkins. The poet, more so than either Edwards or Aquinas, is concerned to demonstrate the affective significance of individuation within the created order. For Hopkins the dual aspects of *instress* and *inscape* are understood as the manifestation of God's design, intention, and love for all that he has created, and are reminiscent of Aquinas' notion of clarity.

Finally, each theologian recognises in humanity a particular vocation that consists of joyful and loving assent to the will of God as the highest expression of beauty within the created realm. For Edwards and Aquinas, this is explicitly articulated in their understanding of the gift of "cognition" in the human species. For Aquinas humanity occupies a mediatorial position between heaven and earth. Although beauty resides in all created being, in humanity beauty is distinguished by the human ability of perception wherein humanity is able to intentionally participate in Divine Beauty through the avenue of contemplation. This same cognitive distinction between humanity and the rest of creation is affirmed by Edwards, for whom "true virtue" is entirely manifest by its co-operation with the holy intention of God as the eternal expansion of his own beauty, which consists in love, joy and delight. Hopkins is no less concerned to demonstrate that true beauty consists in the participation in Divine Beauty, as one consents to his or her vocation to "glorify God." For each theologian, then humanity is particularly suited to

the expression of Divine Beauty and that as it is formally revealed in God's perfect self-revelation "Christ." Aquinas, Edwards and Hopkins each recognised Christ as the perfect form of beauty, who, in the vocabulary of Hopkins, reveals his particular "inscape" in his love and commitment to the created cosmos as it expresses God's love and God's nature. As such, the inscape of Christ, vocationally distinct from the rest of creation, in that he is both creator and saviour, remains, in the motions of his humanity a perfect *image* of created being and a worthy, appropriate and essential model of true beauty – which willingly disposes itself in surrendered love on behalf of the "other." In the figure of Christ then, as a perfect revelation of the Father, the nature of beauty is extended beyond the parameters of "form" to further delineate the content of the form as unconditional love. As such, beauty exists relationally as an expression of reciprocal "forms" (more properly existing cognitive beings) answering one another in love.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS OF BEAUTY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE TRINITY

As seen in Chapter Five, the secular academic community has seen fit to abandon the concept of “beauty” in its study of aesthetics precisely because of the elusive nature of the subject. The difficulty inherent in adequately circumscribing and defining “beauty” in an objective manner has rendered serious discussion concerning “beauty” difficult if not hopeless in the domain of aesthetic philosophy. Human subjectivity and the need for scientific objectivity endlessly collide in debates concerning the validity of subjective judgement, concerning questions of taste, and on the nature of “knowing” itself (Mothersill 1991:75ff). What is agreed upon, however, is the *fact* of beauty while the nature of beauty remains a mystery. As shown in Chapter Five, the situation is significantly different within the Christian community. Aquinas, Edwards and Hopkins all demonstrate that within a theological forum, the subject of beauty is not restricted by the same constraints imposed by academia. Rather, without negating the depth of mystery that inheres in beauty or appealing exclusively to subjective feelings, the church is able to make significant statements on this vast subject.

Recognising however, the perceived empirical limitations inherent in a study of beauty it is first acknowledged that the definition of beauty with which Chapter Five concludes does not, in the first instance, exhaust a discussion of beauty. It does, however, serve to provide the parameters within which the discussion may take place within the believing community given the Christian presupposition of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A discussion of beauty as it resides in art and the artist has not been addressed. Moreover it is fully acknowledged that, in its external expression of delightful, surprising and arresting forms, beauty undoubtedly shines out from artistic canvases, enwraps the listener in the harmonious folds of music, even calls out its own forms to the sensitive eye of the sculptor.⁵⁵ Further, beauty exists outside the bounds of any single doctrinal belief system. However, it is the Christian revelation of God, Father,

⁵⁵ Although a subject closely related to this thesis, beauty as it subsists in the creative mind and heart of the artist and articulated in various art forms, is more properly addressed in a different forum.

Son and Holy Spirit which perfectly *accounts* for “beauty” in all its forms and expressions.

Thus it is in the being and nature of God that an intellectually satisfying and affectively engaging definition of “beauty” will offer itself for consideration. Chapter six will be presented in three sections. *Section one* will begin with an exploration of the definition that has been constructed concerning beauty relating it to the fully inclusive nature of the Triune God. Further, evidence to support this definition will be drawn from those theologians discussed in Chapter five while the explication of the definition will consist of personal conclusions. After an examination of beauty in its relationship to the Triune God, *section two* will focus on the notion of *personhood* as beauty wherein humanity is called to express its likeness to Christ as the perfect form of beauty within the created realm. A brief discussion of the *image of God* as it inheres in humanity will lead to a discussion of “personhood and beauty” as the goal of individual life, and collectively as the “telos” to which the church points. This discussion will examine the notion of the *image of God* that is foundational to Christian thought, and will include a brief overview of the debate concerning the *image* which ensues within the Christian community. Finally, *section three* will conclude with a discussion of contemplation as the axis of the formation of beauty in the life of the individual. Contemplation will be discussed as the locus of the transformation of perception through which humanity is offered a clear perception of reality as the express manifestation of beauty inherent in God’s loving self-donation on behalf of the created “other.” By extension, contemplation will be presented as the locus of the reception of authentic personhood in likeness to its “primal” form.

SECTION ONE

THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE TRINITY

Consistent with the contemporary Western preoccupation with rational analysis in the pursuit of theological understanding, the Trinity itself has been largely ignored in the past five hundred years (the post Reformation years) of Western theological thought. This omission has only been seriously re-addressed in the

contemporary theological world in the past fifty years. Conservative Christian scholarship in the Protestant world, seen in the writings of Thomas Torrance (1993) and James Houston (1990, 1996), Colin Gunton (1991) and Alistair McGrath (1988) as well as contemporary Catholic and Eastern Catholic scholarship, seen in the work of Karl Rahner (1974a:1997) and George Maloney (1979) all consider the place of the Trinity within the church and experientially in the heart of the Christian. This problem has also been explicitly addressed in an ecumenical forum in 1989 published as the "Report of the British Council of Churches" *The Forgotten Trinity*. Collectively, those theologians concerned with the Report address the problem endemic to the post Enlightenment world and the post Enlightenment church, which has lost the ability to express the significance of the Holy Trinity, in a manner that affectively and effectively impacts contemporary theological thought and experience. Significantly, the modern scholar-theologian, Karl Rahner, addressing this negative tendency within the contemporary church, has observed that if the Trinity was to disappear from Western Christian thought it would make little difference to the practical outworking of the church's life (Rahner 1974a:79). This statement acutely illuminates the devastating rupture that has occurred between Christian theological scholarship in the post-Enlightenment West and spirituality, the embodiment of that doctrine in the life of the church. It is precisely this relational integrity to which postmodern restlessness calls the church.

The loss of the Trinity to the experiential life of the church effectively terminates in a profoundly diminished understanding of "relationship" as ontologically constitutive of God Himself. As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the nature of God is expressed immanently as reciprocal motions of love and communion and economically as the ecstatic outpouring of that love substantiated in the beauty and multiplicity of created being.

As discussed in Chapter Four, within the Christian community the Trinity itself constitutes the structure of truth, a concept strongly contested in the postmodern hermeneutic. As such the church can confess with integrity that reality is both an unchanging yet dynamic structure to which humanity, made in the *image and*

likeness of God is perfectly ordered. Truth, primarily disclosed in relational experience, is authentically accessible to humanity whereas the content of truth is not exhausted by human intuition or cognition. The relational nature of truth allows for a dynamic and cognitive reception of objective truth that is subjectively appropriated by the believer and articulated in both word and action. Developing this thought, the central concern of this study is to demonstrate that it is the profound depth of “beauty” that serves as the vernacular of Divine Truth. Beauty, therefore, is Divine “speech” both in its created manifestations as well as in the structure of Divine Life itself as the exchange of reciprocal love substantially manifest in the Person of the Son.

Relational Aspect of Forms: Holy Trinity and Beauty

In those theologians, discussed in Chapter Five, with reference to the concept of beauty, the Holy Trinity disclosed through revelation is understood. Aquinas, Edwards and Hopkins do not depart from the over-arching vision of God as Trinity as the presupposition of doctrinal statements concerning God and the nature of beauty. Nor shall this study on the nature of beauty digress from that formal presuppositional understanding. However, it is also true to state that in each theologian discussed, an understanding of the Trinity devolves from an Augustinian model which in Western articulations of the faith is received as a definitive treatment of the subject. Yet Augustine’s model does not stand alone.

The Eastern understanding of Trinitarian life, articulated by the Cappadocian Fathers⁵⁶, presents a slightly different emphasis from that of Augustine, and from which an understanding of Christian life primarily as one of relationship wherein beauty serves to unify the cosmic horizon, flows more freely. A justification for the statement that beauty consists in the “relational aspects of forms,” begins with an understanding of the Trinity, the apex of Christian revelation and truth. The nature of

⁵⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus (circa 350) are grouped together and referred to as the Cappadocian Fathers. Responding to the threat to Christian doctrine presented in “Arianism,” the Cappadocians are attributed with defining and refining the Orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity (Douglas 1978: 191).

the Trinity is not disclosed by the “word” itself and in the history of the church two distinct modes of understanding the Trinity have prevailed to which the great churches of the Christian East and the Christian West have given their assent.

Augustine and the Western Understanding of Trinity

On the Trinity (Schaff 1998) demonstrates Augustine’s explication of a theology of the Trinity based on an understanding of *essence* as an ontological predicate of Divine Life. Here, Divine essence is understood as an entirely distinct quality of being with no counterpart in the created world. God, as Trinity, is this Primal Unity. The diversity of Persons constitutes authentic loving relationships within this Unity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are related within themselves as modes of reference one to another. In Augustine’s formulation, essence and personhood are not distinct categories. Rather, personhood subsists in the Divine essence. God, in his immanence, then, is self-enclosed and self-referential. Made in God’s image, humanity becomes fully “human” to the degree that the individual, as a created being, reflects that which is essentially God-like in his or her nature. The mind, possessing memory, will and understanding through which it contemplates God in love constitutes the soul and is analogous to the Triune life which is understood as the *image of God* as it exists in humanity.

Prior to conversion, humanity, gripped by original sin, and controlled by its own innate self-interest, is blinded to a vision of God’s beauty and is insensitive to his love, a view clearly evident in Edwards’ work. In Augustine’s construction, the mind once freed from its self-enclosure by the approach of grace and the mercy of Divine forgiveness, is re-oriented toward God and restored to its primal dignity. Ultimately, it is the contemplation of the Trinity within one’s redeemed soul which gives the individual his or her own human distinctiveness corresponding to the “Divine Image.”⁵⁷ In the Augustinian model and in his own experience, relationship in love to

⁵⁷ This point is aptly portrayed in both the life and writings of Elizabeth of the Trinity. See: von Balthasar (1992); Nash (1996)

God is of singular importance evidenced throughout his writings.⁵⁸ Yet it is the mind itself, the rational element in humanity that is of primary importance – rationality takes precedence over relationship. Although an individual is only truly “human,” as his or her own life actualises a likeness to the Divine love evident in the Incarnated Christ, conformity to Christ becomes an external experience rationally discerned. However strongly the bulk of Augustine’s writings demonstrate the centrality of “relationship” with God, his articulation of the Trinity lays bare a theological construction wherein the human being is ontologically self-enclosed and self-referential.⁵⁹ Ultimately, in Augustine’s understanding, it is the contemplation of the Trinity within one’s redeemed soul which gives humanity its “human distinctiveness” corresponding to the “Divine Image.” An ensuing life of holiness as “moral reformation” is made possible as one begins, through grace, to order his or her life in conformity to the revelation of God in Christ. Augustine’s articulations of the intra-Trinitarian life and the *image of God* in humanity suggest communion but do not compel it.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (1961) demonstrate the powerful nature of human affect and its place within the Christian life.

⁵⁹ Prior to his discussion concerning the uni-personal trinity of the mind, Augustine does propose a bi-personal analogy wherein the Father is recognised as the Lover, the Son as the Loved and the Holy Spirit as the Love between them. Here the problem to be noted is that if the analogy is pressed beyond its intended limits as an analogy, Augustine’s construction could lead to an unbalanced view of the Trinity wherein emphasis is placed on the Father and Son, while the Spirit becomes a “force” or “energy.” It is evident throughout Augustine’s writings that this conclusion is not intended. His construction, however, does open his view to this charge (Cutsinger 1997:129-133).

⁶⁰ See Schaff (1998) also, the *British Council of Churches* (1989). Information in this section of this study derives from lectures given on the Trinity by both James Houston, Regent College and Dr. James B. Torrance in *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, Theology 446 (Regent College) August 1993; Zizioulas (1985); Kallistos Ware’s *The Trinity: Heart of our Life*, (Cutsinger 1997) and were initially presented in an unpublished paper *Concept of Community in the Trinity: Worship, Prayer and Personhood* (Herbert 1993:125-154). Further, those differences between the Western and Eastern doctrines of the Holy Trinity based on the Western inclusion of the *filioque* are, after careful examination, shown to be problems associated with linguistic variations between East and West. Thus the later Western Creedal inclusion that the *Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son* is properly understood as “proceeds from the Father through the Son.” This reading avoids the Western tendency to predicate a unity between Father and Son that is not shared with the Holy Spirit. Hence the controversy concerning the *filioque* does not contribute anything of significance to the current topic under discussion - beauty - and will not be discussed in this forum. See: Cutsinger (1997:146-154); de Margerie (1982:175).

Eastern Trinitarian Thought

The Cappadocian articulation of the intra-Trinitarian life, unlike Augustine's, is predicated on an understanding of God, not primarily as one essence subsisting as three persons, but as three persons (*hypostases*) subsisting as one essence (*ousia*) (Zizioulas 1985: 27-57). This divergence of thought from the Western understanding of the Trinity has dramatic consequences. In the Eastern understanding of the Holy Trinity, "personhood" and "relationship" sustained in freedom and love become constitutive of Divine ontology. Within the Eastern tradition, the *image of God* in humanity is not expressed in tripartite terms (although these may be entirely fitting) as it is in Augustine's construction but primarily in terms of love and relationship. Similarly, the Western understanding of "sin" is defined in terms of a primal distortion of the soul – original sin – erased through baptism. In the East, however, sin is articulated most fully in terms of "death," as the inherited legacy of personal isolation and the ultimate distortion of personhood effected by the fall. The significance of this view of the Trinity with respect to the "beauty" of authentic personhood will be discussed in a later section. Here its direct significance for the concept of "beauty" will be explored.

Within the Eastern Church's understanding of Trinity, God is Father precisely because he eternally begets the Son, into whom he pours out the fullness of his own life. Similarly, the Son is Son precisely in receiving his personhood from the Father and offering himself back to the Father in reciprocal love and joy. The Son then is the perfect image of the Father. It is the perfection of the Father's generation of the Son that constitutes the Son as the perfect image of the Father, as a distinct hypostasis enjoying ineffable communion with the Father. The Holy Spirit, as the eternal *spiration* of the Father equally constitutes the perfection of the Father as the fullness of his inner life – breathed out as Person, and who is also the fullness of God predicated on his distinct relationship to and generation from the Father. In this model, the monarchy of the Father as the source of Triune life implies neither a diminishment of the Divine in either the Son or Holy Spirit, nor does it reflect an intra-Trinitarian hierarchy. Rather, the fullness of Divinity itself consists of the

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reciprocal motions of love and self-giving in a dynamic vortex of relational exchange between three distinct Persons united in communion. The dynamic exchange of mutual love, surrender and indwelling of one another, is suggested by the Greek “*perichoresis*” or the Latin “*circumincessio*,” both terms implying a dynamic and eternal movement of love bringing to mind the image of “dance.” In this understanding of the Trinity, it is possible to isolate the concept of beauty as the substantial “form” of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit expressing the dynamic and mutually sustaining motion of love which takes “form” in distinct Personhood.⁶¹

Beauty of the Father and the Son: The Form

Consistent with Aquinas, Edwards, and Hopkins, “form” is an essential concept in a definition of beauty. For each theologian, “form” is recognised as a substantial image occupying space and expressing itself as both attractive and meaningful. For Aquinas, “form” is the objective representation in the material world that manifests “the good” that inheres within the object as it reflects the perfection of its suitability to its purpose. For Edwards, the “form” is also an expression of the Primal Good evident in a general manner to all intelligent creatures as the perception of beauty that evokes a response. This perception, leading to human accountability as regards living a well ordered life, is radicalised in the individual who in union with God, effected through salvation, receives a “regenerate heart” that is apprehended by the “form” of Divine Beauty and made aware of the Truth of God’s revelation in Scripture. Perhaps the significance of the “form” is most evident in the work of Hopkins. The poet’s own intuition of “beauty” and its significance, is entirely conformed to traditional Christian belief, but leaps out from a purely theological mode, embracing the notions of “encounter,” recognition, and affective response to the fullness of the “form” of beauty. Unique to Hopkins’ work is his understanding of individuation as it is expressed as *inscape* and *instress*. Herein, the specific and

⁶¹ The Eastern understanding of the Trinity could be misunderstood as suggesting a form of “modalism.” It is significant to note that the Eastern understanding of the Trinity avoids that error through maintaining that each person is distinct yet subsisting as one. Thus the Father is Father, the Son is Son and the Holy Spirit is Spirit, who in their operations or energy are in mutual and perfect agreement as One.

unique beauty of each form elicits a responsive expression from the poet that relates the beauty of the object to the beauty of its source. Hopkins, whose entire life is itself apprehended by the glory of the universe, recognises in created beauty a singular “vocation” to manifest and express “the greater glory of God.”

Similarly, in each theologian under consideration, it is the “form” of Christ, the incarnate Son who stands as the primary “image” of beauty within the created realm. Jesus, the perfection of form and content expressed as self-surrendered love is perfectly manifest as, and gives substantial form to, a beauty which is both material and concrete, while entirely conformed to the primal and spiritual form of cosmic existence as intended by God in the creation event. It is Jesus who represents the medial or locus of authentic beauty representing in his own unique being both the goal of created existence and its perfect content as conformity to the will of the Father.

The Incarnation adds a profound dimension to the notion of created beauty and particularly that of humanity, created in the *image and likeness* of God. That God formally and intentionally takes on “created being” after the fall and the introduction of sin and death to the cosmos demonstrates the radical value of “creation” in the eyes of God. That creation would be subject to a continuing distortion of its ultimate purpose, the manifestation of the love of God, is entirely incompatible with the eternal and infinite dimension of that love. The life of Christ as well as his death demonstrates God’s emphatic “no” to all that would “mar” the perfection of creation, while the resurrection demonstrates his equally emphatic refusal to allow creation to dissolve in the mire of human fallibility and sin.

The beauty of the Father is perfectly expressed in the beauty of the Son, the perfect “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). Thus to discuss the “beauty of Christ” is to recognise the inherent beauty of the Father and by extension the Spirit, as the perfect expression of Divine Being.⁶²

⁶² It must be noted that passage “he has no beauty that we should come to him” (Isa. 53.2) refers not to the attribute of physical beauty. Rather, it refers to the notion that in his created existence Christ does not exude any *exceptional* beauty that may set him apart from his contemporaries. See: (mar’eh) theological Word Book of the Old Testament (Harris, Archer and Waltke 1980:824).

That the Incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son reflect the full consent and will of the Trinity is evident throughout the New Testament. Here, the baptism of the Lord, and later his transfiguration are full manifestations of Trinitarian Life and thus Trinitarian love. The Spirit attends the baptism of the Lord while the words of the Father echo from heaven. Likewise, the transfiguration reveals the same triadic consent to the mission of Christ as Saviour manifest in the cloud reminiscent of the Spirit in Exodus, and again in the affirming voice of the Father. Further, as stated in Chapter Two, it is precisely the death of Jesus that is spoken of as the “glorification of the Father” whose own love is manifest as the “beauty” of a consent to self-surrender on behalf of the “other,” more precisely, on behalf of his own created “other.” Herein “beauty” is manifest as love dissolving the radical discontinuity that exists between the two concepts of beauty and death. Thus, the manifestation of love and “the good” (in Aquinas’ thought) takes form as beauty. In the transfiguration beauty externalises the glory of the truth of Christ, while in the crucifixion beauty externalises the internal concordance of love and action which constitutes God’s perichoretic Being that will not abandon the object of his love. The life of Jesus further demonstrates the beauty inherent in humanity as the fulfilment of life lived in obedient surrender to the will of the Father.

It is particularly in the eventfulness of the crucifixion that the notion of “beauty” seems distant and missing. Herein, form and content are diametrically opposed. The brutality of Jesus’ death stands as the visible form while the degree of love and surrender, motivating the assent to death is manifest only in those words that come from the cross. Within a discussion of beauty, the cross stands as a watershed, wherein inner beauty and external deformation (ugliness) require some objective clarification. One might well ask if spiritual beauty (self-emptying love) is in fact a separate entity from external beauty? A positive conclusion would lead most assuredly back to the problem wherein the spiritual usurps the physical and wrests beauty itself from the realm of the concrete material world in which we exist. The answer must be “no,” this is not the case within a Christian understanding. The content of beauty and external form constitute a unified entity in Christian belief wherein there can be no “being” without meaning.

Nothing exists without specific reference to the will of its Creator. Herein the concept of particularity must be taken into account. Crucifixion is most certainly *not* a concrete form of beauty but is a form that is “beauty full” due to the interpenetration of content and form. Content modifies form investing it with authentic value. “Form” constitutes the vehicle, which manifests beauty in its union with content. We must insist that the crucifixion is indeed an ugly form. However, the interpenetration of external ugliness with interior meaning (in this instance Christ’s willing self-surrender in love for the salvation of the world) renders the unity of form and content beautiful. The staggering consequences of the unity of form and content suggests that indeed anything may be accurately perceived as beautiful if love, as the content of the form or being under consideration, attends the deformation of the external manifestation. Thus there is no reason to distinguish between “spiritual” beauty and “material” beauty. All beauty is simultaneously material and spiritual in its origin, manifestation and power to compel a response within an individual. In this way, the church is able to confront actual existence, in both its delightful and its *most distorted* expressions, proclaiming an inherent and externally intended beauty, without compromising or modifying its conception of reality as good and beautiful. Ugliness or deformity is not negated by the primal good/ beauty (kalos) of creation. Rather, a perception of this primal good allows instances of disfigurement to stand out in stark relief against the backdrop of the primal intention. Herein, the apparent manifestations of the disfigurement of beauty reveal the profound “distortion” that so inordinately mars the created realm. It is precisely the vocational imperative of the church to “re-order” these instances of disfigurement or chaos to their primal consonance as “cosmos.” Similarly, in its vocation as prophet, the church is called to “reveal” the radical discontinuity that exists between God’s primal intention and a creation wherein *all is seared with trade; bleared with toil;/And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell* (Gardner & MacKenzie 1990:66). Specifically, instances of disfigurement call the church to action (i.e. applying itself to issues of social justice, environmental concerns etc.) as well as fostering within the Christian community, the vertical relationship between each individual and God. It is within this relationship that an accurate perception of reality itself is fostered leading to the

perception of Christ in the very least of his brothers and sisters. Vladimir Lossky (1985) expresses the positive content of Christ's death from the perspective of Christian revelation and the vocation of the church.

Considered from the point of view of our fallen state, the aim of the Divine dispensation can be termed salvation or redemption. This is the negative aspect of our ultimate goal, which is considered from the perspective of our sin. From the point of view of the ultimate vocation of created beings, the aim of the Divine dispensation can be termed deification. This is the positive definition of the same mystery, which must be accomplished in each human person in the church and which will be fully revealed in the age to come... (Lossky 1985:110).

To recognise "beauty" in the eventfulness of the Cross then is to acknowledge that the content and intention of a form directed toward its end suggests that it is in the complexity of form and content, that one is able to identify an object or event as "beauty full." Herein the content of Christ's death and resurrection constitute a dramatic reversal of humanity's perception of authentic beauty that occurs if form is severed from content. Moreover, the Holy Spirit, as the presence of God revealing and manifesting Truth, opens the believers to the radical significance of the union of form and content as authentic beauty.

To limit the "beauty" of Christ to the eventfulness of the Cross, however, would effectively diminish the significance of the "life of Christ" to the concept of beauty. To ignore the contours of Christ's specific existence would suggest that the Incarnation serves solely as an essential prelude to his death a conclusion that seriously undermines the significance of the Incarnation as a reflection of both Divine Beauty and human beauty. The beauty of Christ's humanity (his created being) is expressed in his perfect conformity in all his acts and relationships to the Father's will. Thus God's intention for humanity as his own "*image*" is seen to consist in its likeness to this very aspect of Christ. In Jesus is found a model of perfect humanity, which serves to mediate to created being the essence of humanity restored to its primal perfection. As the perfect embodiment of God and humanity, Jesus simultaneously contemplates the Father and humanity. It is from this simultaneous contemplative act that Jesus receives the pure and specific nature of his human

identity while reflecting the perfect form of human beauty - human existence lived in obedience compelled by love, to the will of the Father. The beauty of Christ, in each detail of his loving interaction with the created order in obedience to the Father's will and empowered by the Holy Spirit serves as the authentic image of *human personhood* as communion with the Triune life of God manifest relationally in created being. The dimensions of authentic personhood in connection with this thought will be discussed at length later. At the moment, it is sufficient to recognise that the beauty perfectly manifest on the Cross is born of the fundamental beauty of Christ that attends his entire Incarnational life.

Beauty and the Holy Spirit

Patrick Sherry identifies a significant trend in current scholarship as it looks at the place of the Holy Spirit in the proclamation of Christian belief. Although the Spirit is in evidence in these writings, the emphasis placed on the work of the Holy Spirit is almost exclusively related to ecclesiology, spirituality and religious experience (Sherry 1992:87).⁶³ The importance of the Holy Spirit to the formation, guidance and sustenance of the church is not called into question here. The place of the Holy Spirit, however, in creation and as source of revelation is to some degree ignored in discussions which examine the realm of created existence as a whole. Citing Kilian McDonnell (Sherry 1992:87), Sherry observes that to lose sight of the broader issues of the Spirit's work in creation and "cosmos" tends to limit the possibility of relating the Holy Spirit to nature itself. Hence "the Spirit becomes too sacralised, too tied to holy objects and events." As Sherry demonstrates, an appeal to the Church Fathers affirms that the presence of the Holy Spirit has traditionally been understood to

⁶³ It is true that since the late 1960's and 70's, a massive amount of writing has appeared which draws attention to the Holy Spirit as experienced in the Charismatic Renewal. However, most of this material is related primarily to an understanding of spiritual gifts within the church and to experiences of "baptism in the Holy Spirit." An understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in creation itself is not apparent in this literature, nor is the dimension of the Holy Spirit's work which affects a deepening contemplative relationship between the Triune God and the believer. For an extended study of the Eastern and Western understanding of the Trinity and the work of the Holy Spirit see Sherry (1992: 85-101), Zizioulas (1985:passim) and "The Necessity of the Trinity" by Gregory of Nazianzus in Everitt, Ebenezer, Watts, Pennington, Jones and Booth (1985:50-52).

extend, not only forward into the age of the church, but back in time to the very creation of the cosmos. Hence, all that exists is the perfect work of the Holy Trinity. In the “Hexaemeron” (28:09:99) answering those who would deny the Holy Spirit’s dynamic presence in the act of creation, Basil clearly expresses the place of the Holy Spirit as understood by the post-apostolic Church. Using the analogy of a bird, he writes:

The Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters. ... This is the meaning of the word; by “was borne”... understand: it cherished the nature of the waters as one sees a bird cover the eggs with her body and impart vital force from her own warmth. Such is, as nearly as possible, the meaning of these words – the Spirit was borne: let us understand that is, prepared the nature of the water to produce living beings: a sufficient proof for those who ask if the Holy Spirit took an active part in the creation of the world (Hexaemeron 28:09:99).

The breadth of Sherry’s (1992) treatment of the subject of beauty and the Holy Spirit clearly demonstrates that the influence of the Holy Spirit is duly recognised both within the church and without. It is further evident that the failure of the church to illuminate the significance of the Holy Spirit outside of the ecclesial setting does not represent a denial of this fact. More correctly, the emphasis that has been placed on the Holy Spirit and the church, as Sherry suggests throughout *Beauty and Spirit* (1992), reflects a contemporary concern to demonstrate the active and continuing presence of the Spirit with the church itself.

That the Holy Spirit attends creation is a belief evident throughout the early church and can be traced throughout the literature of the post-apostolic church. Further, it is precisely the early church’s understanding that the Holy Trinity, differentiated by the procession of the Persons and not simply by the nature of their inherent relationships, that compels the further understanding that the Three Persons *always* act and work in unity. Where the Father is so is the Son, and where the Son is so too is the Father and Holy Spirit. It is this profound unity of differentiated persons

acting in relational harmony sustained by love that is evidenced substantially from creation onwards.⁶⁴

Neither within the immanent or economic Trinity, does the Personhood of the Holy Spirit reveal himself with the clarity that attends the Personhood of the Father and Son.⁶⁵ That human fatherhood derives from Divine Fatherhood (albeit surpassing human fatherhood beyond conception) is evident in Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (3:14). In the created realm, despite those instances wherein conformity to the perfection of God's fatherhood is starkly absent, humanity has some notion of the concept of fatherhood itself. The relational stance between father and child in the created world allows humanity some concept on which to base a notion of familial relationships. This is not the case with the Holy Spirit whose own Personhood has no categorical likeness in the created realm. However, Augustine's understanding of the Holy Spirit as the "kiss" between Father and Son, or other common similes or metaphors which attempt to define the Holy Spirit invariably embrace those concepts which suggest affective relationships. Images of the "kiss," the "embrace," images of nuptial union, or Richard of St. Victor's analogy of "Love Given, Love Received, and Love Shared," (Zinn 1979:395-392) are common analogies intended to suggest the intimate and reciprocal relationship between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. By extension, the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the created realm wherein each "being" solely exists as an outpouring of the same love, must also be understood in terms of intimacy and love. Each metaphor is intended to suggest that intimate union between God and his creature is indeed an experiential reality, and thus constitutes a "substantial relational form" in the life of those who cognitively choose to participate in it. Union with the Holy Spirit understood in the most intimate of terms possible, opens the believer to a perception of the depths of the heart and mind

⁶⁴ It must be emphasised that in his work Sherry (1992) does not isolate the work of the Holy Spirit from that of the Father and the Son. Sherry's work maintains a strong Trinitarian aspect wherein each Person is present in the act of the other.

⁶⁵ All ensuing discussion of the Holy Spirit will adopt the use of the masculine pronoun to maintain a consistency within the text and with common literary tradition of the church when referring to the Holy Trinity. It is important to note that this choice is used only for literary purposes. Significantly, in the Syriac Church, up until seventh century the Holy Spirit was often referred to in feminine terms. See McVey (1989:10-11).

of God as an experiential and vital encounter. The emphasis on the Holy Spirit's role as he who illuminates is seen in his scriptural designation as comforter, guide, convicter, teacher etc.

A perception of the Personhood of the Holy Spirit is recognised precisely in his effects within the created order and particularly in an experiential encounter between the Spirit and humanity. Speaking of the Spirit of God, the psalmist assuredly confesses the profound significance of his work within the created realm, declaring to God, "Thou dost send forth thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou dost renew the face of the earth"(Ps. 104:30). If the Personhood of the Holy Spirit does not lend himself to an understanding in terms analogous to human relationship, it is abundantly clear that within the Christian traditions of both East and West, that his Personhood is analogous to subjective and affective motions within the human heart.

In the East, the Personhood of the Holy Spirit is understood particularly in terms of his actions within the Economic Trinity, wherein the differentiation of Persons is based solely on their manifestation within the created realm (the essence of God remaining unknowable to human intellection). Eastern theology suggests that differentiation between the Divine Persons rests in the manner of their generation: the Son, begotten, the Holy Spirit proceeding. Further, differentiation is inherent in the mission of each Person without violating the unity of the Triune consent.

Moreover, the personhood of the Holy Spirit consists both in his ineffability and mystery as well as his personal co-operation in the mission of the Trinity on behalf of the created world. The role of the Holy Spirit is that of imparting to the believer and experiential awareness of and participation in Divine Love. Pointing away from himself to the Father and Son, the Spirit's own unique Personhood consists of his primordial movement of differentiation both in his immanent relationship within the Trinity and his economic role within the created order. Thus, using the example of the church, wherein the work of the Spirit is duly acknowledged, individuals are united in love as one body through the motions of the Holy Spirit, who also fosters and preserves within the church the uniqueness of each person. Transcending the multiplicity and differentiation of each person, the Holy

Spirit overcomes the staccato of “individuality” and creates a church whose abiding uniqueness is intended as a harmonious and manifest “oneness” that in itself transcends the numerical concept of “one,” while, in the same motion the Holy Spirit further ensures that there is no dissolution of uniqueness within the parts. This motion is particularly evident in the Epiclesis of the Eucharistic event, in those churches which maintain a sacramental continuity with the early church. In these churches the congregation liturgically reiterates the notion that “we being many are one body, for we all share in the One Bread” (*Book of Alternative Services* 1985:212). In the church, therefore, the Holy Spirit is seen to reveal the contours of “beauty” inherent in a redeemed cosmos. Further, it is this revelation that serves to manifest the *intended* unity and coherence of all creation, that even if hidden, structures creation outside of the church.

Illumination of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit defines ecclesial life but in so doing reveals and substantiates the intended and beautiful nature of all created being which is inwardly ordered to ultimately express the same unified and coherent structure of beauty. Thus ecclesial life constitutes a life responsive to the glorious gift of God dwelling with his people; while outside of the church, the providence of God is also abundantly manifest. The main distinction between the two consists of a cognitive and joyful response of love and thanksgiving within the ecclesial community offered in intimate response to the Source that is largely missing outside the church. Most significantly, participation in the gift of creation understood in the most intimate terms possible (actual relationship with the triune life of God), serves to transform an individual’s own spontaneity. Cognisant of the indwelling Trinity, an individual’s perception is transformed from one conditioned by self awareness and self-concern to one freely disposed to encounter the “otherness” of both God and created being with loving self-forgetfulness. In this way the “beauty” of the “created other” as the free expression of its own uniqueness, is both perceived and valued with reverence and awe. Beauty becomes, for the believer, an experiential encounter reflecting his or her own likeness

to the Holy Trinity itself wherein reciprocal and perichoretic motions of love sustain the very being of the “holy other.”

The Person of the Spirit, as the source of unification, revelation and illumination is found throughout the witness of Scripture wherein the Spirit’s presence, communicates the reality of God within the created realm and within the disciple. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that draws the individual into a cognitive awareness of his or her relationship with the Father eliciting the cry of “Abba” and the knowledge of Divine intimacy and dependence (Romans 8:14-15). Further, it is the Spirit who convicts of sin (John 16: 8); it is the Spirit whom Christ declares to his disciples “will lead you into all truth”(John 16:13) and further whom Christ declares to be the “comforter.” Ultimately it is the Holy Spirit who will attend Christ’s disciples imparting to them a growing knowledge of the kingdom in all its dimensions - taking what is Christ’s and placing it into their hands (John 16:13-15). Significantly, it is to the Spirit that Paul refers when he declares: “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same *image*, from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2Cor3:18 RSV).

The Holy Spirit, perhaps more so than Father and Son must be addressed in terms that adequately embrace the very mystery of his Being. As God the Spirit it is he who unites the believer to himself and therein illumines the heart and renders the human being sensitive to God’s motions toward the individual in love. Herein, God’s presence is deeply linked to the notion of intuitive knowledge and the cognitive awareness of Divine radiance speaking “love” to the believer. Moreover, it is recognised as the illuminative and sustaining source of all that is for the vast expanse of created reality alive with beauty in the magnitude and the perfection of its parts.

It is, then, the splendour of Trinitarian love that shines out onto the created realm from its very inception and which continues to constitute the substantial contours of creation as an expression of God’s desire to share his own delight, love and joy. The promise then of the transformation of humanity into the *Image* of Christ, is a radicalisation of the primal gift of love and the manifestation of the fullness of beauty lost in the fall. In short, that God has manifested his generosity in the creation

of the universe attests to the “beauty” inherent in it as the manifestation of “goodness” concretised in material form. That God has committed Himself, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, to the task of “re-establishing” that primal beauty attests to the value that God himself places on beauty as it inheres in the “relational aspect of forms” both animate and inanimate. The cosmos displays itself in ever expanding circles of distinct details - utterly diverse yet unified in the over-arching and perfect conception of its Divine creator and sustainer. In this aspect “beauty” offers itself freely to the realm of “natural theology.” However, to suggest that “beauty” functions as a category in natural theology alone does not exhaust its significance. Rather, the full significance of “beauty” is disclosed by the Holy Spirit who illumines the heart and mind of its observers and thus draws them into a participatory experience of beauty as the manifestation of God’s goodness, joy and ultimately of his love. Beauty then is most fully disclosed in relationship with God the Holy Spirit, who illuminates form and content and thus discloses the internal and eternal significance of beauty as the “relational aspect of forms.”

Relational Aspect of Forms, Created by God, Offered to Humanity as Gift: Beauty in Creation

That the Holy Trinity exists as the primordial source of all that is, makes it possible to state that nothing exists outside of the Trinity. Thus *all* that exists is interior to the eternal and infinite dimension of God that is expressed fully as Divine Love.⁶⁶ More specifically, that God exists as Trinity and thus as the dynamic motion of love, implies that all created being is inseparable from the love of God although distinct from his Being. All that exists as created being is a manifestation – a visual and substantial – manifestation of the love of God expressed as the “beauty of forms.” That they are always known, loved and sustained through a continuing motion of Triune love must be acknowledged as the essential criteria of “beauty” as it is expressed in the natural world. Hence all creation, as the perfect expression of God’s conscious will or decision to love is in the first instance a manifestation of beauty.

⁶⁶ Here the image is one of the infinite and loving presence of God, over-arching the whole of creation.

All Divine activity is an expansion of the Divine movement of love and hence is relational in quality. Creation exists as a manifestation of this same love, economically expressed as the relational aspect of form. God, compelled by his nature as Divine Love, is constrained to create “the good” and “the perfect” which, in their manifest form, constitute “beauty” and are understood and perceived as the “relational aspect of forms.” Here, three aspects of relational “form” are understood. First, created form in relationship to itself (the complex of form and meaning in the objective details of creation); second, created form in its relationship to the rest of creation; third, created form in its relationship to God (the congruity of the complex of form with its meaning or intention as conceived by God in love).

That Love implies relationship is self-evident, but that love implies beauty demands some explication. The perichoretic motions of love described above suggest that the inner-life of the Trinity consists in both the exchange of love as well as a contemplative gaze wherein each Person comprehends and delights in the perfect nature of the Divine Other. In this sense it is possible to use an analogy of sight pertaining to the Trinity and state that God’s delight consists in his eternal vision of his own nature, distinct from himself yet irradiated by the same interior splendour. It is precisely the interior splendour of the Perfection of God that constitutes the Beauty of God as loving conformity or consent to his own internal nature. This communion of love, is seen clearly in even a cursory glance at Rublev’s Icon of the Holy Trinity (*The Three Visitors*). In this Eastern articulation of the Trinitarian doctrine, the dominant theme of reciprocal love is revealed in the circular orientation of the three Angels around the table, each embracing the other through the contact of their gaze (Cutsinger 1997:136-137). Although many interpretations exist concerning the extra detail within the Icon, a personal and simple interpretation suggests itself wherein the mansion, tree and mountain that occupy the backdrop suggest that the life of this Triune God extends beyond the parameters of his own Divine Existence. God, in love, moves outwards in “creation” as the ecstatic expression of a love that will not be confined. The forefront of the Icon leading from the angelic feet to the very edge

of the painting further draws the observer into the very heart of the scene as more than spectator – as participant

More precisely, the love of the Trinity constitutes the boundless expanse of the universe. Under no constraint to “create” in order to add anything to his own Trinitarian fullness, God as love, chooses to share and manifest his relational beauty in the substantial forms of created reality. These forms, distinct from God, are conformed to the Divine inner “vision” that admits no possibility of anything but a perfect expression of form, substance, and content compelled by love. Cosmos as distinct from chaos is entirely consistent with the Divine nature and implies primarily the perfect order and manifestation of all that exists. Herein perfect proportion and perfect equalities of being (Edwards) (Smith, Stout & Minkema 1959:22-27) coincides with what “is.” Here, too, the integrity, harmony and clarity (Aquinas) (Bourke 1990) are evident in the multiplicity of creation as a unified and substantial expression or manifestation of the Divine Word.

The perfection of creation and the nature of humanity created in God’s image, and its inherent beauty, takes on greater and deeper significance as God gives the task of “naming” created being to humanity. Adam’s task of “naming” God’s creation (Gen. 2:19) implies that humanity is endowed with the innate ability to perceive and specify each detail of creation and illuminate it with the clear light of its own uniqueness. Naming creation implies the further task of humanity to tend creation in accordance with the specificity inherent in each of its objective forms. In Adam’s naming of creation he lifts it beyond the realm of “simple” form. In first receiving “creation” and then in perceiving it rightly and naming it, humanity, in Adam, initiates the perichoretic motion of creation. This naming draws creation into an appropriate participation in the created order in likeness to the Trinity wherein each Person’s uniqueness perfectly constitutes the unity of Triune life and beauty. The motion of naming corresponds perfectly with the notion of “the priesthood of all believers” called to participate in the Divine creative act, through its personal reception of creation as a gift of love offered back to God with reverence and awe (Herbert 1996:297). In the created realm, specificity offers itself up in form and substance

entirely compatible with content and meaning. Its beauty consists in its radiant expression of its own uniqueness perfectly expressed in its design, substance, form and content as they radiate Divine generosity and holy intention.

The beauty that inheres in created being exists as the material expression of God's perfect will. Similarly, each expression of created existence is specific and unique, intended by God both for its own sake and for the sake of the entire array of objects in their "relational aspect." Each object or form of creation serves and offers itself to the creative order of being wherein humanity, as "creation par excellence," is called to participate with God as a "royal priesthood." As "priesthood," humanity's own joy and delight lies in its vocational priority to nurture and honour and offer back to God, his own creation. Herein lies the meaning of human creativity, not conceived as original thought, but as a life giving and sustaining orientation to participate in the Divine creative act through "tending" the created universe with love and awe. Thus the vocation of humanity lies precisely in its relational consonance with the primordial will of God which, in the first instance, is to multiply the joy of God through the motions of expansive generosity. Creation exists to receive and reflect the delight of God while humanity exists to participate in that same joy and delight.

The significance of the Cappadocian understanding of the Trinity has particular significance to the notion of personhood manifest as "beauty." Herein lies a most significant departure from Western notions of the *image* of God in humanity based on the Augustinian understanding of triadic likeness reflected in humanity as memory, will and understanding.⁶⁷ The Cappadocians' contribution to a theology of beauty is the recognition that the perfection of personhood within the Holy Trinity is entirely defined by the motions of reciprocal and mutual love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Here, most significantly, it is possible to circumscribe in a manner open to human intellection and compatible with the "common" experience of human

⁶⁷ In Eastern thought the *divine image* is understood variously. Therefore in Clement of Alexandria the phrase alludes to humanity's intellect and also to its capacity for reproduction. In Gregory of Nyssa the image is associated with intellect and free will, a view also reflected in the work of Gregory of Palamas. Significantly Gregory of Palamas also alludes to the "likeness" which he views as the potential for Godliness (Mantzaridis 1984:16-19).

creatureliness, the mode in which humanity is created in the *image and likeness* of God.

Extending the Cappadocian model of the Holy Trinity, it is plausible to conclude that human personhood as opposed to human existence, may be correctly understood as demonstrating the same dimensions of existence as those recognised in the life of Christ. Human personhood is adequately expressed as likeness to Christ whose unique incarnated Sonship is ordered perfectly and authentically to the parameters circumscribed by his created existence.

Certain aspects of the life of Jesus can be seen as bearing perfect likeness to human createdness and suggest that, from infancy onwards, the deeply “inherent” likeness to God spoken of in Genesis exist perfectly in each created human being. In general these aspects are reflected in humanity’s *call to communion, call to uniqueness, and call to freedom* which will be discussed later in this study.

SECTION TWO

Personhood

In the image of God (Genesis 1:27)

The fact that the Scriptures of both Judaism and Christianity maintain humanity has been created in the *image and likeness* of God implies that the notion of personhood within these traditions devolves from the primordial assertion that humanity occupies a significant place within the hierarchy of the created order. Thus a brief discussion of the meaning of the concept of the *image of God* or *Imago Dei* will provide a foundation for further discussion.

The Hermeneutical Problem

The biblical statement found in Genesis, “Let us make man in our *image*, in our likeness, and let them rule...”(Genesis 1:26) is to some extent an ambiguous one. The difficulty inheres first in the semantic style of Hebraic expression and second in arriving at its precise meaning in the creation account in Scripture. A common feature

of Hebrew poetry is its use of parallelism to emphasise meaning and provide a deeper clarity of thought (La Sor, Hubbard & Bush 1987: 307-3318). Thus an initial question arises: “does *image and likeness* imply two separate thoughts?” or “is likeness a means whereby the writer is emphasising the concept of *image*?” Further, is the statement in Genesis a strong enough one on which to base a Christian anthropology or support a theology of the image? It is significant that some church writings have taken the notion of *image and likeness* as two distinct concepts. Such a view, however, is not supported by contemporary biblical criticism. Rather, biblical criticism strongly suggests that the two words, *image* (*selem*) and *likeness* (*demut*), are set together in the passage in order to emphasise the nature of the creature as distinct from other created beings and also in distinction from the understanding of “*image*” in near Eastern religious systems. Thus the Old Testament passage does set humanity apart from the rest of creation but further serves to emphasise that the nature of the Hebrew *image* is distinct from other near Eastern groups (i.e. the Egyptian cult of theriomorphic gods or the Iranian myth of the “heavenly man”) (Lossky 1985:128). Hence from a purely linguistic point of view, Barth is able to assert that “the teachings of the Fathers of the church about the ‘theology of the *image*’ were entirely invented, without any scriptural foundation”(Barth 1957:191) (quoted by Lossky 1985:126). A less strident view, however, is expressed by Emil Brunner (1939:230) who states “the doctrine of the *Imago Dei*, if one equates the phrase with the truth for which it stands, does not play a very important part in the Bible (Lossky 1985:126).” Similarly, Lehmann states: “the strongest argument against ‘creation’ in God’s *image* is the complete silence of the rest of the Old Testament on this subject...” (quoted by Nygren 1953:230). It is Lehmann’s contention that, if creation in the image of God had been a prevalent idea in Hebrew culture, its significance would have been emphasised through the scriptural writings (Lossky 1985: 126-127). Closely connected with these objections to a theology of the *image* is the fact that the doctrine itself only developed following the translation of Hebrew Scripture into Greek wherein the significance of the passage may have been altered in translation to reflect Hellenistic philosophy. This writer must conclude with

Lossky that if an interpretation of the passage is to be isolated in its historical Hebraic context with its attending radical prohibition against images, the significance of the notion of the *imago dei* is indeed minimised *but not negated* (Lossky 1985:128).⁶⁸

Rather, the importance of the *image* is dramatically altered by the Christian understanding of the Incarnation wherein the perfect *image* of the Father (the Son) becomes a historical human person, in every way like humanity “yet without sin.” It is this further revelation of Christ which allows the Church Fathers, to whom Barth refers, to posit a fuller articulation of what is understood by the “*image of God*.” In Christ the ambiguity of the phrase is clarified with regard to the singular position that humanity occupies as the apex of creation. It is, moreover, the Incarnation that serves to underline the traditional understanding of both *image and likeness* as it developed within the early Church. Although never asserted as a definitive statement concerning the meaning of the phrase, *image* became associated with the *impress image* of God – while likeness was taken to infer the *moral qualities* of the character of Christ (Berkhof 1986:202-210). It is this basic distinction that entered into traditional thought with particular reference, in monastic literature, to the concept of *likeness* as holiness and the reformation of character.

Hence, the notion of “personhood,” more commonly discussed in the context of anthropology and psychology, is of equal importance in the realm of spiritual development and maturation. The Christian notion of the *image of God*, in which humanity has been created, reflects the significance of the subject of “personhood” to this current study. Herein the assertion is made that Christ is the perfect manifestation of the “beauty” of God and, as God and man, the only adequate reflection of God’s intention for all of humanity. As Jesus “glorifies the Father” so too humanity, as it moves toward the reclamation of the Divine Image is intended to manifest and reflect that same glory and beauty across the created horizon. Considering the immense significance of the notion of the *image of God* it is to be expected that a diversity of

⁶⁸ Lossky further suggests that it is the sophistication of Hellenistic philosophical thought that served to clarify the phrase and gives it a context, wherein the depth of its meaning rises to the surface. In this way, meaning is made accessible and understandable thus promoted further theological thought on the subject. (Lossky 1985:128).

opinion exist regarding this aspect of Christian belief. Although a full and detailed analysis of the doctrine of the *image of God* in Christianity is not possible in this particular context, some degree of discussion is essential to the notion of “personhood” as it relates to beauty.

The notion of a Divine *image* in humanity is reflected in the earliest beliefs of the ancient Near East. In ancient Greek and Roman antiquity the human being was considered to some degree a “microcosm” of the entire cosmos containing within itself all the vital elements of reality: body, mind, and spirit (Pannenberg 1985:27; Pelikan 1989:204-205). As such, humanity stood as a special “creature” within the universe. And, to the degree that religious consciousness constitutes the ethos of ancient cultures – so too does a notion of the human as a superior and distinct being within creation hold sway over prevailing systems of belief. The primacy of the human being within the created realm then has enjoyed from antiquity an elite status among created beings. This basic assumption, however, concerning “human nature” will be radically altered with the emergence of Enlightenment thought.

Although differences exist between ancient cultural beliefs and Christian doctrine the notion of the *image of God* has insured that this underlying belief concerning the significance of the human beings has extended into the Christian era. And, as demonstrated, it is from the church’s interpretation of the scriptural evidence found in Judaic and Christian Scripture that the theme of the *image of God* in humanity enters into the traditional realm of Christian thought. Yet divergence of opinion concerning the nature of the *image* as it inheres in humanity is also of theological concern within the Christian community. Although the primary assumption that the *image* inheres in humanity is common to Christian thought it further remains to discuss the nature of the *image* itself.

This diversity of opinion concerning the nature of the *image* in humanity is a relatively new occurrence in Christian development finding its own genesis during the period of the Reformation and later during the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment period. Until the Reformation, the *image of God* in humanity was allied with Orthodox and Roman Catholic belief wherein the “fall” effects a blurring of the

Divine Image but not its utter dissolution. In this construction the *image of God* is an ontological condition of humanity. The original righteousness of Adam is considered a secondary function of grace (*donum superadditum*) (Muller 1985:144-145). Hence the “fall” does not negate the basic *image of God* as it resides in all humanity. Significantly, this view is contested in Protestant tradition wherein the *image of God* in humanity is viewed as consisting in the righteous relationship that Adam and Eve enjoy with God prior to the fall. In this construction, the fall effects a radical if not complete vitiation of the *image of God* in humanity due to the severance of the initial relationship (*justitia originalis*) that is seen between the human creatures and God in the opening chapters of Genesis (Pannenberg 1985:49; Muller 1985:144-145).⁶⁹ The significance of this difference in Christian belief, when carried to the extreme is an important one – particularly in relationship to discussions on spirituality and contemplation outside of the Christian milieu.

In the Orthodox East and Roman West the fact that the fall blurs the *image of God* in humanity implies that the “*image*” actually resides within the human being as an expression of her or his intended creation. In the Protestant West, on the other hand, the complete dissolution of the *image* after the fall implies that the *image of God* is not an essential characteristic of human ontology. Rather, the *image* inheres in the composite of humanity and original “virtue.” In this construct “the fall” vitiates the power to live in obedience and friendship with God which constitutes the loss of the *image* that is only restored through an individual’s personal appropriation of salvation. Hence, as seen in Jonathan Edwards, a deep and spiritually affecting perception of reality in general and beauty in particular, is only available to the

⁶⁹ The term *originalis justitia* implies the nature of the initial relationship between the human creature and God wherein there was a primordial ability to live with God in righteousness and obedience – the ability to refuse sin and know righteousness. In Protestant theology this righteousness itself is seen as the divine *image* while in Orthodox, Eastern and Roman Catholic belief, the *image* resides in the human creature as creature and not essentially in the righteousness of humanity prefigured in the capacity for perfect obedience seen in Adam and Eve. A further distinction must be made between liturgical Protestant confessions and those of the non-liturgical reformed tradition. The former reflect a degree of continuity with Orthodox and Roman thought regarding the significance of the loss of the image in humanity, while in the latter group the loss of the image is complete. This second understanding leads to a particularly strong emphasis on the explicit need of individual salvation (as a born again experience) as a requisite experience leading to a reformation of the image (Muller 1985:143-146).

“regenerate” individual. This is not the case in those confessions that maintain that the fall has blurred the Divine *Image* but has not negated it. In this later construction a significant vestige of the *Image* remains and is intrinsic to human being-ness. Although there is little disagreement between confessions concerning God’s intention that humanity reflect this *image* as both relationship and righteousness – a fundamental difference must be noted. In the Protestant construction, the event of personal salvation necessarily constitutes the gift of new life wherein the Divine *image* is given place to develop and mature. In the Orthodox and Catholic construction, the fact that the Divine *image* is constitutive of human being-ness implies that all human beings, regardless of confessional backgrounds and traditions, are predisposed, indeed created to enjoy communion with God as part of the human predisposition toward relationship with God. Although both views continue to separate the church along denominational lines, within Christian belief, both confessions recognise that the vocation of humanity is to reflect the Divine *image* within the created realm.⁷⁰ However, this basic difference does assert its impact upon an individual’s perception of those “outside” of a Christian confession of faith. On the one hand the Orthodox and Roman Catholic view allows one to speak of spirituality as a “pre-religious” attribute within the human being – drawing the individual towards relationship with God or some transcendent reality outside of oneself as a natural human predisposition.⁷¹ The later construction, on the other hand, implies that all attempts to satisfy a longing for completion to which spirituality in general points is unable to strive toward its proper end which is God without the reception of specific grace. This view leads to more detailed and extensive arguments concerning election, predestination, and the ongoing debate concerning nature and grace etc.

⁷⁰ This same distinction accounts, in part, for the Orthodox, Eastern and Roman Catholic freedom to appeal to extra-Christian sources to clarify and shed light on Christian doctrine which is not evident in Protestant thought.

⁷¹ Here, the notion of transcendence is not solely external to the individual. Rather, the predisposition toward *eros* or completion is in itself an interiorly experienced movement of

It is the view of this writer that the understanding of the image of God as it is presented in the Orthodox, Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic confessions reflects more clearly the true condition of humanity which manifests pan-culturally and pan-historically an ontological predisposition toward relationship with transcendence. This tendency, generally understood as “spirituality,” recognises the innate tendency of humanity to complete itself (*eros*) as well as preserving the integrity of “spirituality” as it is expressed outside the confines of the Christian confession. Although the Protestant view does hold that other spiritualities are legitimate they cannot be viewed as “grace bearing” – which tends to leave the non-Christian spiritual disciple in a hopeless and pitiable situation – a conclusion that is not borne out by the evidential fruitfulness of many non-Christian spiritualities. This assertion, however, does not suggest that all spiritual experiences and all religious beliefs are intrinsically the same as is understood in tendencies toward “universalism.” Rather, the suggestion is made that all human strivings toward perfection or completion are legitimate and essential responses to the loss of the *image* as relational consonance with God and which will ultimately be satisfied by union with Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the eschatological fulfilment of creation. Rather, all authentic, sincere heartfelt strivings toward metaphysical and transcendent values, toward God, toward loving encounter will ultimately find their source in Father, Son and Holy Spirit – if not in this world then in the eschatological fulfilment of the age to come. Nor does this imply a negation of the Christian concept of judgement but does imply that the criteria for judgement will rest on notions of love and integrity rather than on doctrine (Matt. 21:31-44).

Without dismissing the relevance of such arguments to a positive ongoing pursuit of “truth,” it appears to this writer that the ever expanding multiplication of arguments concerning these issues also have a negative impact on the broader spiritual horizon. Such questions detract from the common profession of both traditions concerning the centrality of the reclamation of the Divine *image*. Further,

transcendence. Specifically, this motion is evident in the psalmist depiction of the longing heart

such arguments may too easily dismiss the relevance of the non-Christian pursuits of spiritual reality and moral integrity rendering them basically non-grace bearing and hence, eternally irrelevant .

A helpful perspective concerning the *image* is introduced by Reinhold Niebuhr in *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1964:276-280). Although fundamental differences between Orthodox, Eastern and Roman Catholic beliefs on the one hand and Protestant beliefs on the other do exist, Reinhold Niebuhr convincingly argues that it is not necessary to absolutise either view. Rather, Niebuhr demonstrates that “original justice” and by extension the *image* of God in humanity remains following the “fall” and is evidenced in humanity’s innate capacity for self-transcendence and its ability to rationally order its actions toward ultimate values etc. However, it is equally true for Niebuhr, that the innate distant memory of transcendent values by which all humans tend to evaluate the moral character of their actions does not indicate that this indeed leads to moral action. Hence the fact that the *image of God* is not entirely lost after the fall does not imply a human capacity to live a sinless life but only that the *image* constitutes a memory of righteous actions.

In light of the ongoing difficulty inherent in uncovering a complete and unambiguous explication of the *image of God* in humanity, Niebuhr’s less dogmatic view tends to reflect accurately the actual condition in which humanity finds itself and hence is a view with which this writer concurs. In a manner similar to Niebuhr’s, Epiphanius of Cyprus, reflecting on the constellation of characteristics which might be suggested by the phrase *image of God*, concludes:

There is no need at all to define or affirm in what part of us that which is in the Divine image is effectuated, but we should simply confess that the image is in man, so that we do not reject God’s grace and refuse to believe in Him. For whatever God says is true, even if it escapes our understanding in some respects (Mantzaris 1984:16).

Contemporary Anthropology and Psychology

As previously shown, from antiquity until the period of the Reformation and the Enlightenment, the human individual has been viewed as occupying primacy of place within the created order. In both ancient Greek and Roman thought humanity was afforded this position due to its possession of body, mind and spirit reflecting the full constellation of elements found in reality. For Christianity this intuition is clarified through the inclusion of the notion of the *image of God* as it is found in Genesis. However, with the rise of Enlightenment thought with its growing confidence in empiricism and a complementary confidence in the perfectibility of human nature through progressive evolution and the acquisition of knowledge, the centrality of God in the anthropological pursuit was lost. No longer beginning with the Divine, anthropology sought to understand human being-ness in relation to its physical environment in much the same way that science sought to understand the behaviour of other creatures. This approach to the study of human beings culminated in the twentieth century with the introduction of the behaviourist view of human psychology. Herein, humanity is not seen as occupying a unique place within a hierarchy of created beings, but represents the most evolved creature on a continuum from lower animal forms to humanity. The point of departure for this new approach to anthropology and psychology was Darwin's theory of evolution (1859).

Following Darwin's theory, Watson (1913) proposed that because the behaviour of animals can be studied without appeal to consciousness a similar methodology would equally lend itself to the study of human behaviour (Pannenberg 1985:29). Herein the pioneer work of Pavlov was applied to humanity. Thus psychology and anthropology began an exploration into human behaviour using Pavlov's findings concerning patterns of stimuli and response observed in the animal kingdom and applying them to questions concerning human action and learning. This experiment is absolutised in the work of Skinner.

To man *qua* man we readily say good riddance. Only by dispossessing him can we turn to the real cause of human behaviour. Only then can we turn from the inferred to the observed, from the miraculous to the natural. From the inaccessible to the manipulable (Hurding 1985:40).

In an interesting aside, Auden comments on the reductionism of behavioural psychology in his statement:

Of course, Behaviourism ‘works’. So does torture. Give me a no-nonsense, down-to-earth behaviourist, a few drugs, and simple electronic appliances, and in six months I will have him reciting the Athanasian Creed in public (Hurding 1985:40).

More seriously, the behaviourist experiment was criticised for its reductionist view of humanity by Arthur Koestler (1976) in his work, *The Ghost in the Machine*. Koestler states:

Behaviourism is indeed a kind of flat-earth view of the mind. Or, to change the metaphor: it has replaced the anthropomorphic fallacy – ascribing to animals human faculties and sentiments – with the opposite fallacy: denying man faculties not found in lower animals; it has substituted for the erstwhile anthropomorphic view of the rat, a ratamorphic view of man (Koestler 1976:17).

Regardless of the reductionist nature of the behaviourist paradigm concerning humanity, the effect of this early exploration continues into the present in varying though less radical degrees in “behavioural therapy” which need not share the basic assumptions of radical behaviourism. The continuing effects of this experiment are twofold. First, humanity is no longer assumed to hold a superior position within the created realm based on a priori assumptions concerning metaphysical or spiritual beliefs. It must be insisted that in the twentieth and twenty-first century it is not acceptable to posit any view of human nature or personhood that appeals *solely* to any dogmatic faith statements. Such statements, however, need not and must not be discarded altogether. Such views may be maintained if they reflect a degree of continuity with the actual experience of human beings. In a very real sense, spirituality must appeal to the perceived actuality of human experience and not negate it. Given these historical attempts to nullify the importance of the spiritual in human personhood, it must be asserted that any attempt to articulate the nature of human personhood will begin with an initial appeal to faith. Be that a faith in science or in revelation; or more appropriately a deep respect for both.

A second and more positive effect of the reductionist tendency seen in behavioural psychology is also evident. This two-dimensional approach to human nature served to open the scientific community to a deeper consideration of the authentic and complex dimensions of human personhood. This secondary effect called for a re-examination of the full constellation of intellectual and affective conditions that bear on human development including the spiritual (Pannenberg 1985:28-47). A far more sympathetic and insightful view of the human psyche is recognised in those models of psychology seen in the works of Jung (1985), Adler (1946) as well as in Christian Psychologists Kelsey (1972) and Groeschel (1984). The failure of the behaviourist experiment, as an adequate means of understanding the depths of human nature, has been displaced in psychology by a growing tendency to take into account the full constellation of *human* experiences. Significantly, as seen in the work of those listed above and others, these experiences include those spiritual or transcendent motions of the heart which, if not empirically demonstrable, are evidentially discerned in the individual and his or her life.⁷² Although writing specifically on the theory of knowledge suggested by Bernard Lonergan, the conclusion of Hugo Meynell concerning the limitations of scientific inquiry hold true equally for those ongoing attempts to understand human nature:

The point is not, of course, that these sciences as they are at present embody the absolute truth about the matters with which they deal; it is only that they approximate closer and closer to it as more and more observations and experiments are made, and more and more theories propounded and tested (Meynell 1986:10).

From the foregoing discussion it is possible to assert that a basic *mystery* inheres in the heart of humankind and that all attempts to *perfectly* understand humanity must always bow to the ineffable and infinite content of the human spirit – its distinct otherness which in Christian belief is allied to the *image and likeness* of God.

⁷² See *Roots and Shoots* (Hurding 1985), and *The Theory and Practice of Counselling* (sic) *Psychology* (Nelson-Jones 1982) for a comprehensive outline of the evolution of approaches to the

Call to Communion

The evident differences between the human being and other forms of animal life has been the subject of anthropological investigation in an attempt to demonstrate the primacy of humanity in the created order in view of its initial limitations – precisely its lack of instinctual knowledge. Further, such investigations sought explanations that are not wholly dependent on spiritual or dogmatic presuppositions. In these modern constructions the spiritual is not entirely absent but they do demonstrate the growing concern of the scholarly community to distance itself from the traditional reliance on metaphysical concerns.

Anthropology

The tendency to avoid a *strictly* metaphysical understanding of humanity is evident in the contributions of Max Scheler (1928) and H. Plessner (1928). Both anthropologists posit that the human being is a composite of physical and spiritual attributes whose specific and “special” place in creation is linked with the a transcendent source, “the ground of being.” In both men, however, an attempt is made to appeal to biological criteria to account for the difference between the human beings and lesser animal forms while linking that with some intuition of the Divine or transcendent. More radically, however, A. Gehlen (1988) who is influenced by the theoretical insights of Scheler and Plessner, makes no appeal to a Divine or transcendent source whatsoever.

Arnold Gehlen

In *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, Gehlen (1988), expanding on the work of Scheler and Plessner, attempts to explain this fundamental limitation inherent in the human infant as an “inhibition of evolution.” Appealing to the work of zoologist Adolf Portmann, Gehlen suggests that in comparison to other creatures, the human being is born in an “unfinished state,” as physiologically premature - ultimately

psychological development of the human being. Cf. *The Rebuilding of Psychology* (Collins 1980) which attempts to integrate Psychology with Christianity.

as a “deficient being.” He locates the reason for this deficiency in the human need to maintain one’s freedom in the created order. Gehlen gives a positive meaning to the infant’s inordinate dependence on its environment linking it with the human need to develop the capacity to scrutinise the environment. The extended period of dependence serves to provide the individual with the “space” wherein the maturing child is able to hone the intellectual capacity to discern, evaluate, and make judgements. In this way, Gehlen (1988) maintains the notion of human primacy while accounting for the discrepancy between the instinctual superiority of lower animal forms and those of humans. It is Gehlen’s use of the term “deficient beings” for which he was most severely criticised and which ultimately led to the re-evaluation, by the anthropological and psychological community, of the place of the spiritual in the life of the individual. Positively however, Gehlen’s construction seriously suggests the significance of culture and language to the growing maturation of the human as a relational individual who must learn to exercise mature and rational dominion over his or her environment. However, the negative content of Gehlen’s articulation regarding “deficient beings” leads to questions that must be considered when evaluating Gehlen’s views in light of the notion of the *image of God*. Does this construction imply that the infant is less than human? Does it suggest that the mentally impaired individual is equally an ontologically “deficient” creature? What is the “human” status of the developmentally challenged? In Gehlen’s view it is far too easy to equate human being-ness strictly based on intellectual capacity and cognitive development. This view is far too harsh and dismissive of a large segment of the human population to be viewed as an adequate articulation of the human situation. In a similar yet distinct view, John Macmurray offers a deeper insight into the subject of “human personhood.”

John Macmurray

John Macmurray (1960) presents a more sympathetic view concerning human personhood. Macmurray suggests that the initial helplessness of the infant human does not reflect a “biological deficiency” in the human but is an essential aspect of

being human. The apparent lack of instinct within the human infant serves to insure that the individual is afforded an environment wherein to develop the essential human dispositions of trust and interaction. Thus the almost complete lack of instinct is viewed as a requisite condition for attaining a healthy human adjustment to the world. Specifically, Macmurray suggests that human personhood, as relationship, is a primordial characteristic of human being-ness. Received and developed in primary and significant human relationships: "...self exists only in dynamic relation with the Other" (Macmurray 1960:17). From this basic tenet, Macmurray continues on to posit that human personhood is truly constituted as relationship (as opposed to *by* relationship). Received in relationship, and expressed as relationship, personhood reflects the primordial stance of humans to their environment.⁷³ Although Macmurray does not align his conclusion with a particularly Christian view, his own insights lend credibility to the belief that the *image of God* in humanity need not be limited to the rational aspect of "mind." Rather, personhood extends to the affective modes of behaviour and response that are evident in human activity and human relationship.

Following Macmurray's thought, it is possible to suggest that a partial reason for the fact of humanity's initial helplessness is directly related to the notion of personhood consistent with the human predisposition to and for love. Humanity is ordered to the primacy of love for both physical development and ongoing maturation. It is the human creature who is born specifically into an environment wherein survival is entirely dependent on the nurture and care offered through another. Thus in likeness to the Trinity, the human being is, in the first instance, ordered to receive its being – its particular and unique hypostasis, through the reciprocal and intentional surrender of distinct hypostatic individuals on its behalf.

⁷³ The concept of personhood as relationship is not isolated to the work of Macmurray (1960). McFadyen (1990) as well as Brummer (1993) also demonstrate the profound significance of relationship to personhood. These latter views however, are contested by Harris (1998) who indicates the difficulties that ensue if relationship is seen as formative of personhood. Are those unable to make and sustain relationships less than persons? If personhood is relational, is it possible to posit a core aspect of personhood that is not vulnerable to the quality of contingent relationships? Harris is clear in her explication of the difficulties than inhere in suggesting the interaction of relationship and personhood. However, here it is significant that Harris is able to affirm the model of personhood as relationship put forward by Macmurray who suggests that relationship is a primordial orientation within persons.

The significance of this primordial and ontological stance toward relationship as it inheres in humanity in likeness to its Divine source must be seen primarily as *likeness* to God. As such, it does not demand, as Harris (1998:225) concludes that the triune God be “explained as coming into being in a way wholly analogous to the development [of] human persons.” Rather, humanity is, in this respect, “theopormorphic.”

Appealing to the work of both men cited, Gehlen (1988) (Pannenberg 1985) and Macmurray (1960), it can be asserted that at its most fundamental level, humanity is seen to be oriented toward relationship and communion. Throughout the created realm it is only the human being whose own physical existence is attended by the possession of both cognitive and affective capacities differentiating humanity from all other created beings. In humanity each of these elements influences the capacity of the individual to live and sustain its own particular life. However, the human species, as distinct from other forms of animal life, requires an extended maturation period for each aspect of its being and development. From infancy onwards the human being requires a deeply committed relational life through which its needs are met and well being is fostered. The human being, among created living beings, is distinguished by this obvious deficiency of all, save the most rudimentary, life sustaining instincts. The first experience of human existence is the reception of its very being wherein perfect dependence on a created “other” is the *primary* and *essential* criteria for survival and development.

Jesus as the Model of Personhood

Maintaining the *validity* of spiritual claims if they reflect the actual material reality of the physical human environment, it is possible to state that Jesus (both perfectly God and perfectly human) may be realistically viewed as a model for authentic human personhood. This statement rests on the condition that it is possible to isolate in the life of Jesus those elements that are common to humanity as a whole, and which represent a formal likeness to Trinitarian life. Those elements must on the one hand shape Jesus’ own individuality and uniqueness, while on the other, reflect

characteristics that are essential for the maturation and individuation process to which all humanity is subject. Two elements of created being satisfy this criteria. Humanity is born into a specific physical environment wherein life is received and nurtured: human survival is dependent, in the first instance, on self-donation of the created other. Moreover, each being is ordered through the maturation of his or her own “self-awareness” to interact within the larger human community in meaningful and constructive ways – to move toward vocational or avocational consonance with one’s own being.⁷⁴

The vulnerability of an infant continues after its birth, in its total dependence on others for its initial survival as well as for the fruition of the maturation process. This process of relational life continues throughout an individual life: infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood all manifest the human need for relational consonance within the created realm. Further, affective motions of the human heart as well as cognitive abilities underlie an individual’s ability to move not from dependency to independence, but from helpless dependence to inter-dependence. Physically, sexual differentiation between male and female also point emphatically to humanity’s ontological predisposition to mutual interdependence. At its most basic level, sexual differentiation clearly indicates an ontological orientation that moves the individual toward interdependence with a sexual other as a primordial drive to procreate the species. It is the human predisposition for affective as well as cognitive awareness that together with sexual differentiation profoundly tends an individual toward meaningful, fruitful, and lasting relationships wherein new life is born and nurtured. Thus humanity’s physical, emotional and intellectual abilities unite to effect an individual whose own essential being is oriented toward lasting and meaningful relationships predominantly expressed in some form of “familial” unit. Similarly, single individuals equally tend toward relational harmony within some environment that offers a potential for nurture, support and the exchange of mutual love in

⁷⁴ That some individuals experience a primary environment that is significantly distinct from what is assumed to be that of Christ and which is far more distinguished by dysfunction than function, for good or ill, it is this primary familial experience that constitutes a formative initial experience both for Jesus and for humanity.

reciprocal relationships. It is within these particular social groupings that personhood itself is developed as variously suggested by both Gehlen (1988) and Macmurray (1960).⁷⁵ Humanity therefore consists of individual beings whose essential nature is the product of intimate union or communion with a distinct “other.” This initial and fundamental dependence persists throughout that development of the individual and is recognised in the mature orientation toward establishing interdependent relationships. A similar thought is articulated in a theological context by John Zizioulas (1985). Writing on the subject of the “hypostasis of human existence,” Zizioulas states:

Every man who comes into the world bears his “hypostasis,” which is not entirely unrelated to love: he is the product of a communion between two people. Erotic love, even when expressed coldly without emotional involvement, is an astounding mystery of existence, concealing in the deepest act of communion a tendency towards an ecstatic transcendence of individuality through creation (Zizioulas, 1985:50).

Thus humanity, in its created existence, is ordered to receive its own “personhood” in reciprocal motions of love and surrender in likeness to the Triune God. This human orientation finds its spiritual counterpart in the Cappadocian model of the Trinity wherein the unique Personhood of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is both generated and sustained by similar motions of reciprocal love.

Call to Uniqueness

Extending Zizioulas’ insight, it is within the relational group that the delicate human process of individuation unfolds. Innate to humanity are the dual needs to manifest uniqueness and freedom. Looking back to the creation story, it is apparent that what is lost in the fall is the perfect consonance that exists between Adam and Eve as archetypal humanity, between humanity and creation, and ultimately between

⁷⁵ Although the actual structure of family units is currently the object of debate in Western society, and the health of existing relationships is often seen to be destructive to individual development the fact remains that the orientation of human beings is toward mutuality and love and mutual interdependence with an “other.” See: Macmurray (1960) and Zizioulas (1985). Both authors recognise the essential nature of relationship to the notion of personhood. Zizioulas, clearly locates this predisposition toward relationship in the Christian understanding of the “*image and likeness*” of God” as a reflection of Trinitarian life. Macmurray’s conclusions (1960), from an anthropological perspective, verify Zizioulas’ (1985) theological insights.

the created order and God himself. The profound impact of the fall lies in the introduction of “death” onto the landscape of creation. In my article on Patriarchy, (Herbert 1996) I consider the primal beauty of creation in the context of the Fatherhood of God. In the opening chapters of Genesis, I suggests that the garden is a temple of Divine presence for Adam and Eve and the firmament of their responsive love both for God and one another. At this primary stage of created being, there is no suggestion of the priority of status in the creation account except that of God as Father “fashioning the cosmos, delighting in its beauty and offering it to humanity as a gift ”(Herbert 1996:293). This view suggests that the primary ethos of created reality is distinguished by the perfect sense of mutuality and love, of consonance with both being and distinctiveness as the dominant conditions of created existence. It is therefore, recognised that the implications of the fall imply the disintegration of the intended harmony of created being. Specifically, the introduction of “death” onto the cosmic horizon profoundly ruptures the intended destiny for created being, effecting within humanity a radical inversion of its innate capacity for a true and affirming perception of the world as it exists:

Fallen humanity, constrained by the fact of death and the horror of personal annihilation, is incapable of authentically embracing the “otherness” of creation with joy and affirmation. Rather, the “otherness” of the world is experienced as “threat” rather than beauty, and the human capacities for love and joy are displaced by the self-defensive postures of domination and power (Herbert 1996:292).

Significantly, the introduction of death onto the created landscape severely impairs the ability of humanity to experience creation uninhibited by the fact of death and personal annihilation. The hopelessness of humanity confronted by death has been addressed by Martin Heidegger whose concept of “being unto death” focuses on the extremity of the problem confronting humanity in its search for authenticity and freedom in a created landscape circumscribed by the spectre of death (Brown 1968:184). The “fallen” condition in which humanity discovers itself demands that self-interest imposed by necessity usurps joyful contentment as the fundamental

motion that impels action and re-action.⁷⁶ The “other” in the created realm presents to the aware creature a threat to its own existence – as an “other” who is equally compelled by the notion of death to assert its individual propensity for life over any and all that would threaten personal survival. As confirmed by Zizioulas, for humanity trapped on a created horizon, personal freedom and uniqueness experienced at their deepest and most fundamental level is perceived as fundamentally vulnerable to the contingencies of created existence. Hence personal freedom and uniqueness are diametrically opposed to the freedom and uniqueness of the “other.” God overcomes this rupture between primal consonance and the reality in which humanity finds itself in his saving act in Christ. Through Christ, humanity is re-established to its inherent consonance within the created realm by its reception of an “*ecclesial hypostasis*” (Zizioulas 1985:53) with its attendant revelation of “eternal” life. This second “birth” effectively frees the individual from the distortion of perceptions created by one’s self-awareness of the profoundly disturbing impact of existence defined solely as a “*biological hypostasis*.”

It is the human reception of an “*ecclesial hypostasis*” (Zizioulas 1985:49-56) which frees an individual to experience created existence in its positive relational intensity. Herein, the individual becomes, through faith and experience, aware of his or her reception into the Triune life as a child of God. It is precisely in this acquisition of a renewed conformity to his or her ontological heritage, that the individual is able to encounter the created “other” with joy, affirmation and love. Similarly, this “new” ontological reality allows the individual to develop and experience his or her own uniqueness in conformity to the Father’s will in likeness to Christ at the most fundamental level. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are uniquely his own. It is the specificity of Jesus’ vocation as Son of God and Saviour, that is continually opened to him during his Incarnation, and which effects a life that is both Beauty and “beauty full.” Jesus’ Incarnational and vocational life as Son of God and Saviour of the world is indeed unique and unrepeatable. Further, the Divine Beauty that Jesus

⁷⁶ For an extended discussion of this problem as it has been examined in the context of philosophy, psychology and theology, see *The Universality of Sin: The First Sin, Original (Inherited) Sin, Death* in Pannenberg (1985: 119-154).

manifests as the hypostatic image of the Father is equally exclusive to his own uniqueness. Christ's freedom to encounter created existence in love is unimpeded by "sin" as a predisposition toward self which for the rest of created humanity, trapped in a "biological hypostasis" is compelled by necessity to conform its actions toward self-preservation. Yet this freedom expressed by Christ is *not* the product of a unique existence that mysteriously precludes the reality of death as it effects the rest of humanity. Rather, it is clearly dependent on Jesus' knowledge of the Father and his own trust in the Divine Nature *despite the contingency of death* that exerts its own influence on the Saviour's life. For Christ, self-surrendering love on behalf of the other, which constitutes the form of beauty in his own life, does not pertain to his ontological uniqueness as the Divine Son. More appropriately it is seen as a manifestation of his trust in and love for the Father despite the contingency of death – a category entirely open to the life of humanity differing by degree but not by type. Therefore, the beauty of Christ, which is both the manifestation of the Beauty of God and of created being, is not an entirely exclusive category. Christ receives from the Father the fullness of his own personhood both in its Trinitarian existence as well as in his unique human existence. So too humanity's reception of an "*ecclesial hypostasis*" opens the believer to the same knowledge and experience of Divine Goodness as was imparted to Christ in his created being and which ultimately accounts for Christ's freedom to exercise his entire existence as self-surrendered love. Thus the beauty of Christ, although distinct according to the uniqueness of his own existence, is not distinct according to its source and its availability to humanity as a whole.

Here Hopkin's understanding of individuation, the *inscape* and *instress* that constitutes "particular" being, is a significant one to the concept of beauty which terminates in each unique person as the "form" of holiness entirely defined by the contextual reality in which the individual exists. Whether one is received into the kingdom of God through the gift of baptism as liturgical churches suggest, or one enters the kingdom as a conscious decision "for Christ" as non-liturgical churches insist, both expressions of Christian faith understand "reception" into the kingdom of

God as a vital encounter with the Triune God. Herein, the Holy Spirit enlightens the heart of the being whose spontaneous and mature response is the cry, “Abba.” This adoption intimates both relationship and intimacy inviting the believer into a reciprocal response of love and surrender to the sovereignty of God in his or her life. Thus personhood and freedom are not conditioned by the circumstances imposed by “necessity” but, in likeness to Christ, are conditioned by loving trust in the character of God. In likeness to Jesus, humanity is ordered to receive its gift of individuation through relational encounter with the Father, in the Son and through the Holy Spirit.

To use the expression “in Christ” suggests not the broad contours of general or generic reception, but the deeper motions of shared communion between creature and Creator sustained by love. In this context the “rule” of God is correctly perceived as his “love,” while the obedience of the individual is recognised as his or her progressive movement toward the fruition of authentic and redeemed personhood. *This manifestation of personal uniqueness*, increasingly conformed to the contours of God’s loving desire for each individual, ultimately expresses the personal integrity of the individual, taking “form” and expressing itself as the spontaneous and cognitive response to the a priori motions of Divine Love bearing on each person. Herein lies the ultimate human form of the *image of God* not as an external imitation of a Christ-like response (although these too are fitting) but more so in the radical reception of uniqueness as it is imparted to each individual through communion with God himself. Thus, holiness – the perfection of the individual, theosis or deification expresses not a single constellation of virtues or behaviours, but the expansive and contextualized expression of virtue in the immediate milieu of an individual’s particular life. Likeness to Christ, or reformation of the Divine *image* as authentic beauty, consists solely and precisely in the reception of one’s individuation by the Father. To express, in the manner of Christ himself, the particular and essential uniqueness that constitutes one’s authentic personhood both essentially and vocationally, is to enact “holiness” with authenticity and grace consistent with one’s personal and deeply perceived awareness of “self” in communion with God and surrendered to him.

Call to Freedom

To begin to express one's unique personhood, as the form of "beauty" in one's own life requires that an individual experience a deeply felt consonance with his or her own being. Further, an experiential encounter with God himself wherein an individual receives, in the depth of his or her heart, a cognitive awareness of personal reception and acceptance provides the essential freedom necessary to express one's uniqueness without undue concern for the cultural status quo. The "freedom" achieved through this encounter with Divine Love is not extraneous to the Christian life. Rather, the pressure exerted by the imposition of cultural norms, which bear in on an individual in all aspects of life, is the call to an undifferentiated conformity that allows one to peacefully coexist within the social order and diminish the threat of "otherness" imposed by the fall. To express one's uniqueness wherein beauty is formally expressed and experienced as "surrendered love" will necessarily confront a society wherein self-interest, expressed in a postmodern milieu as cohesive and exclusive interest groups, with a radical threat to the illusion of autonomy which such groups demonstrate.

The notion of freedom then is not ancillary to the expression of one's authentic beauty as fulfilled personhood. On the contrary, the profound disruption of the primal consonance evident within the creation event terminates in the isolation of each "biological hypostasis" and implies that personal uniqueness will always be perceived as threat. "Otherness" that refuses to be conformed to the dominant "status quo" (including that of postmodernism characterised by relativism and the absence of structuring norms) will inevitably confront that status quo precisely in those areas wherein conformity would ensure one's peaceful coexistence within the greater social order. Freedom, experienced as relational acceptance in and with God, thus provides a solid and sustaining basis for the acquisition of one's uniqueness, its maturation, and ultimately its expression as beauty, "being surrendered in love."

Likeness to Christ, as the perfect "form" of created beauty, becomes for the individual an attainable and entirely realistic goal. For each individual, likeness to

Christ consists not in “mimicking” Christ’s actions and attitudes which are uniquely his own, but in the reception of one’s *own* individuation as both being and vocation, imparted through relational communion with Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Herein the individual becomes cognitively aware of the contours of his or her personal inclusion within the perichoretic motions of triune love, and is freed to express the uniquely individual imperative of his or her own life. Thus the expansive love of the Triune God becomes the landscape of human action and human “being-ness” itself. Moreover, it becomes an experiential encounter with the essential contours of “reality” wherein individual uniqueness is free to express itself as a growing, if not perfect manifestation, of likeness to Christ as the perfect form of created beauty. In this sense, beauty is recognised as the reception and maturation of one’s individuation in relationship to God, a possibility accessible to all who desire to participate in the motions of Divine love. The beauty of a life moving towards its fulfilment, as one that manifests itself in the process of Divine individuation, is one that is growing toward holiness understood as the expression of God intended uniqueness or personhood for each individual.

SECTION THREE

Contemplation

Because contemplative experience brings the individual into the realm of the “mystical” it is important to indicate the nature of current discussions and debate on “mystical” experience in general prior to a discussion on Christian contemplative experiences in particular. Here questions concern the actual nature of such experiences themselves and the difficulties encountered concerning their “interpretation” and “validation” (Katz 1978:22-23). Katz raises the question whether or not any *final* assertions can be made concerning mystical experience short of the fact that such experiences do occur. He observes that, although mystical events may occur, it is impossible to deduce accurate information concerning them due to the overwhelming evidence that such experiences are not only interpreted within specific and distinct cultural situations but further that cultural and religious beliefs deeply

conform the pre-experiential expectation of the disciple. Thus “similar” explications or descriptions of mystical events are conditioned by the linguistic context of the recorder and can not be assumed to refer to the same experiences pan-historically and pan-culturally despite the “common” language pictures used to describe them. Although the conclusions of Katz are well supported and it must be maintained that mystical eventfulness and its description may well be conditioned by context, that fact does not negate the power of such experiences nor does it suggest that mystical experiences do not occur - a fact Katz readily concedes. However, Katz’s suggestion that “mystical” experiences are indeed contextualised is not an uncontested view.

Recent contributions to questions on the nature of mysticism have been introduced by Forman (1997) in *The Innate Capacity: Mysticism, Psychology, and Philosophy* wherein Forman and his contributors suggest that while the “constructivist” theory of mystical experiences may demonstrate the influence of culture and language on reports of mystical experience, they have little to contribute to an understanding of the perennial core inherent in such experiences. Rather, it is suggested that within humanity there appears to be an *innate* tendency toward such experience that serves as the source of mystical strivings. Thus it must be argued, contrary to the conclusion of Katz, that a perennial element common to expressions of mystical experience is observed and consists in the intuition that the physical realm does not exhaust the meaning of created being. The common core that persists pan-culturally is the intuition that humanity is not at ease in a purely physical mode of being and strains toward some completion of being. Further, because of the differences that obviously exist between different expressions of the mystical life, it is essential to maintain that mystical experience need not, in the first instance, serve as an apologetic for the truth of any belief system. Rather, it is the mature end to which the devotee or disciple moves.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ In his essay, *On Mystic Visions as Sources of Knowledge*, Nelson Pike (1978) outlines the difficulty inherent in assigning epistemic value to mystical experience with particular reference to the scepticism of A. MacIntyre (Katz 1978). Pike’s view is one with which this writer concurs. For present purposes it is assumed that evidence of the truth of such experiences will primarily reside in their ability to elicit a positive and moral response on the part of the individual. It is understood that this will hold true for all mystical experience pan-culturally. Hence it seems that although mystical

Contemplation as the way forward in the discovery of an authentic expression of personhood is an essential category in an explication of the notion of beauty as holiness. Under the title of contemplation, the subject matter will turn to four specific themes. In this context contemplation is understood as the gentle and loving attentiveness to the presence of God commensurate with a person's spiritual maturity and desire. Beginning with a discussion of relational encounter with God, and moving into the subject of the ascetic ground of union with God expressed in the context of the lay life, this section will conclude with a discussion of the transformed perception of self and the "other." Linked with the understanding of transformed perception the discussion will naturally embrace the affective manifestation of a responsive life of joy and thanksgiving wherein all creation radiates its sacramental nature as the landscape of Divine Presence and the essential milieu of personal holiness as beauty.⁷⁸ Evdokimov cogently expresses a similar thought:

At the ultimate heights of holiness, the human person "becomes in a certain sense light".... Man [sic] is drawn upward; we might even say "falls up" and attains the level of Divine beauty. To be in the Light is to be in an illuminating communion which reveals the icons of persons and things. This communion allows us to grasp their *logoi*⁷⁹ as contained in Divine thought and thus initiates these persons and things into their perfect wholeness: in other words, persons and things are initiated into the beauty that God willed for them (Evdokimov 1990:7).

Contemplative Life as Relational Encounter

In the postmodern world, the notion of individualism that permeated the modern era has dissolved in a mire of isolationism and rootlessness. In contemporary culture, the tendency to re-assert the human drive for relationship is expressed by the adoption of a form of "collectivism" wherein social groupings, reflecting particular

experience may confirm doctrine, bearing in mind Katz's own view on language and contextualisation, such experiences are not suited to strictly apologetic concerns.

⁷⁸ It is understood that the subjects of contemplative prayer and mysticism are such profound ones that a complete treatment of the subject is only addressed adequately as a theme in and of itself. For present purposes, the treatment of contemplation will necessarily focus on those areas of particular concern to "beauty" therefore it is not the intention of the writer to exhaust the significance of contemplation and the mystical life in this section.

⁷⁹ In this case *Logoi* represents the "this-ness" the specificity and uniqueness of a particular entity.

tastes and beliefs, emerge as a “new” cultural pattern. In the manner suggested by postmodern philosophical thought these groups create their own “micro-cultures” providing individuals with a structure that forms a cohesive entity wherein personal identity conceived primarily in terms of “personal interest” is freely expressed. Here, however, the bond that is established between members, based on “common concerns” excludes the possibility of providing an inclusive cultural expression wherein a visible characteristic is an inclusive manifestation of harmony and consonance. In these instances social groupings tend to exist primarily as “oppositional” forms with specific reference to “others” whose own views are perceived as counter to or prohibitive of the expression of the primary group. These groups then exist as micro-cultures distinguished by conflict and the assertion of “personal rights.”⁸⁰ The Christian alternative to such a state is a profound one drawing humanity into deeply experienced concord based on “authentic communion” which celebrates the uniqueness of each person, without diminishing or negating the perceived concerns of any group and without needlessly and thoughtlessly intensifying its perceived sense of exclusion. The *scopos* through which the “church” herself will discover and appropriate the beauty of authentic communion is that of prayer as relational encounter.

The forms of prayer common to Christian life, intercessory, petitionary and prayers of supplication and praise are readily understood by the church’s laity. Contemplation, however, is a form of prayer that in the first instance is not self-explanatory. Nor is it a form of prayer readily adopted by the laity. The notion of contemplative prayer, more commonly understood in either an Orthodox or Roman Catholic milieu, has been addressed in the Protestant church, in the popular writings of Joyce Hugget (1986) and more academically in the work of Alister McGrath (1999) in Britain, and in the works of Richard Foster (1978;1981;1992) and Eugene Peterson (1989) in the United States. Each of these writers have sought to refocus the church, if not specifically on contemplative prayer, on the dimensions of spirituality and the “mystical” heritage of the church wherein the affective and

⁸⁰ Included in this type of “group” consciousness are found the various expression of liberation

contemplative life emerge as categories for serious consideration.⁸¹ If the beauty of humanity is to reach its fulfilment and become manifest as personal holiness consistent with the specific details of one's personal existence through communion with the Holy Trinity, the Trinity must be fully accessible to the normal Christian life. Contemplative prayer, which is specifically focussed on the relational aspect of Christian experience, must be understood as a natural and expected avenue for the process of communion and individuation to occur. As such, contemplative prayer should be understood as normative for Christian experience and not considered solely the prerogative of "religious" life historically focussed on "monastic" or varied forms of "vowed" life. Certainly, different forms of vocational expressions of Christian belief have their place in the Christian world. The place of sacred vocation is not questioned. To ignore the process of contemplative prayer within the church as a whole, however, fosters the illusion among the laity that contemplation and by extension the "mystical" life has no place in "ordinary" Christian experience. As such the absence of teaching on contemplative prayer and the mystical life constitutes a significant error which imposes an experiential limitation on the very people who constitute Church.

For those who comprise the church at its very grassroots level, the gift of personal uniqueness and individuation is often limited by the imposition of the church's own preconceived notions of an ecclesial status quo compelling a specific conformity to stereotypical notions of piety. Yet "piety" expressed as conformity to acceptable behaviours within the church may unwittingly effect a radical reductionism of authentic holiness by failing to take into account the very "uniqueness" which constitutes the beauty of holiness in the life of the believer. This tendency creates the illusion of harmony but at its deepest level betrays a church that is unable to truly manifest her highest calling, namely the glorification of God in and through the lives of her members. In this regard, holiness is expressed, not in terms of authentic

groups, i.e. gay groups, radical feminist groups, pro-life and pro-choice groups etc.

⁸¹ See Joyce Hugget, *Listening to God* (1986); Alister McGrath *Christian Spirituality: an Introduction* (1999); Richard Foster *Celebration of Discipline* (1978); *Freedom of Simplicity* (1981); *Prayer: Finding the Hearts True Home* (1992); Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (1989).

“being” as the growing expression of one’s uniqueness, but in terms of the negation of certain behaviours and the adoption of others, which are deemed “appropriate” to the church milieu. This view is not meant to suggest that traditional notions of virtue are no longer appropriate to the Christian church. On the contrary, these virtues are of extraordinary importance expressing the likeness of Christ, and manifesting his beauty onto the created realm. The virtuous life, inherent in Christian belief, provides the church with the only truly convincing “apologetic” for the “truth” she professes. However, the acquisition of virtue implies not the adoption of particular behaviours but the transformation of one’s own spontaneity through which the impulse of the heart (understood as the essential being of an individual – the unity of body, mind and spirit) is truly a reflection of one’s own being.

The expression of this reductionist tendency within the postmodern church, is recognised in the emphasis placed on lay ministry as opposed to “full time ministry,” in the inward looking nature of “ministry” as it is expressed *within* and for the church with little positive regard for the world with which it is called to interact, and finally in its failure to recognise personal “being” as a valuable and essential gift to the church in itself. In those instances where ecclesial activism is based not on one’s “being,” but on a misplaced emphasis on good action motivated by duty the church ignores the authentic gift of personhood as the essential manifestation of Divine likeness. The proliferation of programmes designed to promote church growth and which provide comparatively rare opportunities to foster the full life of the individual combine to effect a subtle tendency to equate human “value” with church performance rather than on “being.” The church, firmly understanding the Divine imperative “you must be born again,” fails in its vocation to emphasise for its members the equally important and ensuing dilemma of “how to live again” as a whole integrated human being.⁸² In this way the ecclesial community itself negates the value of the whole person as a unique expression of the kingdom of God. Herein, the church herself must guard against a tendency toward “reification” as the objectification of members, as well as her tendency to create and live as a subculture

⁸² This thought has been suggested by Dr. James Houston, Regent College, Vancouver Canada.

within the larger culture rather than to offer society an inclusive model for culture itself.

Inherent in the mystery of ecclesial life is the coming together of unique individuals. Herein the visible communion of persons is an authentic expression of multiplicity of persons living with relational and deep consonance. Nor must the communion of the church see itself solely in terms of her distinctiveness from those outside the church, but more positively as the fulfilment of the intended diversity of creation expressing its inherent beauty as relational harmony. It is precisely at this point that the church herself, must identify and re-form the distortion within her own walls. If beauty is the expression of the relational aspect of forms conceived by God and offered to humanity as a gift, the church's own denominationalism tends to magnify her failure to express beauty. Moreover, the church must come to authentically appreciate and value the beauty outside its own doors, to see Christ in the faces of those who do not share her personal perspective. If the church is to recover beauty as a central and ontologically important theme, wherein Christian doctrine is expressed in the lives of believers as holiness, then contemplation and the attendant ascetic orientation that underlies contemplation must become a central and dominant theme throughout the church – regardless of denominational differences.

However, as has been suggested earlier, the literature that traditionally deals with contemplative life is articulated specifically for those who are vocationally called to the enclosed life or the vowed life. Hence, contemplative life is most often described in terms that reflect little continuity with the lives of those who constitute the church as laity.

As referred to earlier (Chapter Three) it is largely in the monastic world of both East and West, that beauty has been articulated as a theological theme relating directly to contemplative prayer. However, it has also been suggested that the literature that emanates from within the monastic world, particularly in the East, is presented in strongly negative and exclusive terms. In the East this tendency is accounted for by the centrality of asceticism to monastic life and to the goal of deification. In the West, a similar monastic culture has traditionally addressed

contemplative prayer and hence a similar exclusivity is perceived concerning this form of prayer. If, however, beauty as the manifestation of authentic personhood is to be recovered within the church, the subject of beauty must be accessible to the “ordinary” Christian life. The subjects of “contemplation and beauty” which open directly into the area of “mystical” experience, defined as a cognitive awareness of God’s love in one’s life, serve to draw the individual into the requisite posture of love and intimacy with God wherein the maturation of authentic personhood is possible.⁸³ In view of the radical importance of contemplation as the avenue of access to an experience of the transforming power of Divine Beauty and the milieu of affective relational encounter with God, the contemplative life must be reconsidered particularly as it relates to the laity of the church.

Teachers on the Life of Prayer

If the Western church has failed to include contemplative prayer and contemplative life as an important theme in Christian life at the congregational level it is not for want of authoritative voices on the subject. In the East these voices include the profound insights of Origen, Gregory of Palamas, as well as the voices that are heard in the Orthodox *Philokalia*. While in the Western church the Carmelites, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, have been named “Doctors of the Universal Church” by the Roman Church, precisely in regard to their deep understanding of the contemplative venture (Dubay 1989). Both these Western teachers on the contemplative life add much to our understanding of contemplation and equally demonstrate a profound understanding and insight into human psychology which has not been minimised by the passage of time.⁸⁴

⁸³ Mysticism represents a vast theme within the context of epistemology, wherein the debate continues concerning the exact nature of phenomenological experiences associated with “mystical experience.” As demonstrated by Kourie (1992) inclusion of mystical life into the mainstream of Christian experience poses particular questions concerning the verification of the content of mystical experience. Her paper indicates that despite problems concerning the verification of mystical “data” according to Enlightenment and modern methodology positive and trustworthy data does exist in current literature.

⁸⁴ See: Kavanaugh, K and Rodriguez, O. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (1964); St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection* (1964) and *Interior Castle* (1961); and *Fire Within* (Dubay 1989).

Ascetic Ground of Union with God

The notion of asceticism as it relates to spiritual life, is not limited to the Christian experience. Rather, asceticism as it relates to contemplative prayer or a contemplative life is a common theme (a perennial theme) in all articulations that focus on “spirituality” existing pan-historically and pan-culturally across all religious traditions. The basis on which asceticism rests is the intuition that a purely “physical” existence does not exhaust the meaning inherent in human nature which is only fully disclosed and appropriated through experience with the transcendent – that which is undisclosed by a purely “material” existence. Differences between traditions, however, do exist. Supporting the central thesis of postmodern pragmatist thought wherein the “end” takes precedence over means these differences are concerned not with the “scopos” inherent in discovering “meaning” but in the “telos” to which the method or pre-suppositions point.⁸⁵ Thus the intuition that has formed, guided and sustained the importance of asceticism implies that humanity pan historically and pan culturally has perceived that human “knowing” (epistemology) extends beyond physical bounds. Rather, “knowing” moves toward a more unitive perception of reality than either the Enlightenment or modernity is able to articulate or reach through empiricism alone. Postmodernity, expressed in “popular culture” by an

⁸⁵In Buddhism the *telos* of the ascetic life lies in the dissolution of personal uniqueness that finally effects a state of non-being and its dissolution into a non-specific and transcendent “unity” *nirvana*. In Hinduism, the sense of transcendence is also of importance and so too the process of contemplation leading to the perfection of human existence. In this case a refinement of “being” toward perfection is effected through the quality of one’s earthly life as it is reiterated again and again through the process of reincarnation which ultimately leads to absorption into the non-personal Brahman. In these expressions of mysticism, however, the goal is that of the eradication of “self” rather than its fulfilment. It must be stated that a similar strand of thought does appear in Christian mystical thought in the works of the Dominican, Meister Eckhart (Colledge & McGinn 1996) and in the twentieth century in the writings of Bernadette Roberts (Roberts 1993). Thus, Katz (1978:41) can quote Eckhart as stating “If I am to know God directly, I must become completely he and he I: so that this he and this I become and are one I.” Both writers, Eckhart and Roberts suggest that experientially, an apophatic revelation of God leading to the dissolution of “self” is encountered beyond the limits of the Holy Trinity – “God behind God.” To pass judgement on the validity of the experiences both writers described is not within the scope of this present study. It is sufficient to state that neither writer is supported in their insights by traditional Christian teaching which asserts that no revelation beyond the Holy Trinity is possible. It is indeed possible that both of these contributors to the debate concerning mystical experience may be pointing toward a depth of spiritual encounter with which the “traditional” church is yet unaware. However, for present purposes this writer will not speculate beyond the traditional Christian doctrine.

insatiable “thirst” for spiritual reality, has opened the way for the church to re-introduce or perhaps, introduce for the first time, the mystical reality to which the basic tenets of Christian doctrine point.

Here the *scopos* of Christian asceticism will reflect a similar (perennial pattern) with most teachings on the contemplative life. Yet it must be recognised that the perennial and unchanging element in regards to the mystical life is the intuition that an altered state of consciousness or illumination which embraces the transcendent world is within the grasp of ordinary human life. This shared intuition of “possibility” however must be separated from the Christian understanding of revelation and union with God which separates Christian contemplation from the more esoteric forms of contemplation understood in belief systems such as Buddhism or Hinduism. Radical differences, between Christian and non-Christian expressions of meditation and contemplation, exist in the “goal” that is sought (in Christianity – relationship rather than a cosmic absorption) and the underlying presuppositions concerning the nature of reality and the substantial and actual value that inheres in both physical and spiritual realms.⁸⁶

However, as suggested earlier, the literature surrounding the subject of asceticism has been conceived and articulated in specifically monastic settings. This fact is true for both Christian asceticism and non-Christian alike and in both models the methodology prescribed often reflects an apparent negative view of the sensuous realm. Because both Buddhism and Hinduism are expressed in a multitude of sects

⁸⁶ Both Benedict Groeschel (1984) and Thomas Dubay (1989) writing from a Roman Catholic perspective draw attention to the similarities and differences that are found in Christian and non-Christian understandings of contemplation most importantly drawing attention to differences in underlying presuppositions. Further, the work of William Johnston (1997), again from a Catholic perspective, indicate that certain methodologies from Buddhist contemplative practices can be utilised for Christian purposes. However, Steven Katz (1978) argues in his essay *Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism* that perceived similarities that may emerge through language used to describe “mystical states” are not a dependable criteria for comparison of varieties of mystical experience. Here the contextualisation of language hinders such an enterprise and suggests that a “perennial” core in mystical experience does not exist. Katz’s explication and arguments do indicate the radical diversity inherent in different understandings of the mystical life. However it remains evident a certain “perennialism” does persist - not in the goals of mystical experience but in the human predisposition to move toward the transcendent realm. Cf. Forman et.al.,(1997) who in their

only the most general of comments can be made concerning these systems in the present forum. The concern here is not to plumb the depths of these belief systems but to indicate the common call to asceticism that exists among Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian thought. As regards the physical realm it can be stated that in Buddhist and Hindu belief, the state of flux, change, and decay that is evidenced in physical existence is the cause of human disease and suffering. To find peace the disciple must transcend the illusion of “self” which is inexorably tied to the physical universe. In this respect it can be noted that Buddhism proposes that the ultimate “end” of created being is the dissolution of specificity and uniqueness (the state of no-self) into the transcendent and its absorption back to a cosmic “unity.” This implies the loss of particular human sensibilities and the loss of all sense of distinction, which are to be assumed into a cosmic whole. Hinduism makes a distinction between the *ego* – the illusory self, and the true self – the *atman* – or pure consciousness.⁸⁷ The distinction between “particular” beings is entirely subservient to the notion of “unity” that transcends “form.” Christianity too asserts that to be entirely conformed to the contingencies of “physical” existence, Zizioulas’ (1985) *biological hypostasis*, is to find ones self hopelessly imprisoned. In each of these expressions of spirituality, a degree of detachment from the physical realm is implied if one is to experience true freedom, spiritual growth and maturation.

The tendency toward viewing the “physical” realm as a hindrance to spiritual development is a common theme in the history of Christian spirituality. However, in Christian belief the perceived negativity inherent in experiences of the senses does not exhaust the “meaning” and content of the contemplative encounter. On the contrary,

Christianity uniquely celebrates the “form” of created being as well as its accompanying union with the transcendent. Yet, this “unity” is not always evident in Christian literature commonly associated with contemplative prayer. The movement

own contribution to the argument, contest the validity of Katz’s conclusions by focussing on an evident and innate human capacity to experience the transcendent.

⁸⁷ Pantanjali states: “We readily admit that it is better to love people for what they really are than merely for their beauty, their intelligence, their strength, their sense of humour or some other quality – but this is only a vague relative phrase. What people really are is the *Atman*, nothing less. To love

toward union with God to which Christian contemplative prayer points traditionally has been articulated in such a way as to preserve the central notion that the “Being” of God is entirely inaccessible to human powers of cognition.

The terminology surrounding the subject of contemplation reflects two divergent “schools” of thought concerning the “mystical” event under discussion generally understood as either apophatic (without *images*) or kataphatic (with *images*). In the former the disciple is exhorted to divest him or herself from all preconceived notions concerning God and to attain a degree of “purity of heart” which will allow for the “approach” of God. Apophaticism ensures that the manifestation of God achieved in contemplative prayer will be consistent with his own Being, “the uncreated light” of Eastern Orthodox belief rather than mediated by human imagination. Traditionally referred to as the *via negativa*, apophatic spirituality recognises the profound “Otherness” of God and thus avoids all imaginative exercises that may serve to impair an authentic reception and perception of the “God who comes.” On the other hand, a kataphatic approach holds that the imagination has its own value in the contemplative enterprise.⁸⁸ Discussing these approaches Holmes (1980:3) suggests that they do not represent clear and distinct categories within the Christian spiritual tradition. Rather, they can be observed as and more properly represent, a continuum of experience.⁸⁹ However, the literature that has grown up around apophatic spirituality demonstrates a distinct discontinuity with the “ordinary” experience of the lay person. These writings appear throughout the Orthodox spiritual compendium, the *Philokalia* a collection of writings representing the heart of Eastern Orthodox spirituality.

We should abandon all that is earthly. We should not only renounce riches and gold and other material things, but should also expel desire for such

the *Atman* in ourselves is to love it everywhere.” And elsewhere it is stated: “The Atman.... Is pure consciousness” (Prabhavananda & Isherwood 1953:12-22).

⁸⁸ In *A History of Christian Spirituality*, Urban T. Holmes (1980) offers a clear and informative introduction to the multi-faceted concerns surrounding “apophatic” and “kataphatic” spirituality. His analysis, provides a useful background concerning not just apophatic and kataphatic spirituality but further a psychological analysis of prayer, an anthropological discussion concerning prayer, and a sociology of prayer which is highly recommended for a more complete discussion than can be presented here.

⁸⁹ For an extended discussions on apophaticism and kataphaticism demonstrating the need for an ongoing interaction between the two extremes see *Father Glorify thy Name and Trinitarian theology & the Quest for Ecumenical Orthodoxy: A Response to Patrick Henry Reardon* (Cutsinger 1997).

things completely from our soul. We should hate not only the body's sensual pleasure, but also its mindless impulses; and we should strive to mortify it through suffering. For it is through the body that our desires are roused and stirred into action; and so long as it is alive, our soul will inevitably be dead, slow to respond and even impervious to every Divine command (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware 1995: 29-30).

or:

Evil is a passion found in matter, and so it is not possible for a body to come into being free from evil. The intelligent soul, grasping this, strives to free itself from the evil burden of matter; and when it is free from this burden, it comes to know the God of all, and keeps watch on the body as being an enemy and does not yield to it. Then the soul is crowned by God for having conquered the passions of evil and of matter (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware 1995 :197).

Certain tendencies can be identified in both these examples that underline the problem they present for the lay person intent on living a holy life. The married life is excluded a priori based on the prevailing assumption that all human desires, prompting the human predisposition toward fulfilment and completion, are rooted not in the spiritual life but in the physical and the desire to satiate "animal" appetites: hunger, sexual drives et.al.. Thus, the most perfect life will entirely suppress physical tendencies in order to align the soul with the spiritual realm. Further, the "scopos" of the spiritual life in these writings is represented as a rigorous asceticism that promotes not only mortification of the flesh but in some instances a more extreme self-mortification as a means to progress. In this regard, Kallistos Ware, citing a modern scholar, comments in his introduction to John Climacus' *Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Luibheid & Russell 1982:5) that at times the descriptions are more closely akin to an "asylum" than a monastery.

Nor is the Western church immune from using concepts that indicate a negative and exclusive view of the spiritual life. Recalling that the first one thousand years of Christendom are common to both East and West, a similar stream of austere ascetic language is carried into Western articulations concerning the spiritual life. Particularly John of the Cross's concept of *nada*, calling for a drastic death to self, is expressed in language as radical as the concept itself and might be understood as harsh and austere.

In a less extreme passage John of the Cross, in the sixteenth century can write:

The whole creation compared with the infinite being of God is nothing. All the beauty of creation compared with His beauty is sheer ugliness; all its delicate loveliness merely repulsive. Compared with the goodness of God the goodness of the entire world is rather evil. All wisdom, all human understanding beside his is pure ignorance....and so it is with sweetness, pleasures, riches, glory, freedom (Burrows 1987:7).

In neither Eastern or Western writings, however, is the intention of such negative descriptive language meant to imply a denigration of physical goodness but, in Burrow's estimation, constitute a celebration - "a hymn"- of human transcendence and the profound and surpassing nature of the glory of God (Burrows 1987:7). It must be asserted, however, that much of this early writing reveals a strong bias against the physicality of human nature in general and, for example, has contributed to the severe anti-feminist stance that has carried through in many strands of traditional Christian culture.⁹⁰ Wherever such "deformity" exists it must be confronted and exposed, not only as a denigration of sexuality and womanhood in particular, but further as an unwarranted and destructive affront to the basic beauty of Divine Creation.⁹¹ However, with regard to contemplative life, the strand of monastic writings has served to exclude not only lay women but lay men from participating in the fullness of Divine encounter.

Kataphatic spirituality, which takes seriously, and is less damning of, the human predisposition to affectivity and toward those physical drives which propel humanity, is equally concerned that the experience of God is conformed to Truth and not imagination. The difference between the two "schools" however, lies in the value placed on the "physical" realm as it leads one to a vital encounter with its Creator. Thus, St. Ignatius Loyola, in his *Exercises* (Mottola 1964), is able to bring the

⁹⁰ This tendency is well document by Oliver Clement in his introduction to *The Sacrament of Love* (Evdokimov 1985) and provides an interesting backdrop to one aspect of the power of monasticism to inform, in this case erroneously, the general ethos of church culture.

⁹¹ It is not within the scope of this endeavour to elucidate on the implications of this strand of thinking concerning sexuality and women in the church. However, the question must be asked how the radical exclusion of women based on questionable notions of Christian anthropological and sociological thought have served to prevent a wider and more pervasive expression of contemplative spirituality within the church.

imagination to bear on the spiritual quest. Here love for God is fostered by scriptural meditation and the ensuing affective response of an individual. The kataphatic approach to contemplative prayer utilises those “gifts” of cognition and affectivity that constitute the essence of being human. Further, Ignatius guards against “illusory” mystical experiences by introducing the profound need for “discernment” in spiritual growth, as well as the significance of spiritual direction to the life of the disciple.

Moreover, the literature concerning contemplative prayer and the mystical life, describing the attending phenomena of ecstasies and locutions, “spiritual battles,” the presence of evil assaulting the individual in the open silent spaces of prayer, and the staggering call to “focus” solely and exclusively on the goal of union with God, tends to leave the lay person feeling helpless and even breathless. The recourse for the laity is to pass over the possibility of contemplative prayer entirely, settling for what he or she expects is available to them outside the confines of monastic life. Such radical spiritual reductionism is tragic for both the individual and the church. The individual risks losing the gifts of intimacy and grace that lead naturally to the maturation and expression of authentic personhood, while the church loses the gift of uniqueness and freedom that each individual brings to the greater community. Similarly, without violating the notion of darkness in spiritual maturation (*nada*), John of the Cross is able to attest to the truth that contemplative prayer is an entirely inclusive category, inviting both monastic and laity into the breadth of Divine encounter. He writes:

...The Father of lights, who is not close fisted but diffuses Himself abundantly, as the sun does its rays, without being a respecter of persons, wherever there is room – always showing Himself gladly along the highways and byways – does not hesitate or consider it of little import to find His delights with the children of men at a common table in the world (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez: 1964: 584-585).

The call to asceticism, as expressed in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions is at root a call to “purity of heart” which need not follow the precise forms inherent in the monastic tradition. However, it is indeed true that the experiences of the monastic world will in many ways serve as guides to contemplative prayer

offering wisdom, assurance and providing a background of what one should and should not expect.

A Lay Alternative⁹²

As suggested by Jean Leclercq (1979), the monastery is first and most importantly, a “school of love,” a “school of Christ” wherein the primary lesson is not essentially the mortification of the senses or a death to all physical pleasure, but growth in the awareness of and love for God. In this sense the monastic enterprise is entirely open to the lay individual expressed as personal desire to seek God and honour him in all areas of one’s lay life. The “mystical” eventfulness of contemplative prayer need not be thought of in terms of ecstasy and “other worldliness,” as true as such experiences may be. Rather, the mystery of Divine Love is best appreciated and understood in terms of wonder and joy and reverence. That God comes to an individual, that God as Trinity dwells in love in the human heart and assumes the life of the individual into the expansive reality of his own Love constitute the “mystery” of contemplative prayer and the mystical life. These areas must be recognised as experiences intended for all who love God and commit themselves not only to “radical” ascetic practices but more importantly to the “foolishness” of knowing and loving this God as deeply as is possible. Thus if the “monastic context” is foreign to the lay life, certainly the monastic *ideal* is entirely possible for the layperson. Here the confines of the enclosed life are exchanged for the “confines” of the human heart wherein an individual’s desire for God is both the call to “purity of heart” and the end to which ascetic ideal points. Purity of heart then is measured not by stages attained in the spiritual life, but by the intensity of the heart’s desire to love and know the depth of the Divine Heart. “Holiness” itself is measured by the integrity of the decision to love God and the ensuing decision to bring joy and delight to the subject of that love. Further, because God himself has named the “created other” as a worthy and authentic symbol of Himself, holiness avoids any tendency toward “quietism”

⁹²Both von Balthasar (1986 :7-33) and Dubay (1999: 1-12) reflect on the obstacles to contemplative prayer that bear directly on the “laity” and which account, in part, for the abandonment of this deep form of prayer as “normative” in the Christian life.

expressing itself naturally as loving and affirming interaction with the created other. “Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine you did for to me” (Matt. 25: 40).

An ascetic life is entirely possible for the laity. Asceticism does not demand extravagantly demonstrative acts of self denial on the part of the disciple, but is authentically experienced in the less dramatic and “ordinary” experiences of every day life which increasingly reflect a deepening commitment to live in love and consonance with one’s immediate milieu. The ascetic commitment then, resides in desire, in the sincerity of one’s approach to God and in one’s profound trust that God’s approach itself is an eager and long sought for response to the question he has already asked, “do you love me?”

For the laity, finding one’s authentic personhood in God is accessible in and through the circumstances of one’s unique life. Here the profundity of the lay life in the eyes of God is both revealed and experienced as each individual gives him or her self over to the ordinary means of “communion” at their disposal. John Navone’s (1999) discussion of “scriptural icons” as well as the imaginative meditations suggested by Ignatius of Loyola encourage the individual to put aside esoteric preconceptions concerning the contemplative life. Here the emphasis is on developing a fundamental trust that God will meet the longings of the individual’s heart in a manner entirely suited and unique to the person involved. Holiness in each unique life is never restricted to preconceived notions based on behaviour and common expressions of “piety” which one might expect. Rather, holiness is the substantial manifestation of God’s perfect will for each individual expressed as the seamless unity of the unique form and content of an individual’s life. Given over to love and relational intimacy with the Triune God, whose nature is essentially reflected as the “form” of self-dispossession on behalf of the other, the disciple begins to experience a fresh perception of “reality” defined by the radiant expanse of Divine Presence. Herein Christianity anticipates and answers the postmodern concern for “communion” and “community” without displacing individual uniqueness. Incorporating the distinct beauty of each individual life into the panoramic vision of God’s primal intention for

all that exists, Christianity allows for and encourages a more profound unity than the mere collectivism of which postmodern concern is capable. Here it is precisely the relational harmony of specific and distinctive persons that constitutes communion as “relational harmony.” Communion itself then is expressed as *the relational harmony of distinct forms conceived by God and offered to humanity as gift* – beauty in its highest expression.

In this sense all are invited to enter into communion with God through meditative and contemplative encounter and by adopting the less dramatic disciplines of turning to God in the quiet and in the recollection of him the midst of the day. Thus, the very “ordinary” experiences of life offer themselves as the realistic means whereby to nurture the desire for God and love for him leading to a profound and transforming union of hearts.

Certainly, the contemplative life calls for discipline for both the monastic and the lay individual. However, the lay person need not presume that contemplative joy is beyond his or her grasp, nor that one must be overly concerned with the specific techniques of any “contemplative” methodology. In this regard, God himself orders one’s prayer life in a manner perfectly consistent with his own understanding of the uniqueness of each individual.

The efficacy of contemplative prayer lies purely in the Divine predisposition to speak, to encounter, to have his Word met with joyful assent – to be in communion with and known by his people. Hence the most gentle, tentative and shy turnings toward God with love and desire are met by his responsive gaze, are met with love wherein the Divine Word knows Himself heard and cherished. What lies in the eventfulness of communion is not necessarily a *dramatic ecstasy* as much as the foundation of a *dynamic ecstasy* of standing outside the constrictions of personal concern. The disciple is moved outside the narrow parameters of personal existence into the expansive landscape of Divine love. Herein he or she is freed to express the full dimensions of personhood as self-surrendered love wherein God and the radiant “otherness” of the created order becomes the direct object of an individual’s subjective stance now ordered to love. Literally, finding the freedom to stand outside

of one's own restrictive view of reality and embracing its fullness as a conscious awareness of God's holy will, holy design, and holy love, the individual exchanges personal perspective for the more open and unrestricted perspective of God. In contemplative prayer, the disciple truly begins to "see" with the "eye of the dove" and to love with the heart of the Lord. Thus transformation of one's spontaneity, effected through loving encounter, displaces moral reformation as the basis for an authentic expression of virtue. Through the contemplative encounter, the continuing process toward "purity of heart" is effected and sustained through the more natural and human motions of responsive love inherent in the transforming communion with love's Divine source.

Beauty and Virtue

From what has been written it becomes apparent that contemplative prayer becomes the locus of true communion with God and the impetus for all "action" within the created realm. Hence the virtuous life will stand out within the created realm as "beauty" relating specifically to the notion of the "relational aspect of forms" (in this case humanity) and the integrity of forms as they manifest the content of Christian belief. Here, the Christian understanding of sin as a pre-condition of human nature needs be addressed. As stated earlier, the primary effect of sin can be described accurately as an inversion of one's personal perspective. Separated from God, and an ensuing sense of consonance with the created universe, an individual's perception is entirely defined by self and self interest wherein human action is propelled by the necessity to ensure one's own existence and well being in the created realm. Hence love and action directed toward the created other generally extends only to the limits wherein personal security and well being are assured. The risk of Christian love and community is that of moving beyond such limitations and to recognise the call to participate in the created order as a steward of Divine love defined by a willing and joyful self-donation beyond the limits of a perceived sense of personal well being. Recognising this call, an individual's own existence and well being must be experienced precisely in his or her recognition of God's active presence directing and

embracing the personal eventfulness of life. It is this cognitive awareness of God's presence which offers the disciple the ability to express love and act freely toward the created other, no longer constricted by the limitations imposed by the need for personal security and well being. Further, the risk of Christian love and community is that of abandoning the primary impulse to control one's environment in a self-defensive stance. The recognition of this call to participate in the created order as a steward of Divine love which extends beyond the limits of a perceived sense of personal well being is ultimately the gift of freedom to which the human heart has always aspired. This motion of self-donation is expressed succinctly and inclusively by Jesus' words, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind... and love your neighbour as yourself" (Matt. 22:39) and constitutes the fullness of the "virtuous life" – the beauty of holiness.

In church tradition virtues have been categorised according to theological virtues (faith, hope and love) and the cardinal virtues (prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance). As is apparent from these lists the theological virtues are rooted in Scripture and are directly related to God, while the cardinal virtues reflect more clearly onto the created realm referring more specifically to attitudes and habitual responses inherent in the individual. Certainly this distinction is not complete. Faith in the character of God opens the way to a perception of reality that is positive and creative. Hope, based on the character of God and his continued presence with his creation affirms that "good" is the primary orientation of "reality" and therefore the potentiality for all that exists. The love of God directed toward creation and the human capacity to know "love" and move towards it on a personal level and as an adequate response to all that exists, will manifest itself not only as spiritual devotion but equally in an individual's orientation to creation as a whole.

The cardinal virtues define more particularly specific qualities that radiate from the heart of the theological virtues and constitute a natural orientation toward "reality" as one confronts it in specific situations. Both the theological and cardinal virtues as elucidated by the Roman church are succinctly and profoundly drawn together in Jesus' statement previously cited. The church specifies those virtues most

earnestly to be cultivated in the human heart – not suggesting that the “list” exhausts the full range of virtuous attitudes possible but indicating the direction toward which authentic “virtue” points.

Hence, the church draws attention to the *habitual* nature of virtue as it impacts each area of the Christian life. In this sense, the church does not add or delete anything from the specific command of Christ but does indicate that the nature of true virtue is significantly different from what might be expected. Because “virtue” is a habitual orientation of the heart, it requires a true conversion of the disciple’s heart, effecting an enduring transformation of his or her perception. Inherent in this deeper perception of “reality” is the attending transformation of one’s responses to reality expressed as an authentically “virtuous life” as opposed to the mere adoption of specific behaviours. The “habit of virtue” then, becomes the spontaneous response of the heart to any situation and is the fulfilment of personal beauty in the life of the disciple. Herein lies the significance of contemplation wherein a true and unique experience of communion irradiates the heart and impacts the believer with a deepening sense of the true nature of God and an attending realistic perception of both the “good” and “bad” aspects of self. Thus, the transformation of one’s personhood, expressed as a growing dependence on the character of God as love, acceptance and truth, derives from the natural impulses of love wherein the only possible response is a gentle Marian assent: “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

In the contemplative encounter, the individual comes to an understanding of authentic virtue and experiences it as a growing ability to exchange a self-protective stance in relation to God and to creation for a new impulse of the heart. The individual learns to surrender with joy and delight to the Word who speaks in the quiet. It is in the responsive motion of love between God and an individual that a disciple “hears” and “recognises” the desire of God’s heart for his or her specific life. In this encounter, masks fall away, the disciple learns that in the eyes and heart of God the primary “virtue” is to allow oneself to become vulnerable and open to the gaze of the Trinity. This open-ness to God allows God himself to outline the “steps”

required to grow in the grace and maturity of love. In time the developing sense of freedom to express one's heart with honesty and confidence in the tender receptivity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, extends further onto the created realm. Thus human interaction becomes more and more conformed to the heart of God Himself wherein receptivity and love for the created other are distinct qualities of Divine Goodness. Embraced by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit the disciple increasingly desires a true knowledge of self, seeking from God both meekness and gentleness of heart and an increasing willingness to put away those personal impulses that are not consistent with the reality of Divine Love. Herein lies the impetus for moral transformation effecting within the disciple a "new heart" that is more and more welcoming of those it encounters within the created realm. The disciple, whose own life reflects a growing awareness of Divine acceptance, finds him or herself freed from the strictures of necessity and acquires a spontaneous impulse to self-donation.

The place of asceticism is not absent from this course of action but it represents a gradual weaning away from that which is inconsistent with God's perfection and love. Hence, the disciple is assured that in the act of personal surrender, he or she may be confident that personal "perfection" is not somewhere far off. Just as the perfection of the rosebud is no less perfect than the perfection of the rose, the individual is affirmed at each "step" of his or her growth into holiness which is measured not by the fruition of maturity but by the desire to please and delight God as a continuing orientation of the heart. Nor does this process negate the value of those contemplative techniques suggested by monastic literature. However, the motion toward contemplative prayer for the laity need not depend on such techniques, particularly where they prove inconsistent with the contours of the lay life. Similarly, questions concerning the merits of either an apophatic or kataphatic approach gives way to a confidence that God himself will lead the individual in a manner that is perfectly suited to the specific context of the individual's life.

Returning more specifically to the subject of "beauty" the contemplative life opens the believer to express with deep integrity both the form and content of his or her specific life as it grows more deeply into the primal beauty of God's intention.

Personal “beauty” is recognised as the fruition of the contemplative encounter wherein the individual is freed to perceive the “intended” beauty of the entire created order. The individual naturally reflects this “beauty” onto the created realm through his or her interaction with the “created other” thus fostering, through personal relational encounters, a deepening respect, reverence and awe for the “beauty” of the entire created order through manifesting an authentic love for all that exists.

Responsive Life of Joy and Thanksgiving

The notion of beauty in the Christian life, as an expression of authentic personhood and in the perception of the relational harmony of creation wherein each individual has an intended and meaningful place, leads an individual to an intuitive recognition of his or her personal vocation. This precise vocation is implied in the notion of the “priesthood of all believers.” Herein each person recognises that within the specific range of their particular interactions the primary call is to tend the “created other” with care and compassion. That environment wherein each is called to participate with God in the reorientation of the created order to its primal dignity and beauty is encountered in the fullness of its sacramental nature. All is gift, all has value, all is the chosen object of God’s delight and love. The call of redeemed humanity is to offer this creation to God with joy and thanksgiving, recognising in each detail the profound “beauty” which illuminates its depth, its structure, its form - its Divine intention. Hence the call of the priesthood of all believers represents a human participation in the Divine mission to allow creation to exercise its own meaning as a hymn of praise to God its Creator. This fact is true for both animate and inanimate creation wherein the “relational aspect of being” implies the inherent dignity and worth of all that exists. So too, humanity “born again” to a priestly vocation standing between heaven and earth, is called to engage creation with love, joy and deep reverence. The profound call to humanity is to insure, even within the limited ken of personal activity, that all personal actions and choices are ordered to and manifest the integrity of its holy vocation. This constitutes the call to recognise, nurture and offer back to God the radiant beauty with which he has entrusted the “priesthood of all

believers.” The implications of the perception of beauty as the relational aspect of forms, conceived by God and offered to humanity as gift suggests that the perception of beauty imposes a serious call on the individual which will be discussed more fully in Chapter Seven. On a personal level, however, perhaps the most important effect of the transformation of one’s perception, is in fact the understanding that peace and consonance are particular gifts from God to each person allowing for the celebration of knowing oneself “at home” in a cosmos structured by beauty.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

At the outset it is imperative to state, that the church need not conform her ways to that of postmodern society. Rather, if postmodernity offers the church a challenge it is that of demonstrating to a new cultural expression, that its own deepest intuitions have been anticipated from the very beginning of time. Intuitions concerning community, concerning the transcendent life that completes and gives meaning to the material universe, those concerning notions of peace and justice and human equality, represent the perfection toward which creation is intended to move. The church’s answer to postmodernity is its ability to demonstrate that in and through the Holy Trinity she is able to offer not an adequate answer to postmodern needs but *the* answer. Here the very structure of reality is expressed and manifest in the perichoretic motions of Triune love wherein all that exists is conformed to the primordial form of beauty as the celebration of the distinct “other” sustained by love and deep communion. Thus beauty as well as “Beauty Itself” is a central theme not only for the church but for each distinct individual whose very being is conformed specifically to the Triune “form” – as the *image and likeness* of God.

Further, this understanding of “beauty” takes distinct and substantial “form,” in the Word of God, Christ, who has come to call creation back to its highest dignity and its most perfect expression of likeness to its Holy Source. The Divine intention for the created realm sates the appetite for spirituality offering a coherent explication of the “true end” to which all creation strives and a model of authentic personhood as the fruit of one’s particular individuation received from God and conformed primarily in and for love

and communion. Here the “*eros*” inherent in created being, expressed by the postmodern longing for “authentic experience” and its longing for a sense of completion through spiritual union, is met by a true experiential encounter with God himself.

Further, the church is able to expand the postmodern ideal of community by opening it to the possibility of providing an “inclusive” experience of community. The church which reflects most clearly the perichoretic nature of reality, both understands the need for relational communion as well as the need to express one’s own uniqueness which is the essence of true communion. The church then, as an authentic reflection of Divine Beauty is able to transcend those divisive categories inherent in postmodern expressions of community without negating the concern which such groups express.

In the contemporary Western world, the modern emphasis on individualism has been displaced by a radical adherence to notions of community and relationship expressed in the formation of interest groups either spiritual or social. The profound difference, however, between the new postmodern groupings and those to which God calls his creation is the difference between collectivism as opposed to authentic community. Hence postmodernity *orients* the individual towards notion of communion but, in so far as it fails to understand the inherent theological source of the unity to which humanity is called, falls short of the Divine Ideal from which its desire for communion springs. Whereas collectivism remains external to the human being, community recalls the primary dimensions of humanity’s creation in the “*image and likeness*” of God. It is the particular “calling” of the church to recover and articulate for a postmodern society the depth of beauty and the expansive nature of beauty which is the particular vision of redeemed humanity.

An understanding of beauty as “the relational aspect of forms, conceived by God and offered to humanity as gift” is strongly supported by the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the Holy Trinity. Here the nature of the Trinity is conceived, as three distinct persons (*hypostases*) subsisting as one essence or (*ousia*). Personhood and relationship sustained in freedom and love are therefore constitutive of Divine Ontology. In this construction, reality itself is oriented to the primordial “form” of the perichoretic exchange of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is then, the primordial beauty

of this free exchange of love which radiates from the heart of God and is recognised in the relational aspect of all that exists. It is this love generated from God that constitutes the structure of the cosmos. As stated earlier, it is only in the being and nature of God that a fully inclusive definition of beauty offers itself for consideration. Beauty, therefore, stands as the structuring reality of all that exists. It is the voice and language of God speaking to his creation and through which he draws humanity into an intimate and transforming encounter – to completion itself – as an authentic image of Jesus the Son – the manifestation of Divine and created beauty – the sacred reality of human existence.

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSIONS: THE POSTMODERN CHALLENGE AND THE WAY
FORWARD FOR THE RESURRECTION OF BEAUTY

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Western culture finds itself the inheritor of scientific, technological and electronic excellence - the progressive legacy of the Enlightenment past. Yet, with few exceptions, the mechanistic prowess of the twenty-first century is left unmediated by clear ethical standards and values that serve to direct and ensure that capabilities will move toward creative life affirming and sustaining ends. As scholasticism inched its way across the panorama of Western culture giving rise to Enlightenment thought, and the profound influence of Enlightenment thought brought Western culture into an age of modernity, contemporary society finds itself reflecting a profound disillusionment with the sterility of scientific materialism.

Postmodernity is characterised by a radical inversion of the values of modernity. And, to the degree that the church has adopted those values and attributes, the postmodern era challenges the institutional church herself. It is a challenge to which the church must respond. Although the popular expression of postmodernism reflects little of the philosophical insight that has contributed to its development as seen in the works of Derrida, Foucault, and Rorty, the contemporary expression of postmodern assumptions are clearly evident in Western society.

This study has successfully demonstrated that four dominant trends emerge in postmodern society which reflect a radical reversal of modernist themes. These include: (1) a growing concern for community and communion as opposed to the modern tendency toward individualism; (2) the displacement of traditional assertions of absolute truth by an emerging dependence on “relativism”; (3) the ascendance of pragmatism and personal experience as ultimate arbiters of true values without reference to the notion of “absolute truth”; and finally (4) the rejection of confidence in a mechanistic and scientific world view and an attendant resurgence of a profound human desire for spiritual reality. Chapter Seven will begin by examining each of these characteristics of postmodernity

followed by a delineation of specific conclusions that have been reached concerning the contribution that the resurrection of beauty will make to the church as she seeks to meet these challenges to her own mission. This initial material will be followed by a discussion of particular problems that inhere in the subjective nature of this study. Following this discussion, the study will turn to a review of the material presented and will conclude with a discussion of areas wherein further studies are indicated.

POSTMODERN CHALLENGE

Postmodern Characteristics

As postmodernity illuminates these four characteristics to which Western culture adheres and demands as structuring principles of culture, the church is confronted by those elements in her own life that have failed to satisfy the growing popular intuition that “something more” is required to humanise and complement the physical realm. The dominant notion put forward in this study is that beauty, as a transcendent quality in God himself, stands as a comprehensive and inclusive subject embracing all of reality – both physical and spiritual. As such, Beauty is recognised as the structuring form of all that exists both created and uncreated: God, inanimate creation, animate creation and humanity itself. Beauty is both the beginning and end of the creational intention of God and offers a comprehensive and understandable concept that defines and unites the essence of all that “is.” That which deviates from this primal form constitutes a profound disruption of God’s holy Will as it relates to both the environment in which humanity finds itself, as well as the interaction between creature and creature, and ultimately between the human creature and God. Hence the meaning of the concept of beauty extends beyond the realms of physical attractiveness and is endued with a radical moral and ethical significance as beauty bears its truth upon a cognitively aware humanity. Similarly, the fact that “beauty” exists as the structuring reality of that which “is” equally implies that creation, recognised as Divine gift offered to humanity in love, has been conceived by God as a landscape which is primarily intended to evoke a shared response of joy, delight and happiness. Hence, “beauty” introduces into the theological enterprise an appropriate and often neglected theme of the radical “playfulness” of being. At the

conclusion of this chapter both the seriousness and playfulness inherent in the theology of beauty will be examined. Finally, Chapter Seven will conclude by indicating the direction in which further theological studies concerning beauty might lead.

Community and Communion

The postmodern concern for meaningful and authentic community is seen in the formation of social groups drawn together to share common concerns among individuals in various systems of mutual support, understanding, care, interests, etc. This movement away from the radical individualism that characterised the modern era challenges the church to re-establish or re-assert the fundamental nature of her very being: communion and community as the embodiment in the created realm of the perichoretic life of the Triune God himself. The church is, in the first instance, called to affirm the intuition of contemporary culture concerning the humanising quality of community and communion. Moreover, the church is called to offer the world a radical vision of the intense beauty that is manifest in an inclusive yet diverse expression of authentic communion as a reflection of Triune life itself. Here the church must diligently and truthfully examine herself concerning the inclusive or exclusive nature of her own life. Further, she must demonstrate a willingness to move, if need be, beyond her own narrow self-defined parameters and look for meaningful ways to incorporate those who are, for any reason, marginalised in each individual church grouping. Certainly this self-examination holds true for all aspects of congregational life, while those who hold administrative offices, within each setting, must be particularly sensitive to this need.

It has been maintained throughout this study that “beauty” is that quality manifested through the relational aspect of forms, conceived by God and offered to humanity as gift. Thus individuals within a congregation are called to an essential form of participation that is consistent with their very selves. The church however, is not always cognisant of either the reality of those “gifts” that reflect less directly on congregational life and more fully on the culture outside the church’s doors. Hence, the giftedness of particular individuals is often unaffirmed and unacknowledged in the church milieu. However, the definition of beauty to which this study appeals implies that the manifestation of Church life must be a

visible and experiential expression of the quality of beauty that constitutes the nature of God himself. As such, the church is expected to manifest a positive and authentically inclusive community that is fully able to affirm and moreover, encourage, the maturation of each person toward the expression of their own unique personhood as a gift from God to both the church and to culture at large. In general, the church must examine her own prejudices concerning those who are not “conformed” to the worshipping groups particular “status quo”: the poor, the infirmed, and the elderly, those with physical or emotional challenges.

It is not enough to draw these individuals into the church. Rather, the very ambience of the church must be that of experiencing the “otherness” in its midst with awe and reverence. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples of the church’s failure to inclusively value the giftedness of those who exist in her midst is recognised in the issue of the “role of women” in the church.

If, as is asserted in this study, the relational aspect of forms sustained in love is the manifestation of both Divine and human beauty, and by extension manifests the nature of reality, *then the role of women in the church* must be deeply re-evaluated. Here, at a most fundamental level, the deeply perceived exclusivity concerning women constitutes a radical inversion of Divine Being, as well as a profound deformation of God’s creational intention. In this instance, many denominations *have* gone forward to officially recognise and listen to those women in its midst – be that through ordination to the diaconate or to the priesthood. However, in those churches wherein a male priesthood is viewed as essential, Roman Catholic or Orthodox, along with some of the more conservative Protestant denominations – the continuing male/female imbalance is painfully and one might suggest destructively evident. Further, the message of the church which must affirm the worth of each individual will not be accepted by those whose own insight is sufficient to perceive the imbalances that so sorely restricts the contribution of such a large group of individuals. These churches too, must examine the place of women within a congregational setting and incorporate new areas of “ministry” wherein women are free to express their personhood with integrity and love – as gift. If, as in Roman Catholic and Orthodox expressions of Christianity, the ordination of

women is unlikely to take place, then most assuredly it is the church's responsibility to find other avenues wherein women may offer their giftedness to the church. So too, the church herself, must resist those "stereo-typical" views of women and allow the full expression of gifts – be they preaching, administrating, teaching without relegating the feminine voice to areas of "coffee hour," of "Sunday School teaching" etc. Rather, the breadth of the entire church, at a congregational level as well as in its fully global expression must balance the purely "male" voice of ecclesiastic authority with the essential and indeed necessary feminine voices in her midst.

Such a movement toward a more inclusive representation of "reality" is not to be viewed as a radical attempt to break through into a strongly male dominated group, but as an essential attempt to rebalance the very heart of the message of the Triune God. The church with serious intentionality must make every attempt to manifest God's life visibly as the radiant and glorious expression of unity amidst diversity sustained in love in perichoretic likeness.⁹³ It is equally true to suggest that "beauty," in every instance, is deformed by any incursion of sectarian preference into the life of the church. What is true for women is equally true for anyone or any group who may discover that their personhood – their "being-ness" is seen as non-essential or of little value to the functioning life of the church. Thus the church must manifest itself as an authentic community wherein personhood is affirmed and received with joy and delight – wherein all uniqueness is recognised as the gift it truly is. Anything less is a dissolution of beauty and an affront to the creational intention of God. Anything else fails in the first instance to incarnate the beauty of the Christian message.

Authentic Christian community, however, must be based, not on group interests or group agendas of any kind, but far more essentially on the depth of communion with God himself as both the *alpha* and *omega* of authentic community. Herein, the church must reconsider the place of spirituality and its significance, not only to the individual

⁹³ I have included the example of the "role of women" in the church, as it is a subject with which I am aware both personally and through discussion with others. I am not attempting here to force the church into any particular action. I am suggesting however, that where women are most noticeable by their absence then attention must be given to opening the way for this large segment of the population to express their giftedness in a manner that thoroughly respects and affirms the giftedness God has given them.

but moreover to the very ethos of Christian life. It is within the area of spiritual maturity that the church will most dramatically recover the authentic and compelling dimensions of “beauty” as the *image* of God incarnate in the lives of those who are Christian. Hence the church must begin once again to focus on contemplative prayer, not as an adjunct to the spiritual life but as its very source. As mentioned earlier, contemplative prayer has never occupied a significant place within Western congregational life. Although literature on the contemplative life that is both rich and wise is readily available, the subject itself has made very few inroads into general congregational life. The reasons for this failure have already been cited: the monastic context of much writing that excludes the laity and denominational conflicts concerning the source of such writings etc. However, it must be emphatically stated that contemplation remains the avenue of deep relationship with Father, Son and Holy Spirit and is the ambience of transformation for each individual.

As such, the place of contemplation as the source of intimacy and love, as the place of Divine encounter, as the radiant landscape of “reality” itself – must be spoken, must be taught at the most basic “grass roots” level of Christian teaching.

It is in the ambience of contemplative prayer that each individual discovers on both an affective and cognitive level the radical dimensions of union with God, through which he or she experiences an increasing awareness of the true “liberty of the sons and daughters of God.” Further, it is from the depth of this “freedom” to express ones authentic personhood, that an individual moves naturally into the realm of living wherein the constraints imposed by necessity and self-interest give way to a profound trust in and dependence on the character of God himself. It must be asserted that contemplation does not propel an individual into an unacceptable “quietism” or “foolish” reliance on Divine providence, but rather, re-orders the heart in such a way that “wisdom” equally exerts itself. It is significant to note that those suggestions in academic literature that suggest a pathological origin for the phenomena encountered in mystical experience (Kourie 1992: 90) are not uncontested. Rather, a more positive view also exists. Herein attributes associated with mystical experience are recognised as secondary to the psychologically integrating nature of the experience within the individual (Kourie 1992: 91-92). Hence

contemplation serves as the landscape of a profound “transformation” - “from one degree of likeness to another...” effecting within an individual an entirely “new” way or manner of “being” in both the world and the church.

Through contemplative prayer the church itself will begin to recover the depth of unity and love to which the *image of God* within humanity points. The church will reflect, onto the cultural horizon, a degree and quality of communion and community wherein personhood and uniqueness are affirmed anticipating the needs so sorely reflected in postmodern thought. Here a visual manifestation of beauty – evident in the relational aspect of forms created by God and offered to humanity as gift – will radiate from the church witnessing to the intended beauty of “culture” healed and brought into its full and intended glory.

The Ascendancy of Relativism

The loss in contemporary culture of an abiding sense of the concept of absolute truth confronts the church with a seemingly insurmountable challenge. As has been shown, “absolute truth” as a structuring principle on which humanity has rested in the past, no longer exerts itself across the panorama of Western culture. Here, postmodernity asserts, with almost unassailable confidence, that truth is relative to personal human experience. In this regard, the church is called to gently indicate that this assertion itself manifests a deep inconsistency in the very foundations of contemporary thought – being itself a declaration of “absolute truth.” But here, the church must listen carefully to what the statement is indicating – to perceive the root cause of the “off hand” dismissal of the structure of reality. Again, the church must affirm the intuition of contemporary culture in its suggestion that “truth” can not be strictly and judicially imposed from without. The relegation of “truth” to the netherworld of cultural concern implies (to this writer) not a well defined argument or structured analysis of truth that in the last analysis has proven “truth” obsolete and rendered it “irrelevant” to humanity. Rather, I would suggest, it more correctly reflects an intuition that truth itself is not “static” in the sense that it is narrowly

confined to the literal understanding of one book – applied judicially – to each and every circumstance of life- but will reflect more humanely on the human condition.

Simply, the Christian declaration of One Truth (which is indeed maintained by this writer) is often presented with little concern given to the subjective elements to which human life is subject. Again, it must be asserted that Christianity is not, in the first instance, conformed to a book – regardless of the sacred nature of the writings. Rather, “truth” is a person, Christ the Lord – and Scripture a revealed testimony to that Truth. Indeed Scripture stands as the authority on which Christian absolutes must be based and will lead us to experience and know Truth intimately. It is equally true to insist that Christian belief requires a personal adherence to “ethical and moral” behaviours that are often at odds with the changing moral climate of postmodern culture. Truth exists in an absolute form and is objective. However, the objective Truth, Christ himself, is subjectively appropriated by each individual, according to one’s personal capacity to be “led into all Truth” through intimacy and relationship. This statement is not meant to suggest that Truth is indeed relative. Rather, the personal implications of relationship with God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit will ultimately be revealed in a manner consistent with the ability of an individual to receive and appropriate the insights gained.

Thus the church is called not to modify her beliefs and the absolute statements that inhere in Christian doctrine and dogma, but again to re-evaluate in her own life those instances wherein “dogmatic” statements take precedence over a compassionate and loving concern for any individual’s personal struggle. The church may not compromise her beliefs concerning the implications inherent in Christian belief, but equally she must learn to temper “Truth” with love, compassion and wisdom. Rather, than asserting a blanket condemnation against different forms of behaviour, the church must rest in her own faith in God’s profound love for each individual. Quite simply, the church must learn that if her own witness to the Truth is trustworthy, then any individual who enters deeply into relationship with God, will come to recognise, in God’s time, the changes in behaviour that must attend his or her Christian experience. In every instance of “behavioural non-conformity” the church is called to

exercise the patience of Christ as it interacts with each individual's progress of growth toward spiritual maturity. Thus, no group or individual is superfluous to the church. The church must truly reflect the inclusive nature of her "ecclesial hypostasis" and trust her Lord to lead each individual into the depth of relationship that will bring him or her into the highest expression of their unique personhood.

Pragmatism

A third characteristic of postmodern culture is its reliance on pragmatism. Closely allied to the dissolution of a notion of absolute truth, pragmatism and experience replace an objective standard for truth, with a belief system wherein "experience" is brought to ascendancy as truth's arbiter. Again the church is challenged to listen to what is being suggested. If the Christian message is indeed true how is its fruit manifest? Contemporary society has every right to expect that doctrine or Truth will become visible in the lives of Christian adherents. Herein lies the church's call to manifest a deep and unassailable integrity concerning her witness. As suggested earlier in this study, society is no longer compelled to belief by logical explications for any assertion claiming to be truth. Rather, the objective content of Christian faith must be allied with a manifestation of the truth to which her doctrinal beliefs point. Thus beliefs must become incarnate in the lives of believers – not as acquiescence to postmodern concern but as the only authentic legitimisation of the Truth being proclaimed. Nor is this call to authenticity, legitimacy, or integrity a new one for the church but is clearly an intended fruit of the totality of the salvation that Christianity announces. New birth is not expected to be isolated from new life – both co-inhere in the gift of God's sacrifice on humanity's behalf. Once again, it is the incarnate life of God which will manifest the attraction of beauty onto the contemporary horizon calling those outside of the church to consider the claims of Christian doctrine and belief – to re-evaluate the nature of reality itself.

The nature of postmodern pragmatism reflects a deep desire within culture to find an avenue through which to feel "at peace" with itself. Rather, than demand that adherence to a belief system present a cohesive and unified melding of dogmatic

structure and personal experience, the new cultural motif is content with effects and experience without demanding a detailed analysis of the vehicle through which experiences come. Here it is obvious that pragmatism has abandoned all concern for truth as Rorty advocates (Grenz: 1996) in favour of the effectiveness of an action in itself. Hence the litany of postmodernity has become, predictably, “if it works for you....” This type of mindset has given rise in contemporary culture to the proliferation of spiritual techniques and motifs from which a prospective adherent might choose – including Christianity. Thus pragmatism does not assert that Christianity has nothing to offer – on the contrary, Christianity remains one of many possibilities that offer an effective and possibly meaningful encounter with the numinous world of spirituality. Again, as is expected in the postmodern world, truth is subservient to experience. Yet for Christianity, doctrine and experience are intended to meld – offering an objectively demonstrated validity of its deepest claims.

Desire for Spiritual Experience

Given the desire for community and communion, the erosion of absolute truth as an arbiter of what is “real,” the contemporary drive in culture for experiences, it is not surprising that the final characteristic of postmodern culture is a drive for spiritual encounter. As already discussed, the profound trust in technology and science evident in the modern era has been displaced by a deeply felt longing for spiritual depth and meaning – a fulfilment of the human intuition toward fullness of being.

In this context, however, the church is not recognised as a place wherein fulfilment of human longing for the numinous is necessarily met. To the degree that the church has adopted in its proclamation a reliance on apologetic and cognitively valid arguments she has lost her own self-understanding as a bearer of Christ – as an experiential reality – as relationship in love. Rather, far too often, conversion has been discussed, preached, and offered stressing the intellectual content of the faith – bearing testimony to the letter of Scripture while failing to present contemporary culture with a visible testimony to the attendant affective content of the truth being articulated. On the one hand, this objective intellectually satisfying testimony of the

church is an essential component of the message, while on the other hand, this approach, unattended by the evidence of the truth compels neither decision or confidence in the proclamation of the church. As discussed earlier in this study, the answer to the challenge of postmodernity is a heuristic model of evangelism wherein both doctrine and life merge as a visible witness to the truth of the Christian message. Further, as has been suggested in this study, to achieve this dynamic and compelling integration of doctrine and spirituality will require from the church a focus on the place of contemplative prayer as the vehicle of transforming encounter with the Triune God. Spiritual experience as relational encounter is not a foreign theme to the witness of the church but is its natural and intended end. Herein, Christianity does not anticipate the needs of a postmodern culture but more inclusively, anticipates and completes the intended end of humanity – in any age.

The Postmodern Church and Beauty

It is particularly in the realm of spiritual experience wherein the concept of beauty and the Christian belief in contemplative prayer are demonstrated to meet both the desires of the human heart so evident in postmodern culture as well as fulfilling the human drive toward *eros* as completion in love. These gifts of Christ, to the world, mediated through the church express the ultimate goal for all humanity. Here it is possible to indicate a number of specific conclusions.

- *Beauty, Community and Communion*

That the Greek word *kalos* (good and beautiful) shares a common root with the Greek verb *kaleo* (to call) demonstrates the deep continuity that exists between these seemingly unrelated concepts. As indicated by Dionysius the Aeropagite, beauty is, in fact, a calling forth – an utterance that apprehends and engages the observer. It is a call to communion with the object of beauty and ultimately with the Author of beauty – God. Further, the response to beauty is largely unanticipated, is unselfconscious, and is free with respect to any attribute other than the object itself.

Hence, beauty exists and evokes a response without reference to any utilitarian criteria. Beauty “is” its own beginning and end and stands as the legitimisation of existence in and of itself. Beauty calls for no explanation or justification. As such, beauty answers the deepest criteria for community and communion – the mutual embrace of a distinct other – in love, reverence and awe – by virtue of its existential freedom to be itself. Truly, unconcernedly and through beauty’s openness to its own inclusive nature of being, beauty calls the distinct other to participate and delight in its objective free existence. This bidding motion of beauty, true in the created realm reflects most clearly the Beauty of its source – the Triune God, whose own distinct and perfect “Otherness” freely calls for relational participation as communion and as community. The resurrection of beauty within the postmodern church serves to redefine and clarify this deepest structure of “reality.” As such beauty offers the culture the opportunity to enter into an affectively engaging and cognitively satisfying experience of the God intended and God reflecting dimensions of “being” – and this as relational consonance and love.

- *Beauty and Truth*

The second characteristic of postmodernity is its reluctance to acknowledge the abiding nature of truth. As demonstrated earlier in this study, the truth to which postmodernism is opposed is the elusive “truth” of philosophical investigation. Rorty’s pragmatic solution to the dilemma of defining truth is to abandon the attempt entirely while adopting the criteria of “utilitarian” efficacy as the sufficient criteria for adopting a belief system (Grenz 1996). Yet this assertion of a sufficient criteria for the adoption of a belief system renders reality meaningless and empty of authentic content.

The elusive nature of “truth,” however, need not lead to a disheartened abandonment of the concept entirely. It is entirely true to state that “truth” as an objective reality exists and is consistent with the Christian message most clearly manifest as integrity and authenticity. Truth exists as that which is both real and unchanging, and most importantly, in Christian belief, truth is embodied in Jesus the

Lord. Certainly this answer does not sweep difficult questions away with one blow. Here the assertion will be made that to accept Christian truth, a priori, requires an assent to “absolute truth” - requires a “faith” decision at the most fundamental level. However, it is also true to suggest that to abandon the notion of “absolute truth” is equally a “faith” decision. “absolute truth” exists either as “something” or as “nothing.” Christianity, however, also offers discernible evidence for its statement – a manifestation of its deepest intuition: the integration of doctrine and spirituality – the manifest “beauty” of its integrity. Thus, in a postmodern culture, Christianity offers truth that is both objective and abiding, as God is objective and abiding. Moreover, it offers truth that is efficacious as it calls and provides the means whereby each individual is given the freedom to rediscover and re-orient individual life to the contours of the life of Jesus the Son of God as personal individuation through intimate relationship. Thus the objective truth of Christianity is subjectively revealed and subjectively appropriated by each individual and avoids an arbitrary and judicial imposition of “one truth” without regard for actual life circumstances of an individual. The relational aspect of truth allows each individual to appropriate truth and incorporate those ethical demands of Christian belief, in a manner entirely consistent with the ability and maturity of the believer to receive from God himself the direction forward into holiness – the created manifestation of beauty itself.

- *Beauty and Pragmatism*

As evidenced above, the pragmatic quest of postmodern culture requires that the truth of Christian belief be evident in the lives of its adherents. This assertion requires that the church clarify within her own witness – the end to which Christianity points – that of participating in the perichoretic motions of Divine Life. Herein the assertion of beauty as the relational aspect of forms, conceived by God and offered to humanity as gift, is significant. Beauty suggests itself as the form of “truth” - the integrity of Christian assertions - as they are manifest in the lives of those who claim to be followers of Christ and who are moving toward the reclamation of the *image* of

God in their own lives. Thus postmodernity calls the church to account: calls the church to demonstrate the efficacy of its claims; calls then for a heuristic approach to evangelism that relies not solely on doctrinal claims but more fully, authenticates those claims through the attraction of the beauty inherent and made evident in its own life.

- *Beauty and Spiritual Desire*

Ultimately, the desire of postmodernity for spiritual experience is perhaps the most important challenge with which it confronts the church. It has been maintained through out this study, that the primary claim that is made by Christianity is that of participation in love with the Holy Trinity. It is an assertion of relationship of which an individual is cognitively aware and in which he or she is affectively engaged. This relationship is effected and deepened through contemplative encounter with the Triune God as an experiential reality. The call to the church is to offer the wisdom and direction through which contemplative prayer becomes a reality in the lives of believers. To the extent, however, that the church has abandoned the centrality of contemplative prayer in its proclamation of the Gospel, so too, has she cut herself off from the deepest source from which affective encounter arises.

The relationship that is encountered and nourished in contemplative prayer is, at its most visceral level, a life transforming one. Herein, as has been maintained, from the earliest years of the church, the believer is brought to a deeper recognition and perception of reality wherein creation itself is “seen” as alive with holy intention and holy content. The believer is given a new and fresh perspective wherein all creation resonates with the Glory of its Divine Source thus effecting a transformation of his or her spontaneity. The heart, engaged by the perception of reality as participation in love, leads the believer into a deep and abiding sense of “truth” known, apprehended and calling forth an answering response of thanksgiving and love, of joy and praise. The relationship between the experiential encounter that is contemplative prayer and beauty is evident. Creation is recognised as the profound gift of God to humanity, wherein the relational aspect of “forms” leaves no alternative but to participate with

reality, in a manner consistent with the profound worth of each particular object. To recognise the beauty of being and to rejoice in its existence is to progressively reflect in all aspects of one's own being – one's own behaviour – an authentic expression of humanity's deepest vocation, to live responsively to the Glory of God manifest in the details of created being.

Responsibility and Beauty

The call to live responsively to beauty is the call to participate within the created order in a life affirming creative manner. Beauty opens the individual to meaningful participation in the created order in the specific context in which he or she finds himself or herself. There is no place for blanket generalisations. Rather, the specificity of God's intention for creation implies that the relational order of all that exists will be upheld and nurtured in an ever-expanding context. Beginning with family and opening outwards to include one's social milieu, one's community both on a personal and national level beauty compels responsible action and participation and calls for a response to the broadest of global issues.

- *Response of Justice and Love*

As an individual begins to recognise him or her self as a particular and loved expression of God's holy Will, and grows in the acquisition of personal character mediated by God as an awakening to his or her specific personhood, perception changes dramatically. The primary recognition of one's inclusion within the life of the Triune God, evokes at the deepest level an individual's recognition that all that exists is equally intended to express its own existence – its own being as a manifestation of Divine love. Thus, the quality of interaction within one's immediate relational group naturally begins to express a fresh and authentic delight wherein awe and reverence become dominant characteristics. Here too, an individual perceives the contours of his or her immediate and God-designed vocation – to creatively affirm the created order, to preserve it and to assure that all one's responses reflect a dynamic consent

to the being of the other. The perception of the beauty as it exists in the “other” extends beyond the narrowest parameters of one’s immediate social setting to include the larger community in which one finds him or her self. In this way, the individual finds him or her self moved towards the expressions of justice and of righteousness, not imposed externally but as the orientation of one’s own heart creatively directed toward the “other.”⁹⁴

Hence beauty as the expression of one’s uniqueness is not without moral and ethical obligations. Rather, one truly recognises the dignity and design of “being” as it is expressed in all of life. Thus the individual moves toward a healing response to any and all ruptures in the Divine plan of relational well being manifest as the harmony of love directed toward the created other. The implications then dramatically impact upon an individual’s participation in the affairs of the world on a personal level, in the larger community, at a national level and globally. Nor does this suggest that all will respond alike to the world in which they exist. Rather, the gift of individuation to each person will necessarily impact upon one’s ability to recognise the abuses of beauty and influence the direction and manner of one’s response – but a response always mediated by a deep and abiding perception of the dignity, value and glory of the created other.

Beauty must not be seen simply as the physical attractiveness – rather, a deep appreciation of beauty must extend beyond external considerations and include the less evident criteria of “meaning” and Divine Intention. Herein lies the impact of contemplation on the concept and perception of beauty – the congruity of form and meaning as expressions of the Divine Word.

The Playfulness of Beauty

If as an apocryphal story suggests, Albert Einstein asked the question “is the universe a friendly place?” The concept of beauty allows us to answer “yes” to his

⁹⁴ Alejandro García-Rivera (1999) demonstrates the essential calling of the church to express not “unity in diversity” but a “unity *as* diversity.” Garcia-Rivera’s work constitutes a theological aesthetic that clearly and poignantly illustrates the call to justice that is deeply embedded in the

crucial question.⁹⁵ A perception of beauty as the relational aspect of forms, conceived by God and offered to humanity as gift, implies that all that exists is the expression of Divine Love extending itself into the created realm. Creation then abounds with good will and good intention. The disfigurement of this intended relational harmony indeed is evident in the world. Yet, to recognise the affirmation of the goodness of “being,” contingent on the nature and character of God, is a staggering and transforming perception for any individual. This insight constitutes the recovery of one’s freedom from the constraints of a “biological hypostasis” trapped by the contingency of death exchanging it for an “ecclesial hypostasis” wherein an individual recovers the dimensions of life as intended by God. This exchange effects a deep and intended “freedom” within an individual to express his or her own uniqueness and giftedness no longer conformed to the external standards imposed by the society or culture in which one finds oneself. This freedom implies the freedom to live with life-affirming grace within the created realm. Without overstepping into the realm of autonomy and license this is the freedom which allows one to live without an inordinate concern for “self-interest,” it constitutes the gift of self-forgetfulness and thus the gifts of authentic compassion and generosity. No longer constrained to ensure one’s own well being in opposition to the “other,” the individual experiences a new and inclusive landscape of personal being. Herein, all that exists and all that ensues does so within a landscape of Divine Presence and Divine Love. Thus the orientation of one’s entire being is directed toward responsive expressions of joy and thanksgiving. The playfulness of beauty consists precisely in the exuberance of this responsive joy and delight in the manifest reality of creation. Here the words of Romano Guardini take on newer and fresher significance:

notion of beauty. Garcia-Rivera achieves this through his examination of the potency of signs and symbols in the evangelical pursuit of the church in Latin America (1999: 39-63).

⁹⁵ Whether or not Einstein can truly be documented as asking this profound question is unimportant. The statement itself echoes the terrifying emptiness that confronts contemporary culture. In his *History of Western Philosophy*, Russell deals with the question, why, in view of the obvious failure of philosophy to reach a satisfactory conclusion concerning the nature of reality, does the attempt persist. His answer speaks of the need to attend to the “terror of cosmic loneliness”(Russell 1979:14). Similarly, the poet Stephen Crane has written a short chilling echo of this very theme: “A man said to the universe,: “Sir, I exist!”/However,” replied the universe,: “The fact has not created in me: A sense of obligation”(Gesner 1983:556).

Man, with the aid of grace, is given the opportunity of relaying his fundamental essence, of really becoming that which according to his Divine destiny he should be and longs to be, a child of God (quoted by Schmemmann 1988b:30).

As an individual grows in his or her recognition of childhood in God the dimensions of the playfulness of beauty emerge. Creation animated by the beauty and love of God, dances with affection and invites an equally playful participation. To perceive the beauty of creation and to move outwards to God the source and author of beauty-Beauty itself – invites the believer to an extravagant response – that of the joyful and faithful abandonment of one's very being to the heart of God himself. Nor is the playfulness of beauty a secondary consideration. Rather, it is precisely the promise of abiding joy attended by love which is offered the believer and that articulates the most profound witness to the doctrine of Christian Truth – as relationship with God himself. Beauty, therefore, is not a peripheral subject in the life of the church but constitutes the structure of reality created by God, intended by God, redeemed by God and which is freely offered to each individual in union with God.

Thus, the notion of beauty in all its dimensions must recover its place at the heart of the Christian proclamation. The beauty of creation, the beauty of humanity and primarily the beauty of God serve as profoundly unifying themes in the Christian life. Herein the radically unique nature of each individual drawn toward his or her own maturity (thus encouraging authentic individuation) does not prove antithetical to true community with all its moral and ethical considerations, but places the individual organically and purposefully within the unified landscape of the whole. If this vision is to become a reality within any congregational milieu the Christian church must herself be faithful to the wisdom with which she has been entrusted not only doctrinally but, more importantly, the wisdom that draws an individual into the realm of deep and transforming spiritual encounter.

The Heritage of Spirituality

As has been asserted throughout this study, the vehicle through which an individual enters cognitively and affectively into the landscape of Divine Presence is

that of contemplative prayer. It is contemplative prayer that serves, at a basic level, to initiate and then effect within an individual the transformation of his or her perceptions awakening within the heart a certainty of the beauty of God and the intended beauty of his creation. However, it is precisely this message that is missing among the many other essential messages proclaimed from the pulpits of Christendom. Contemplative prayer is sorely absent and so too the dimensions of beauty to which it points.

In those denominations, Orthodox, Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic wherein a rich heritage of teaching on the spiritual life in general and contemplative prayer in particular is present and is available the subject of contemplative prayer remains primarily reserved for those in religious life. Contemplative prayer remains outside the common concern of the church at a congregational level. It is time for this wisdom to be dusted off and offered afresh to all that constitute the church at its grass roots level.

Similarly, those Protestant denominations which themselves demonstrate a profound continuity with the Orthodox, Eastern and Roman Catholic confessions, are equally called to bring to the forefront of their proclamation the dynamic of contemplative union with God. It is through the delicate motions of relational love between humanity and God that the church in the twenty-first century is able to provide, as it assuredly must, the wisdom and leadership essential to the formation of the spiritual life for which postmodern culture so deeply hungers. In those Protestant denominations which are more distant in ethos from the sacramental churches named above, it is equally important to examine their own understanding of spirituality and further, readdress contemplative prayer as a formal theme in their Christian witness. In this latter group, the prejudices of historical discord between the sacramental churches and the non-liturgical based groups must not be stand as an impediment to the recovery of the depth of a fully Christian life as the integration of doctrine and spiritual experience. For this latter group, contemplative prayer must not be discarded as an unacceptable incursion of Orthodox, Eastern and Roman Catholic beliefs into the more scripturally oriented church. Here, it is imperative that the Western non-

liturgical denominations recognise that their own heritage includes the common heritage of the first one thousand years of Christian history and Christian wisdom with the historical churches previously listed. Thus contemplative prayer which brings a theology of beauty to experiential fruition is not foreign to Protestant forms of non-liturgical congregational life but an invaluable component of their own legacy as participators in the kingdom of God.

Subjectivity of Spirituality

To intentionally introduce the dimension of contemplative prayer to the twenty-first century church requires that the church first consent to let go of her tendency toward an exclusive Enlightenment and modern approach to her proclamation of the Gospel. The struggle of the Enlightenment and that of modernity to clearly define and articulate the faith must give way, allowing the church to express with equal emphasis the motions of affectivity to which Christianity points. Thus objective knowledge must not dominate the Christian proclamation. Rather, the church must reassert the place of “mystery” in her own life and give space to the subjectivity that inheres in any form of human relational life, including that of human relationship with God himself. Herein lies a particular difficulty. The introduction of contemplation into the life of the church requires that the church and those academic institutions from which the church chooses her leaders provide some criteria to assure the reliability of its teachings.

The subjectivity inherent in the notion of spirituality must be acknowledged and accepted by the church despite the problems that necessarily unfold when affectivity and subjectivity are introduced into a predominantly objective milieu. A reintroduction of the contemplative life into the mainstream experience of congregational life necessarily implies willingness on the part of the ministerial authority within a church to open itself to the reality of human impulses and human motions of the heart. Both of these aspects of being are themselves free expressions of personal experience which are not allied to formal instruction. Rather, the uniqueness of each individual, differences in spiritual maturity, varied temperaments

present definite problems in terms of instruction and direction. Again, however, the history of Christian traditions of spirituality holds an answer to these specific problems. Here the role of the spiritual director to the task of spiritual direction was maintained as a significant component of the “teaching” function of the church. Traditionally, in the Orthodox, Eastern and Roman Catholic expressions of Christianity, this role was met within the monastic setting by those monks whose own lives and experience so expressed the truth of Christian doctrine that their words and direction were taken as authoritative in the development of spiritual maturity. For the laity, this role continues to assert itself to some degree through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. However, given the significance of the spiritual life to the witness of the church, this type of incidental spiritual direction is no longer sufficient where it does exist while those churches that have no direct continuity with the churches listed above have no provisions for spiritual direction whatsoever.

Spiritual Direction

It is imperative, at this juncture in history, for the Christian church, in all its expressions to recover the particular ministry or charism of spiritual direction if she is to meet and satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart, which are so evident in postmodern culture. This ministry is particularly important if the church is to proclaim to the world an accessible theology of beauty for the laity. The link between spiritual direction and a theology of beauty is not an obscure one. Beauty as an ontological category of Divine Being expressed in the perichoretic life of the Triune God implies that beauty in all its manifestations is the unifying principle of creation. As such it is the goal to which the Christian life moves in relationship with God himself, toward the mature expression of human personhood as holiness, mediated by Divine revelation. Hence, the subjectivity inherent in the journey toward this human completion requires that each individual move with integrity toward the goal. If this movement toward holiness, fulfillment and beauty is to advance, the individual must be fully cognisant of the dimensions of the spiritual life on which he or she has

embarked. Guides are essential if the process is to lead to maturity and wisdom, and miss the pitfalls of human illusions and human propensities toward error.

If a theology of beauty is allowed to assert itself across the panoply of Christian life, the church will discover that she is entirely capable of answering the challenges made to her by postmodern culture without compromising her basic presuppositions. Beauty is not antithetical to the doctrine of the church but provides a structuring principle by which she is able to define herself. Beauty, above all else, stands as the deepest structure of reality - the word of God calling for a response in love to the invitation to enter into a cognitive and affective encounter.

The manner in which beauty will enter the mainstream of Christian thought, requires that the church focus more intentionally on those aspects of spirituality wherein the affective content of belief resides and implies a deeper and more intentional development of the contemplative life within the mainstream congregational setting.

SUMMARY OF STUDY AND CONCLUSIONS

At this juncture, it is of value to reiterate the problem which this thesis has been concerned to address. As has been stated in the introduction:

Beauty represents a lost value in Christian tradition. Concurrent with the loss of beauty has been the rise of postmodernism, which in popular Western culture is characterised by a deep hunger for spiritual reality, for community, and for an experiential and substantial demonstration of truth. The church is most perfectly suited to answer these longings of the human heart through her proclamation of beauty as a fundamental value both within and without the church milieu. Significantly, the church's understanding of beauty anticipates the needs of postmodernism and is entirely adequate to provide for these deepest longings of the human spirit. To this end, "beauty" has been reasserted as a fundamental and essential value.

Further, it is appropriate to summarise in general a number of preliminary conclusions to which I have been drawn. This section will be followed by a more detailed analysis of the study and further significant conclusions.

- *Although the concept of beauty has been a significant one in early articulations of the Christian faith through the progressive stages of history the concept of*

beauty, richly evident from the post-apostolic years until the birth of scholasticism and Enlightenment thought, has been marginalised in theological discourse.

- *The result of this loss is evident both in Western culture and in the church within the Western world. In the greater context of Western culture the movement away from subjectivity and an increasing reliance on empiricism have proven too limited a criterion on which humanity can rely if it desires to experience the fullness of its own humanity.*
- *Ultimately, the Enlightenment confidence in empirical knowledge evident in modernity has effected a contemporary culture, which demonstrates the hollowness of the Enlightenment project – its failure to deal adequately with the transcendent component of human being-ness.*
- *Inherent in the modern adoption of Enlightenment belief is the negation of the concept of beauty. Here the elusive nature of the concept has contributed to the loss of beauty as a subject of serious concern even in the realm of aesthetic philosophy.*
- *The demise of beauty in the secular realm is paralleled within the Christian context. Whereas in the former category beauty, as a subject of concern, has been formally abandoned, within the church the loss of beauty represents not a rejection of the concept but its progressive marginalisation within the church.*
- *The popular expression of postmodernism represents the cumulative impact of and rejection by Western society of the Enlightenment project inherent in modernity. Here, the one-sided reliance on empirical knowledge has proven an inadequate “answer” to the unique needs of the human being.*
- *A similar reliance on empirical knowledge is evident within the church and is manifest as the increasing atrophy of the church’s ability to reflect a symphonic integration of truth, goodness and beauty in its proclamation of Christian belief.*
- *An exclusive emphasis on truth leads predominantly to a theological approach oriented toward apologetics and a logical analysis of the faith, an emphasis on*

“goodness” and moral reformation tends toward a faith primarily expressed as legalism.

- *Although both aspects of truth and goodness are essential to the church’s witness, it has been demonstrated that beauty provides the integrating principle wherein truth and goodness are inextricably woven into the fabric of the primordial love of God. It is only through this basic integration of truth and goodness by the mediatorial presence of beauty that the witness of the church becomes relevant to the culture at large. A similar thought is expressed by von Balthasar:*

In a world that no longer has any confidence in itself to affirm the beautiful, the proofs of the truth have lost their cogency. In other words, syllogisms may still dutifully clatter away like rotary presses or computers which infallibly spew out an exact number of answers by the minute. But the logic of these answers is itself a mechanism which no longer captivates anyone (quoted by Garcia-Rivera 1999: 64).

- *Beauty serves as the integrating principle of both Christian belief and Christian life as they reflect the triune nature of God – Beauty itself.*

Scriptural Witness to Beauty

In Chapter two the intention was to demonstrate that beauty stands as a significant theme within the witness of Scripture.

Although the word beauty is rarely used in Scripture an examination of the Old and New Testaments has demonstrated that beauty is a pervasive strand throughout. It has been demonstrated that although not a theme that is easily extracted from Scripture and thus open to specific investigation, beauty pervades the entire witness of Scripture. In this regard, a careful examination of the vocabulary of beauty, in both Old and New Testaments, with a particular emphasis on the Greek *kalos* and Hebrew *tawb* has demonstrated that the notions of the morally good and aesthetically beautiful combine in Hebrew and Greek usage. Further, it has been shown that regardless of the similarities that appear between the secular use of the

term and that of Scripture a significant difference exists: for Israel, all that exists is understood and interpreted in the context of God's covenantal relationship with his people. Thus it is not to be expected that Israel will demonstrate a unique understanding of the word. Rather, the difference lies in Israel's distinct self-understanding of her relationship to God and his relationship with Israel. *Thus I have concluded that the criticisms of von Rad and Grundmann (Chapter Two) in relationship to the concept of beauty do not negate the possibility of a theology of beauty, nor are they adequate to suggest that a theology of beauty is foreign to the scriptural witness.*

Historical Understanding of Beauty within the Church

An historical overview of beauty within the church has demonstrated that it has been viewed as a significant theme in Christian thought.

The concept of beauty is remarkably evident in the early church and remains a significant theme until the advent of scholasticism, Enlightenment thought and the Protestant Reformation. Thus churches within the Orthodox East, the Roman West weave the concept of beauty into their particular articulations of the faith. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, the place of beauty only becomes problematic within Protestant theological thought wherein the notion of "*sola scriptura*" is a fundamental issue. Protestantism does not embrace those fundamental intuitions of the Orthodox, Eastern and Roman Catholic Churches that appeal to extra-biblical sources to articulate Christian insights. Here the basic issue concerning the authority of Scripture alone, a reaction to perceived Roman Catholic errors, determines that Protestant thought will not easily reflect the same freedom to incorporate beauty in its theological discourse as does Roman Catholicism. The reasons for this omission have been clearly attributed to the Protestant concern that Scripture alone represents the sole authority on which any doctrinal statements may be based. However, it is also true that Calvin himself clearly values the aesthetic glory of creation, although he does not incorporate beauty into his overall discourse. This is not the case for the Orthodox East or Roman West. In both these ecclesial bodies beauty is most closely

associated with the sacramental life of the church and the nuances of spiritual transformation toward holiness. Both these particular aspects of Christian teaching, sacraments and holiness (theosis and deification) appeal to tradition (and monastic tradition particularly) for their authority which is incompatible with Protestant concerns. *However, despite these difficulties, it has also been demonstrated that no Christian theology, Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant exists without an appeal to the common heritage of the first millennium of Christianity. Significantly, it is during these first one thousand years that the church addresses major controversies concerning the nature of God. Further, it has been demonstrated that conclusions reached in the first one thousand years, remain constant throughout Christendom and are clearly a part of Protestant belief (i.e. the nature of the Trinity, the nature of Christ, the meaning of the Incarnation, the ineffable nature of God, the nature of his self revelation etc.). These issues bear significantly on the construction of a theology of beauty. This fact is a significant one and demonstrates that "beauty" is the heritage of all Christians. Hence the recovery of beauty to the realm of theology is significant across the Christian world and is not limited by denominational differences.*

The Cultural Context of Beauty

Chapter Four has demonstrated those cultural shifts evident in Western society which have led to contemporary postmodernism and further, have indicated the challenge postmodern thought presents to the church.

As Chapter Three indicated, the significance of beauty to the theological realm, ebbed through the successive phases of church history. However, these changes did not take place in a vacuum. Chapter Four brought to the forefront those dramatic cultural movements that ultimately propelled the Western world into a social order devoid of any true sense of metaphysical reality. In Chapter Four my intention was to follow the historical cultural shifts in Western society which culminate in a modern era characterised by individualism, empiricism, utilitarianism, loss of faith in intuitive knowledge etc. Dissatisfaction with the modern experiment has effected in the postmodern culture a social order that is starved for affective encounter and

spiritual meaning. Chapter Four traced those secular movements which ultimately displaced the predominantly Christian worldview with a belief system given over to rationalism and empiricism and ultimately, to radical relativism. It is within this wider context that the movement away from beauty is clarified. *Here it has been shown that the growing confidence in rational analysis and empirical investigation effected a cultural climate that is less and less able to address the affective content inherent in human nature. Beauty, a concept that resists attempts of rational and systematic analysis to discover its deepest meaning became a subject largely ignored by academia and is abandoned particularly by philosophical aesthetics.*

The church, addressing the apparent needs of the culture in which she exists began to assert her fundamental insights in a manner consistent with the empiricism demanded by society. *It is in this movement away from the more subtle and mysterious nuances of affectivity inherent in Christian belief, that the church lost her own confidence in the mystery and intuitive nature of the truth to which she is called to bear witness. The subjectivity inherent in a discussion of beauty remains largely outside the realms of purely scientific and rational investigation and is gradually lost to Christian spiritual tradition.*

Similarly, in the secular world, beauty has been dropped from philosophical discussion concerning the aesthetic, due to the elusive and indefinable nature of the subject. Hence, Western culture, of which the church is a part, undertook to assert the priority of empirical and philosophical discourse over the less well defined nuances of spirituality. Further, *it has been demonstrated that the loss of "beauty" in theological thought, aligned to the intuitive realm of transcendence, has contributed to the erosion of the church's integrity which demands that both doctrine and Christian life must substantially coincide in the lives of her adherents. It is precisely this manifestation of the integrity of doctrine and life which constitutes the form of beauty as an actual and evident expression of the perichoretic life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the image of God in humanity.*

Aquinas, Edwards and Hopkins

An examination of Aquinas, Edwards and Hopkins, has demonstrated that a resurrection of beauty is not foreign to Christian belief. Further, Edwards demonstrates that a resurrection of beauty appeals to the basic tenets of all Christian systems (creation, Incarnation, Holy Trinity) and therefore is not limited by denominationalism, while Hopkins reflects that beauty is an integrative theme calling for an adequate response to the glory (beauty) of God.

The inclusion of the thoughts of Aquinas, Edwards, and Hopkins in this study demonstrated that beauty has occupied a central position in the life and theologies of significant church spokespersons. This fact is apparent in Aquinas as he develops the earliest thoughts on beauty seen in the work of Dionysius, in Edwards drawing beauty into the forefront of his theology from a Protestant perspective at the height of Enlightenment thought; and in the work of Hopkins whose own celebration of beauty is expressed with poetic freedom as a response to the glory that is. Each of these theologians adds a personal and particular emphasis from which the twenty-first century church will richly benefit.

Aquinas clearly takes the Christian initiative and defines “beauty” from within the context of Christian thought. Here Aquinas is free to affirm that “goodness” and “beauty” coincide and occupy the same place within Christian thought while beauty adds a visual dimension to the less substantial form of “good.” Further, Aquinas, drawing on concepts of “perfection, harmony and brilliance” is able to demonstrate that beauty, in its most perfect expression is God, himself.

Similarly, from a Protestant perspective, Jonathan Edwards is able to make a very similar statement concerning the “beauty of God” and continues in his theological thought to demonstrate the profound continuity between the Being of God and the form of God’s creation – of which humanity is the highest expression. Both Aquinas and Edwards present their views with strict adherence to the rules of logic and unwaveringly to the doctrinal content of Christian belief. Both demonstrate the rational justification for their statements that “beauty” is indeed a Christian concept – indeed a Christian word.

It is Hopkins, however, who contributes to the study of beauty the responsive nature of the call of beauty. As such, Hopkins, in the opinion of this writer, is the theologian who is most closely akin to the laity and thus speaks most profoundly to us. Hopkins, although conformed to the theological structure of Christian thought, includes the profound dimensions of intuition and insight in his articulation – his writing combines both theology and the dynamic response to theology that is the truest demonstration of the reality of which he speaks. “The world is charged with the grandeur of God” and demands a response – demands that this “world” be encountered with reverence and awe, with thanksgiving and love. It has been a particular concern of this study to present the means whereby the poetic vision of Hopkins becomes a reality in the life of the church. This fact does not imply that all will become poets, or that all will express the gift of being in a manner similar to Hopkins. Rather, it is asserted that the laity is equally called to perceive this vision and express its truth in a manner consistent with an individual’s own “being” and in that response be confident that he or she too expresses the “glory of God” with authenticity, with love, delight and joy. Drawing on the particular insights of Aquinas, Edwards and Hopkins a definition of beauty is offered which serves as the basis for the theology of beauty. *From this discussion I have concluded that beauty has been a topic of rich significance to the church in the past. Moreover in the work of Jonathan Edwards it has been shown that beauty is entirely consonant with Protestant belief and is not limited by the notion of “sola scriptura” (a view that is later suggested, if not developed in the work of Karl Barth). Similarly, Hopkins unites the doctrinal issues concerning beauty with a human response to beauty effecting a dialogical theology of beauty.*

Resurrection of Beauty for a Postmodern Church

In chapter six I have constructed and defended a cohesive “theology of beauty” that is particularly conformed to the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity as articulated within the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Beginning with the Holy Trinity I have outlined the place of beauty as it inheres in creation and in the nature of God himself. Following this discussion, an appeal was made to the scriptural theme of the “image of God” in humanity through which I have shown that the perichoretic life

of the Holy Trinity serves as the model of the Divine image. Here, I have demonstrated that likeness to the Triune God expresses the true dimensions of "beauty" as personal uniqueness sustained by relational love. Uniqueness sustained and expressed as loving self-surrender represents the dimension of fulfilled "personhood" for humanity and most clearly manifests the beauty of all that exists in likeness to its Divine source. On this basis I have demonstrated the power, efficacy and suitability of the resurrection of beauty for a postmodern church.

Offering a definition of beauty as the *"relational aspect of forms, conceived by God and offered to humanity as gift,"* I have presented "beauty" as the structuring principle of all that is manifest in creation and which reflects the relational existence of God himself. Thus it has been shown *that beauty is a concept that belongs in and is intended to be expressed and addressed within a Christian context.* If secular philosophy and philosophical aesthetic in particular are unable to approach "beauty" in a significant manner, the reason is clear: *beauty has its genesis in the Divine and although evident both within and without the church, is only adequately addressed with reference to its Divine source. Thus beauty is a theological concept and belongs within the context of the church as the "new creation" wherein the dimensions of God's perichoretic life are manifest in the created realm.* Beauty is the natural expression of "reality" for those who enter through relational love into intimate union with God, whose own beauty provides an efficacious experience resulting in the transformation of human perception opening the believer to a vital and dynamic encounter with "Beauty" itself. Further, *it is asserted that the "image of God" first spoken of in Genesis, is most fully manifest in humanity as it expresses the perichoretic motions of God's Divine Life.* I have examined those objections put forward suggesting that the "Divine image" is not a pervasive subject in Scripture and therefore is not evident enough to allow for a theology of the "Divine image" and the argument that this doctrine represents a hellenisation of Scripture. *In this regard I have asserted that these objections are successfully countered by the fact of the Incarnation of Christ through which the concept of the "image of God" as a theological motif is ultimately substantiated.*

Further, introducing examples of modern and contemporary attempts to account for the obvious differences that exist between humanity and other living

beings within the created realm, *I have demonstrated that an understanding of “human being-ness” requires that investigations include a place for the transcendent qualities that attend human nature. It has been demonstrated that pan-historically and pan-culturally, humanity is distinguished by a desire for communication, for community, and ultimately for communion. Drawing on the Cappadocian articulation of Trinitarian theology, I have concluded that these particular “human” tendencies are a reflection of the Triune God – as “Being in communion.” Thus I have demonstrated authentic human beauty is manifest in the maturation of personhood as it is expressed in self-surrendered love - a reflection of Divine Beauty. Humanity is both physical and spiritual: thus if Christianity is true, it must be able to account for both aspects of created being. Moreover, it is in the reception of one’s authentic personhood (the product of God’s own individuation in an individual’s life) that most perfectly accounts for and reflects the beauty inherent in God’s own Trinitarian life.*

It has also been demonstrated that the transformation of one’s perception is the fruit of contemplative relationship with God wherein each individual is embraced by love and affirmed in their own particular being. Thus the contemplative life has been posited as the means of entering into the realm of beauty – of Divine Presence - wherein an individual experiences a radical transformation of his or her perception – ultimately, the freedom to be and to love.

Postmodern culture offers a challenge to the church that the deepest truths of Christian faith are well able to meet – were intended to meet. As the twenty-first century begins, Western culture calls the church to demonstrate her integrity – the union of doctrine and life. Thus the interests of theology itself must expand to include the study of the Christian understanding of spirituality of which beauty is an essential part.

Having begun with the notion of beauty, this study has led to the discussion of topics largely ignored by academic theology - those subjects which inhere in the affective component of human nature – love, personhood, relational being to name a few. It is obvious that these themes do not lend themselves easily to traditional modes

of academic inquiry. The way forward for the church must be to approach with theological integrity these deeply elusive concepts. How academia will incorporate these issues into its theological perspective is a question that must be addressed.

FURTHER STUDY

The study of beauty as it inheres in Christian thought indicates the need for further studies that look particularly at the subjective content of faith as well as those themes suggested by beauty itself. The first area of concern to be addressed in this forum is of a general nature dealing with the constellation of problems surrounding the subjective content of the material of spirituality. The second area of concern to be discussed will deal directly with the implications of “beauty” as they impact upon the practical life of the Christian believer.

General Observations

That certain, if few, academic institutions are beginning to address spirituality as a valid subject of academic inquiry suggests that the church through these institutions is beginning to heed the challenge of postmodern society. Yet this enterprise is a new one and the nature of the undertaking suggests that a need for new modes of academic investigation may be indicated. This shift is necessitated by the content of these studies. Herein the criteria for investigation and articulation must move from a strictly academic format to one more in tune with the subjective matter of the inquiry. Thus it remains to be examined how best to incorporate the subjective content of Christian belief into the dialogue between Christianity and academia. It is entirely true that addressing subjective elements in the mainstream of theological thought is a difficult task. Intentional studies and investigations must address this primary issue if the way is to be cleared for in-depth studies concerning the nature and expression of spirituality.

The value of contemplative experience to the church is not an uncontested issue. In *Mysticism: A Survey of Recent Issues*, Kourie (1992) outlines the contours of the debate over the place of mysticism in the church. She shows that critical views

are much in evidence in the writings of Western Protestant thought which suggests “mystical experience” has little utilitarian value, intensifies individualism, serves to create a “spiritual élite” and significantly undermines “religious authority and moral principle” (Kourie 1992:88-92). Further, empirical analysis of the “phenomena” associated at times with mystical or contemplative experience have been associated with symptoms of mental illness, leading to an off-hand dismissal of contemplative experience without due consideration given to the dissimilarities between pathologies and mystical phenomena (Kourie 1992:90). Thus, continuing research and study must address these and other issues and present its findings in a “public” and non-threatening format to those who constitute the laity of the church. Kourie demonstrates that such negativity need not dominate the debate.

It is also of interest to theological investigation to include in its discourse the insights of psychological investigations as they contribute to the understanding of the subjectivity of human existence. As demonstrated by Kourie (1992) there is significant evidence to demonstrate that the church presents a healthy understanding of human nature which is enhanced by contemplative experience - a view that is supported by psychology. That such material exists is not contested; that it be made readily and clearly available to the church at large is a necessity. In this regard the work of Benedict Groeschel (1984) may serve as a comprehensive starting point. Groeschel’s perspective provides a refreshingly open vision that avoids the dual errors of perceiving psychology as antithetical to spiritual development and the converse error of perceiving theology as counter productive in the quest for psychological health and balance.

Future study might also be undertaken to clarify the place of intuition in the epistemological pursuit. Also, the *effect* of the historically male orientation of theological discourse may well be pursued to determine a natural place to re-balance the insights of theologians to include the contribution of women and the feminine perspective. If Karl Stern’s (1965) investigations are correct, the difference between male and female modes of perception indicate that the predominantly male

articulation of the faith is inherently unbalanced and stands as a violation of “beauty” as the relational aspect of forms conceived by God.

It is equally incumbent on the church and on those theological institutions or faculties within academia to investigate and provide a reliable source from which the church might draw those most fitted to lead in spiritual direction at the congregational level. While of equal importance is the investigation of the Christian understanding of discernment as it directly relates to the charism of spiritual direction. Similarly, it is incumbent on the church to provide authoritative instruction on the processes of spiritual formation and maturation particularly within those confessions wherein confusion and a degree of suspicion has carried over from the formative years of the Reformation.

Each of the areas wherein the need for further study is indicated suggests that the greatest impediment to an inclusive presentation of contemplative prayer at the congregational level is the profound difficulty in validating the data of experience. As suggested in the introduction of this study, the subjectivity of the theme under consideration does not allow for a strictly empirical presentation. Thus, it has been necessary to demonstrate the reliability of the topic by appealing to its historical continuity with the beliefs of the church, which may, at this juncture, prove the most convincing and reliable evidence for the thesis presented.

Beauty Itself: Primal Word and Sacramentality of Reality

The consideration of the specific subject of beauty as it has been addressed in this study leads naturally to further studies that might consider more precisely the notion of the “primal word” introduced by Karl Rahner as it impacts upon a profoundly sacramental understanding of reality. Similarly, investigation into the meaning of the symbolic life, wherein human intuition is able to extend the parameters of “knowledge” beyond the realm of the purely physical, would contribute a great deal to enhance the church’s confidence in the more elusive subject matter with which she is called to proclaim. Such a study, however, leads back to the primary need to determine the reliability of subjective and intuitive knowledge as it is applied to the

theological enterprise. Here the work of theologian and philosopher, Bernard Lonergan (1990), who demonstrates a deep concern to understand and articulate the manner by which the human being acquires and appropriates knowledge with a particular reference to insight and intuition in the context of spiritual formation, could serve well as a focus for further study. Furthermore, the proposal of Frits Staal (1975) that mystical experience is open to investigation in the manner of other scientific investigations if the mystical state could be induced in the investigator, might also lend itself to a more specific investigation of the subject of ‘beauty’.

The Playfulness of Creation

As has been suggested earlier, the playfulness of creation is a subject that merits further discussion and analysis. A study of the contours of playfulness as a further expression of spiritual freedom effected by encounter with Divine Beauty may offer Christianity a fresh realisation of the nature of personal vocation as living with responsive joy and delight. It is interesting to note that von Balthasar’s final literary work is a slim volume entitled *Unless You Become Like this Child* (1991). Certainly the interior joy and freedom that attends the recognition of Divine Beauty implies the further notion of surrender to God, of abandonment to the One who loves and gives Himself so completely. Hence further study into the notion of spiritual childhood would serve to articulate the nature of living with freedom and joy in a fallen world.

Without doubt a theology of beauty opens the church to a re-examine the very place of art within her life – as more than pedagogical material. Here it is indicated that the church in the West might consider the depth and meaning of iconography that has attended Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic spirituality from its earliest days. Again, the manner of investigation will necessarily be impeded by the empirical criteria normally required for such study in the Western world. Here again the vast amount of material that has evolved in Eastern Christendom concerning this very topic cannot be ignored.

In this chapter, I have indicated the objectives that have been set in addressing and articulating the need for a resurrection of beauty in the postmodern church. It has

been demonstrated that such a recovery is indeed essential if the church is to offer the contemporary postmodern world in which she is positioned a full vision of the truth of God and the truth inherent in his creation.

CONCLUSION

Beauty, as it has been addressed in this study is not a narrowly confined subject – yet equally, it is a simple one. Beauty, finding its source in God, extends into the created horizon as a manifest expression of Divine goodness and love that inheres primarily in the perichoretic motions of Triune life. It is this motion of love directed outwards from an individual in his or her own experience of being that constitutes the expression of holiness as a manifestation of beauty in likeness to its source. Taking seriously these motions of response to one's apprehension of personal beauty and the attendant beauty of all that exists I have suggested that holiness, as ethical and moral interaction with creation, stands as the "form" of beauty within the created realm. In this sense humanity is called to enter deeply into the mutual exchange of love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is within this landscape of Divine Presence, that individuals will begin to live with joyful and thankful abandonment to the God who has offered himself to humanity as the fulfilment of its deepest needs for personhood and freedom.

In this manner, creation becomes an altar – humanity's response of Eucharistic joy and doxological praise to God, *whose beauty fathers forth* constant, undiminished, and with deep delight in his creation. Thus, the perception of this beauty moves theology, naturally and gently, from a study that requires and seeks for intellectual assent alone to one pregnant with dynamic eventfulness and ontological significance. More importantly, however, through personal encounter with God, who is both the source of beauty and Beauty itself, the content of theology becomes, in the experience of the believer, the living content of his or her worship. The landscape of creation becomes a manifestation of the landscape of Divine Presence and the authentic locus for humanity's expressions of responsive love and thanksgiving.

Therein lies the beauty of our being and the intended vocation for all creation – to know and to rejoice in God's holy goodness. *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.*

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