

PART FOUR: Practicing Beauty

At this point, I would like to go a little deeper into this sense of beauty that could include all forms besides art, with the connection to God's attributes as hinted at in the last section. The reason for making this connection is that when we participate in beauty, an attribute of God, we also participate in who God is. That is what God's attributes mean. For example, John's gospel tells us that God is Love, another of his attributes. When we participate in love, we also participate in who God is. Since beautiful can be attributed to art, music, architecture, dance, and so forth, participation in any or even several of these, we participate in God. It is almost like dancing with God through the attribute of beauty, or love, or Justice and Goodness. When we participate in our faith, we call that 'praxes,' or action, as when we put our faith in action in the *corporal works of mercy*.

There are levels of praxis or action, for example, when we visit an art museum, attend a concert, or visit a building famous for its architecture. We participate in beauty through these visits or concerts, even though we did not produce the art or compose the music or design the building. Our participation is vicarious action or vicarious creation. In a sense, that is what aesthetics is about, our vicarious participation in beauty. Plato talks about this in his dialogue of the 'Cave' where he believed that on earth we see dimly as shadows in his *Cave* analogy.

Whether we participate in beauty vicariously or creatively we still experience that sense of awe. We talked about that in the last section, "The Desire for Perfect Beauty." In this section I want to focus more on beauty in our connection with God, using more specifically an apparition of Mary to Juan Diego at Guadalupe.

In his chapter, *Practicing Beauty*, Roberto S Goizueta, points out that the Lady uses beauty in her apparition. "(Juan Diego) was compelled to enter into the relationship by *the beauty of the birds' singing*, which originally signaled the Virgin's presence, *the beauty of the flowers* that the Lady offered as the sign of her love for him, and *the beauty of the Lady herself*," (*INVITATION TO PRACTIAL THEOLOGY*, ed. C. E. Wolfeite, 2014). Goizueta even specifically says so, "...*(she) approaches him in the form of beauty, that of music, flowers and the Lady (herself)*," and points out that it is "...*privileged mediators of the sacred*," *flor y canto* ("flower and song"). And he surprisingly states that, "...*it sought, compelled, and seduced him*." This is

the language of Saint John of the Cross and of the Prophet Jeremiah, "You seduced me, Lord!"

He continues, "It is no coincidence, therefore, that such a relationship is mediated, above all, by beauty; the subject's interaction with beauty is always fundamentally one in which he or she is not in control...Beauty compels, attracts, and seduces unexpectedly." He says that we are **caught-up** in something greater than and beyond our selves, something divine, mystical, numinous. The fact that we can not control this experience, as Juan Diego, it is still *ultimately energizing, inspiring, and empowering* that has attracted the Saints over the ages.

And this is what was mentioned in the previous *PART THREE: The Nature of Beauty and the Desire for Perfect Beauty*, "Ontological Status of the Beautiful."

"...the Requiem is performed within a magnificent church with magnificent art, and the music, art and architecture are unified as a whole, one feels drawn into a perfection bigger than all the forms combined," (p161).

Eventually, this is where we are heading, but not yet. Sometimes we participate in this beauty simply by listening and looking at times to someone else's beauty in their music or art. We participate with God, now, in this life in many ways that are really part of God's attributes by being just and fair to others and loving them.

"Juan Diego never dreamed that he could possibly order or command the bishop to do anything; such a goal was, for the indigenous man, literally inconceivable. Only as he is gradually drawn into the relationship with the Virgin does he eventually discover...that he is able to confront the bishop and, indeed, to compel the bishop's own obedience." Notice that the military power of God is not used "...as claimed by the missionaries, but the *attractive power* of beauty, respect, and compassion," (p161).

Goizueta points out that it is our "...participation in a relationship with another subject, whose own self-expression compels that participation." God seduces us into interacting with him through the beauty of the world around us and by his other attributes. Again, Goizueta point out that "...the ground of all rational or instrumental knowledge...is participatory or aesthetic praxis," (p162).

In other words: "The word of God is thus much more than information about God; ***it is the inconceivable invitation to participate in God's own praxis, God's own ongoing self-disclosure in history,***" (p163).

In the next part we will look at the article by Dr. Kenneth Craycraft, *No Atheists in Art Galleries*.