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THE SCOURGE OF PRIVATISM:
THEOLOGY BY INQUISITION AND ETHICS BY HUNCH
by David Allan Hubbard

One of the most serious conflicts waging inside the Church and out is the battle of authority. Time and again in visiting campuses I have found that arguments are prefaced or tagged with statements like "this is what I feel"; "here's how I see it"; "these are my beliefs".

These statements are usually made without recourse to any external authority. When one raises questions "but what does the Bible say, would Christ look at it that way, have you checked this feeling with the Apostle Paul", one is branded with the most stigmatic of all modern brands—authoritarian.

The typical high school and university student has neither a philosophical nor a theological world view by which truth is gauged. Historical research makes him yawn, he shrugs at the law of contradiction, he sneers at the tradition of the elders. His own private opinion is his sole authority.

He may hold simultaneously to contradictory beliefs in the name of tolerance or open mindedness. He may purport to accept the most divergent and conflicting points of view. He may be equally enamored of the Prophet, Kahlil Gibran, the Rubyist of Omar Khayyam, a couple of couplets from Shakespeare, some musing of Hemingway, and a dash of Salinger. Yet this unsystematic, eclectic, synthetic approach is wed to an attitude of great concern for social issues and a general sense of frustration concerning the church.

This student, not to say urban, mind-set or posture, in its pragmatic and privatistic attitude toward truth, is one of the greatest hurdles that the Christian preacher or teacher has to surmount. The situation becomes more vexing to us as ministers when we realize that it is partly (though by no means entirely) our fault. Rather than demonstrating in our lives and preaching what Bible-authority really means, we have ambivalently alternated between ardently pounding the pulpit and giving off-the-cuff homilies which may be loosely tied to some Biblical thought, but are not firmly founded in Biblical authority.

What course can we take to meet our responsibilities in this anti-authoritarian challenge?

1. We ought to examine ourselves to see whether we are really living and thinking, preaching and praying, in ways that mirror God's Word in its fullness.

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EDITORIAL

Let us enjoy this Memorial Day as a wine-taster, who thoughtfully rolls the libation over his tongue before beginning the next task. Many universities regularly schedule one or two reading days immediately before examinations. On these days instructors are encouraged to be available to their students, but not to give tests or cover new material, for only the students can take advantage of last-minute enthusiasm. Fuller Seminary is a graduate school with an undergraduate class schedule. By making the last day or two of every quarter a reading day, students would be able to attend all the lectures and still have opportunity to digest their course material before examinations.

D.K.G.

THE SCOURGE OF PRIVATISM (continued)

2. When we talk about Biblical authority and inspiration we ought to make clear that we mean that the Scripture does in fact stand in judgment over all other tests of ethical and doctrinal truth. To many people inspiration is where you find it—in art, literature, life, and Scripture. A clear concept of the canon is in danger of being lost even in the church. "Whatever inspires me is inspired," is the tacit motto of many.

3. Our theology and our preaching must grow out of our encounter with the Scripture rather than being read back into it. Too much problem-centered preaching may suggest that the Bible is little more than a good place to find solutions to problems, along with Ann Landers, Tennessee Williams, and Peanuts. Of course the Scripture gives answers to pressing human problems, but it does much more. It tells us the source of these problems and drives home to our hearts and minds problems that we haven't yet felt or thought of.

4. The unique authority of the Bible must be linked to the unique authority of Jesus Christ. Our loyalty to the canon is not an uneasy act of escapism in which we take flight from individual responsibility. It is rather one aspect of our sturdy commitment to the truth of Christ's witness about God, Himself, and us.

5. Our belief in the authority of the Word must be harnessed to a trust in the power of the Word. We must teach and preach as those who have complete confidence that God's Word will accomplish its work as the Spirit applies it to men's lives. Where the living Church is demonstrating the power of the Word there will be little question about its authority. It's the big-smoke-no-fire approach to the Bible that has set the modern generation coughing.

Let's not kid ourselves about the seriousness of the situation—that would be dangerous. But let's not sell short the power of the Word and Spirit and try to reach men by other means—that would be fatal.
"If you want to understand the invisible, look closely at the visible." (Helm) In this simple statement lies the main thesis of all natural theology—and knowledge in general. From the small part of the universe with which man is in contact, the construct of the entire can be projected, he assumes. This contacted portion suggests to him that the value of all things can be summed up in the basic elements of truth, goodness, and beauty. And if God is beyond and behind the immediately perceived world, the search for the essence of these values can imply God. The particular value, beauty, and the field thus involved, aesthetics, is the central concern of the remaining discussion: the part that beauty and the aesthetic experience can play in man's quest for God.

The Objective Element

There is a uniqueness in the nature of beauty and aesthetic experience which distinguishes it from moral, religious, and scientific experiences. In the aesthetic, the object of experience is the thing of beauty itself. The senses respond to the object. For example, one looks at a painting of Rembrandt in order to see it; listens to a prelude of Chopin in order to hear it; reads Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn to appreciate it. In the moral, religious, and scientific experiences, however, attention is not sustained upon the object itself, but rather, shifted in order to find the relationships to which it points. In a moral decision one moves from consideration of the initial object, i.e. the moral act, to its relationship to one's knowledge of and desire and need for the Good and the "ought." In religious experience the object, e.g. the sacrament, becomes meaningful only as set in the perspective of other related objects, viz. the revelation of God. Likewise, in scientific endeavors, causes and consequences are sought out in order to give completeness to the object of investigation. It is this basic difference between intransitive and transitive quality that distinguishes the beautiful and aesthetic from other types of experience.

This is the basis upon which a definition of the beautiful has been postulated. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary states that beauty is "that quality or aggregate of qualities in a thing which gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit." Similarly, Krikorian defines an aesthetic experience as "an experience of rapt attention which involves the intransitive apprehension of an object's immanent meanings in their full presentational immediacy".

An examination of the substance of beauty shows some very basic qualities. First, there is a generic quality of "goodness". That is, beauty contributes to the joy and pleasure of life. That evil is sometimes attached to the essentially beautiful in an object only points to a greater object visualized in which the good is exclusively united with the beautiful, just as the counterfeit bill...

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points to the valued dollar. Perhaps by its recognized quality of
goodness, though adulterated at times, beauty points to a universal
Good.

There are even more specific qualities to notice. At the very
heart and center of an object of beauty are unity, harmony, and co­
herence. It is unity that provides the strength in the self-renew­ing
personality of beauty. It defines the exact boundaries of the
object and helps to focus all attention upon it. The object is made
a homogeneous unit with the whole controlling the value of each part
and each part controlling the value of the whole. "Unity is the com­
bination of elements by virtue of which the object which they consti­
tute achieves a distinctive, unique, monadic character for aesthetic
perception. Without this character the object cannot give rise to
an intransitive experience, and without this intransitivity the ex­
perience lacks its peculiar intrinsic value and sustained intensity."
(Krikorian)

In looking closer at the quality of unity, Monroe Beardsley
suggests the following basic elements: continuity of development
without gaps or dead spaces, a sense of overall providential pattern,
and an orderly cumulation of energy toward a climax. The object
must hang together; the parts must fit and relate. Musical notes
cannot be played beautifully at random. They must portray purpose
progress, and design—unity.

Furthermore, an aesthetic object must manifest harmony. Its
components are not perceived separately only—in fact very seldom—
but rather as a harmonious unit. The various responses being re­
ceived from an object are harmonious with one another. They build
and gain amplitude, and tend to block out stimuli coming from outside
sources which would call forth interfering responses. And thus it is
from this fused harmony of an object of beauty that deep response
is initiated. It is as one sees the coordinated movements of the
ballet, sees the blend of color in a Manet painting, or hears the
thick harmony of choral-orchestral combination in the Brahms Requiem
that he is moved with such strong aesthetic pleasure.

Coherence, closely related to unity and harmony, deals with the
basic pattern, the controlling idea to which all segments of the ob­
ject conform. The beautiful, before being so adjudged, must mani­
fest consistency in the inter-relationship of its parts, systematic
connection that reflects the aesthetic ideal or purpose within the
mind of the artist. And there must be purpose. The response to a
chance splash of colors on a canvas is different from the response
to a conscious arrangement of color. Aesthetic experience always
involves recognition of purpose. Mind must match mind. This phenom­
enon in the contacted world, the necessity of mind for creating beau­
ty, when projected on other data of the universe, suggests a Mind
behind the beauty of nature.

At this point the question of the source of beauty must be
raised. Can all great art be simply traced to the mind of the art­
ist? From what source does the artist receive his ideas of design
and form? The consensus points to nature itself as the answer. De­
sign is in all that one sees around him—the starry heavens, the del­
icate flower, the snowflake, even the intricate framework of his own
body suggests design, purpose, and uniformity. The imagination and
creativity of beauty as expressed in nature is conceded to be unexcelled. Man therefore diligently seeks to reflect this design with painstaking labor, for "the closest artificial approach to the beauty of nature . . . comes not at random, but by disciplined effort and by patient thought". (Trueblood) This need for thoughtful concentration of mind to work with nature suggests a greater Mind behind its beauty.

It would follow, as Clyde Kilby suggests, that there is an image of this Mind within every man. Man creates because God, the Creator, has placed His image within him. And this image or similarity is further evidenced by man's acceptance of design and unity as the foundation of great art. States Thomas Aquinas, "Form is the very ontological secret of the being of things, their true spiritual essence; form is a remnant or ray of the creative Mind penetrating the heart of man". The fact that men basically agree upon objective standards for art can be accounted for by this common possession of man, the image of the Creator, the Mind.

But this is not the whole story of man's aesthetic experience.

There is more in beauty than beauty. There is communication from, and communion with, personal spirit. The whole aesthetic experience is unintelligible unless there comes through it a revelation from spirit to spirit. (Temple)

It is to this consideration that the discussion next turns.

The Subjective Element

Temple points out that even though beauty is an objective quality, lying within the object itself, it is only actualized when it is subjectively appreciated. There are many factors that a perceptor brings to an aesthetic object, which may or may not add to his experience. Foremost of these is knowledge of the object itself. Perhaps there is much truth in the old saying "there is beauty in everything". One may very often see the beautiful object or hear it, and not perceive its beauty because his perceptive faculties have not been properly developed. Certainly the aesthetic experience is much greater for the one comprehending Wagner's plan as he hears the leit-motifs of Brunhild, the fire music, sleep, and Siegfried woven together at the close of Die Valkure than for the uninitiated. The one who can recall something of England as he reads the symbolistic satire of Swift's Gulliver's Travels experiences far more than the one ignorant of the times.

Such experience does not come by means of casual sensation. It is effected only by means of applied knowledge. Often a person misses a much deeper experience because of the lack of understanding with which he could perceive. For example, attending an opera without having read the libretto, or at least a narrative resume, can appreciably shrink one's aesthetic experience.

There is some information, however, which the object may give to the spectator that will increase his understanding. A painting may have a title; a musical composition may contain words. These aid in disclosing the original design.

But there is yet another aspect of knowledge which a person may bring to an aesthetic object. This is the presuppositions and experi...
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ences of his own background. The object itself may initiate this response, as when a love song brings back old memories almost forgotten, or a painting of Grandma Moses invites reflection on "the good old days".

Great art is art charged with meanings which are tied up with a complex and intricate network of responses in the perceiving organism, meanings belonging to a multitude of ranges of experiences, to the moral, the religious, the intellectual, and also purely sensual. (Krikorian)

The danger of relying too heavily upon this knowledge, as Dr. Kilby points out, is that observance is made only on the relativistic, horizontal level. Beauty becomes relative to each individual (likewise goodness and truth). Standards are lost and everyone becomes his own judge. The "I have my own taste" presides. Also, the aesthetic experience often tends to become almost completely centered in the emotions. Appreciation is reserved only for that which "moves". However, emotion is not at all unique to aesthetic experience, but rather is found in almost every area. And though it may play a large part for some, it may not for others who also enjoy deep aesthetic pleasure. Furthermore, enjoyment differs between persons because the sensitivity of each individual is of different degrees. Though Seashore and others have made attempts to discover the innate qualities of creativity and sensitivity, nothing completely satisfactory has been found from which one could work to increase or develop sensitivity and thus reduce the subjective difference in this area.

Despite the dangers involved by the subjective response, this element can play a rewarding and meaningful role in aesthetic experience. Is it "bad" when one reflects on past experience as he listens to an old love song? Though the knowledge which he brings from his personal experience may not be contained in the object, yet it is certainly a part of the experience, and may lead to an even deeper encounter. Such is the case when the young missionary reads the story of Hudson Taylor or William Borden and envisions himself, or when a young couple watches the splendid photography and choreography of "West Side Story" and is moved with compassion. This is communication of spirit. Though man might be able to express this spirit scientifically, he chooses rather the aesthetic experience of great art, because it is personal and not general.

Knowing then that an individual's response to beauty is partially dependent upon what he is and has become, it is highly significant that man responds to natural beauty by investing it with the quality of revelation of a Being beyond. Throughout literature one finds man searching for and contemplating That behind nature. Within the sensitivities of man lies a witness to the Creator and Sustainer of the visible world.

That the art surviving the centuries' judgment, the art called great, is so largely composed of that centered upon God, His Being and His works, testifies to the subjective response of man, man having felt the love, forgiveness, and acceptance of God in his own life. To the one who possesses a personal relationship with the Author and Designer of all Beauty and who is sensitive to creative imagination, the possibility of deep aesthetic experience is even greater.

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A person very sensitive to music, in whose soul something of the inspiration that moved the composer finds response, may for a time be transported emotionally and even spiritually. Whether he is turned Godwards or not depends partly on the nature of the music, and partly on the individual's peculiar response. (Etherington)

Thus it is possible for one listening to the simple, sonorous third movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony or the great strains of the final chorus and "Amen" of Handel's Messiah to be in rapt consideration of the glory of the love of Christ for him.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain and hath redeemed us to God by His blood to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. (Rev. 7:9,12,13)

The Sum of the Matter
What is to be concluded? Does beauty and the aesthetic experience lead to an affirmation of the existence of God. It may. The reality of this Creator-Artist is suggested not only in man's ability to create, but also in his sensitivity to the created object. Through the medium of aesthetic experience man is capable of expressing and contemplating all that is meaningful and significant to his existence, even his eternal redemption. And even though the existence of God cannot be absolutely proven by aesthetics, yet to the one who finds God concretely revealed in Jesus Christ, and who through Christ experiences a personal relationship with the Creator and Designer of all beauty, there is a depth of aesthetic experience unattainable to the unbeliever.

* * *

The Hymns of the Little Hours

Sext

O God, who cannot change nor fail,
Guiding the hours as they roll by;
Brightening with beams the morning pale,
And burning in the midday sky.
Quench Thou the fires of hate and strife,
The wasting fever of the heart;
From perils guard our feeble life,
And to our souls Thy peace impart.

None

O God, unchangeable and true,
Of all the Light and Power,
Dispensing light in silence through
Every successive hour;
Lord, brighten our declining day,
That it may never wane,
Till death, when all things round decay,
Brings back the morn again.

by St. Ambrose of Milan
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