

Daniel's reflection for week-beginning 3rd September - Reclaiming beauty

When Albert Einstein holds that imagination is more important than knowledge and when George Bernard Shaw equates language of the heart with imagination perhaps it is the notion of creativity, openness and beauty they are trying to protect. Beauty and imagination are too often obscured by the high walls of logic. Formulations and doctrines will never do justice to mystery. Faith is more than the sum of its constituent beliefs. It is a way of imagining and experiencing our divine/human world. That is why prophets of the church are trying to recover the neglected role of imagination, the 'poetics of theology' and its artistic expression in the more positive and open approach of the contemporary human spirit. We all have within us the icon of God, the source of beauty. No less an authority than Thomas Aquinas has written, "God puts into creatures along with a kind of sheen, a reflection of God's own luminous ray . . . From this Beautiful One, beauty comes to be in all beings." Hans Urs von Balthasar, too, believes that at the deepest level of our being, we already "vibrate sympathetically" with beauty because we ourselves are beautifully created. In its presence, he says, we fall into "aesthetic arrest." He sees beauty and grace as one. It disturbs us, captivates us, provokes us. It keeps our eyes on distant horizons of ultimate beauty. It is what keeps us searching for God. Many readers will already be aware of the devotion to beauty expressed in the writings of Saint Augustine, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Simone Weil. We love reading the clear, pure expressions of beauty in the meditations of the mystics of the past and present. With imagination you don't have to travel far to find God-only notice things. The finite and infinite live in the same place. It is here alone, at this precarious and vital point, that the holy secret is laid bare. God walks in two shoes-the shoes of creation and the shoes of incarnation. Each footfall is a threshold moment-the breath before the vision, the cusp between the seen and the unseen, the substance of things hoped for, evidence of the invisible. 'I live in this world by attention,' wrote Simone Weil. Again, Hans Urs von Balthasar reminds us that without a feeling for beauty we cannot pray, 'and soon, will no longer be able to love.' Beauty always invites, entrances and awakens the sleeping divinity within us.

(Begin with the Heart pages 22, 23)