

ART & THEOLOGY: My Ruminations on the Good, the True, and the Beautiful

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Something is "beautiful only because the delight that it arouses in us is founded upon the fact that, in it, the truth and goodness of the depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed, and this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and inexhaustibly valuable and fascinating." (Hans Urs von Balthasar)

True beauty draws us out of ourselves toward the transcendent. The more beautiful an encounter is, the more the divine presence is made manifest to us. Thus, there is none more beautiful than that of the Incarnation of Christ. My hope with my drawings is to point to that fundamental importance of beauty as a vehicle to journey into the mind of God.

Every month I will share an art piece of mine along with a description of the theological reflection that went into it so as to hopefully provoke theological reflection of our own.



The Fate of the Firstborn

In this drawing I wanted to contrast two angelic powers of death and life as well as two sides of salvation history. On the left is the angel of death or the destroyer from Ex 12:23. "For the Lord will pass through to slay the Egyptians; and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you." Accordingly, he takes on an appearance of a grim reaper with skulls (or death) flowing from him. Those slain were the firstborn of the Egyptians and according to the early Church Fathers, Origen and St. Augustine, the destroyer was Satan. The

significance of the firstborn is that it signifies inheritance. God Himself recognized Israel as His firstborn (Ex 4:22) and thus was meant to take on His inheritance. However, the Egyptians were oppressing the Israelites and even killing their firstborn sons. By contrast God delivered the Egyptians unto their own sins and allowed their firstborn sons to be taken by the last of the ten plagues that ravaged Egypt. The plagues, as facilitated through Moses, were in response to the Egyptians' empty idolatry of false gods. They challenged Moses many times and each time they were rendered powerless before the true God, YHWH, because there is no other god. Rather than having the power of gods, the



Egyptians were shown that they were instead enslaved by the power of death.

I chose this reference because it illustrates the true result of the fall of Adam and Eve. "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death spread to all men because all men sinned." (Rom 5:12) After the fall, man's essential meaning had been obscured and thus no longer a surety having broken his relationship with God. Facing death then would mean facing the possibility of his essential meaninglessness holding man under a cycle of sin because of his insecurity. Certainly the Egyptian's insecurity manifested the most in the killing of the firstborn of

the Israelites.

However, the exodus event is an anticipation of the Christ event. Just as God, through Moses, delivered His people from bondage of the Egyptians, so too would God deliver all of mankind from the bondage of sin. No longer would we have to live under the power of sin and death but rather under the power of life in Christ. Thus I drew the archangel, Gabriel, juxtaposed to the right of the Angel of Death. He carries an olive branch as a symbol for Christ because one is anointed by the oil of the Olive and Christ means anointed. The flame above Gabriel is a symbol for the Holy Spirit, and lastly, lilies flow out of him as an image of life but also an allusion to Mary who would bear the life of our Lord in her womb. The Destroyer announced death manifested in the firstborn of the Egyptians and so in contrast Gabriel announced life to Mary in the form of the firstborn of the new creation, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. "If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." (Rom 5:17)