

American Council of Christian Churches
80th Anniversary, October 19-21, 2021
Hardingville Bible Church, Monroeville, NJ
Resolution on God's Sovereignty over Beauty

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”; “and God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:1, 31). What God created was beautiful in His eyes. He not only made creation's wonders, but also beheld its extreme goodness. Beauty was a part of the goodness He saw. Noah Webster defined *beauty* as “an assemblage of graces, or an assemblage of properties in the form of the person or any other object, which pleases the eye. . . . By an easy transition, the word beauty is used to express what is pleasing to the other senses, or to the understanding. Thus we say, the beauty of a thought, of a remark, of a sound, etc.”¹ Creation's beauty is both real and perceptible for the Lord and those made in His image. Because the Creator perceives beauty in His creation as its Divine Sovereign, standards of beauty are absolute. Things are beautiful to the degree that they please the Creator's eyes, ears, and omniscient understandings. Opinions about beauty that disagree with this standard are mistaken.

Prior to the Fall of Man, the world was universally beautiful. God saw *all* that He had made, beholding its entirety as very good. It was very good in the moral sense that it pleased Him and met with His sovereign approval. Nothing in God's creation was exempt from this assessment. Nothing was amoral. Nothing failed to be right, truthful, and beautiful. Regarding ethics, all creation was very righteous because no sin existed therein. Regarding reality, all creation was very truthful because no lie had been told. Regarding aesthetics, all creation was very beautiful because nothing ugly was there. God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.²

Genesis 3 describes what changed with the Fall of Man and his expulsion from the Garden of Eden. The Fall introduced nothing amoral. Instead, moral righteousness, moral truth, and moral beauty became mingled with their cursed counterparts. The Fall introduced the immoral. Creation groans today under the weight of unrighteousness, lies, and ugliness, what Paul calls “the bondage of corruption” and “travailing in pain together,” awaiting restoration through a new-creation redemption from the Creator (Rom. 8:21-22). The current mingling of the very good with the very evil began when sinful man enthroned his own sensibility as the arbiter of righteousness and unrighteousness, his own understanding as the identifier of truth and deceit, and what is pleasing his own eyes as the judge of beauty and ugliness.

Since the Fall the universal “very good” is no longer immanent in creation. Because of the curse of man's sin, absolute righteousness now transcends our sinful world, and man must delight in the law of the Lord to know ethical goodness (Ps.

1:2); absolute truth now transcends this domain of the lie, and man must submit in faith to Christ the Redeemer to know the good way, the good truth, and the good life (John 14:6); and absolute beauty transcends this now uglier place, and man must look through the eyes of the Lord to see good artistry (Deut. 11:11-12). These treasures come only from the Lord, for they are the righteousness, truth, and beauty of holiness (Luke 1:75, Rev. 3:7, Ps. 29:2).

Tragically, since the Fall sinful man has preferred the vulgar over the transcendent. Churches often begin to follow this pattern with the rejection of God's sovereignty over beauty, which leads to dire consequences in the loss of truth and righteousness. In his book, *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism*, Humanities professor Robert Pattison has shown how the pantheistic romanticism of rock-n-roll robbed Western culture and many of its churches of an ordinate affection for the transcendent. Today, many churches prefer the ugly rather than the beautiful, because it is the comfortable possession of the common man. This is the romance of pantheistic romanticism, where transcendence became inauthentic pretention. Pattison explains what this loss of transcendent beauty in music has meant for Christianity: “Rock knocks the props out from under religion, first, by shifting the locus of faith from God to self, and secondly, by depriving sects and churches of their claim to exclusive revelation. By forcing churches to compete on the basis of their ability to titillate the instincts of their worshippers, vulgar pantheism compels the champions of organized religions to abandon their pretension to superior truth and turns them into entrepreneurs of emotional stimulation.”³

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches at its 80th Anniversary, October 19-21, 2021, at Hardingville Bible Church in Monroeville, NJ, resolves to affirm God's sovereignty over beauty, resisting the temptation to allow the vulgarity of our age to turn our ministries into enterprises of emotional stimulation. We believe that beauty is in the eyes of the Sovereign Creator, not human beholders, and we determine to see as beautiful what He sees to be so. The Great Songwriter of the Psalms has put the artistry of a new song in our mouths, even praise to our God (Ps. 40:3), and we will sing that song, ever striving for the beauty of holiness in artful expression rather than the titillation of man's instincts and appetites. By God's grace, our artistry shall seek His glory and the pleasure of His eyes.



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¹ *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828; reprint, San Francisco: The Foundation for American Christian Education, 1983), s.v. “beauty.”

² For more detail on this topic, see the well-expressed “A Conservative Christian Declaration,” available at <https://religiousaffections.org/articles/articles-on-conservatism/introducing-a-conservative-christian-declaration>.

³ (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 186. Dr. Pattison taught at Long Island University.