

HISTORY OF AESTHETICS

Vol. II

MEDIEVAL AESTHETICS

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MEDIEVAL AESTHETICS

edited by

C. BARRETT

1970

MOUTON

THE HAGUE · PARIS

PWN—POLISH SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHERS

WARSZAWA

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Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe
(PWN—Polish Scientific Publishers)
Warszawa

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This is a translation from the original Polish
Historia estetyki · Estetyka średniowieczna
published in 1962 by "Ossolineum", Warszawa
translated by R. M. Montgomery

Printed in Poland
(DRP)

CONTENTS

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vii
I. THE AESTHETICS OF THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES	1
A. EASTERN AESTHETICS	1
1. Background	1
2. The Aesthetics of the <i>Holy Scriptures</i>	4
A. Texts from the <i>Holy Scriptures</i>	12
3. The Aesthetics of the Greek Church Fathers	14
B. Texts from the Greek Church Fathers	22
4. The Aesthetics of the Pseudo-Dionysius	27
C. Texts from the Pseudo-Dionysius	33
5. Byzantine Aesthetics	35
D. Texts from Byzantine Theologians	45
B. WESTERN AESTHETICS	47
1. The Aesthetics of St. Augustine	47
E. Texts from St. Augustine	59
2. Background to Further Developments	66
a. Political Background	66
b. Literature	69
c. Music	72
d. The Visual Arts	75
3. Aesthetics from Boethius to Isidore	78
F. Texts from Boethius, Cassiodorus and Isidore	86
4. Carolingian Aesthetics	91
G. Texts from Scholars of the Carolingian Period	99
5. Summary of Early Christian Aesthetics	106
II. THE AESTHETICS OF THE HIGH MIDDLE AGES	110
1. Social and Political Background	110
2. Poetics	113
H. Texts on Medieval Poetics	121

3. The Theory of Music	124
I. Texts on Medieval Theory of Music	131
4. The Theory of the Visual Arts	138
J. Texts on the Medieval Theory of the Visual Arts	170
5. Summary of the Theory of the Arts and Synopsis of Philosophical Aesthetics	178
6. Cistercian Aesthetics	183
K. Cistercian Texts	187
7. Victorine Aesthetics	190
L. Victorine Texts	197
8. The Aesthetics of the School of Chartres and Other Schools of the 12th Century	203
M. Texts of the School of Chartres and Other Schools of the 12th Century	209
9. The Beginnings of Scholastic Aesthetics	213
N. Texts from William of Auvergne and the <i>Summa Alexandri</i>	221
10. The Aesthetics of Robert Grosseteste	225
O. Texts from Robert Grosseteste	229
11. The Aesthetics of Bonaventure	232
P. Texts from Bonaventure	236
12. The Aesthetics of Albert the Great and Ulrich of Strassburg	240
Q. Texts from Albert the Great and Ulrich of Strassburg	242
13. The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas	245
R. Texts from Thomas Aquinas	257
14. The Aesthetics of Alhazen and Vitelo	263
S. Texts from Vitelo	267
15. Late Scholastic Aesthetics	271
T. Texts from Duns Scotus and William Ockham	276
16. The Aesthetics of Dante	279
U. Texts from Dante	282
17. Summary of Medieval Aesthetics	285
18. Ancient and Medieval Aesthetics	293
19. The Old and the New Aesthetics	298
NAME INDEX	305
SUBJECT INDEX	312

TABLE OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Section of the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople (after O. Schubert)	153
2. Section of the Capella Palatina in Aachen (after O. Schubert)	154
3. The Church of San Vitale in Ravenna (after L. Niemojewski)	155
4. Horizontal projection of the Church at St. Gallen	156
5. Horizontal projection of Worms Cathedral	157
6. The façade of Notre-Dame in Paris	158
7. Section of the Church of San Petronio in Bologna (after an engraving of 1592)	159
8. Section of Milan Cathedral (after a drawing of 1391 by the mathematician Stornaloco)	160
9. The socles of a Gothic column based on a circle, a square and a triangle (from the goldsmiths' patterns, Basle, c. 1500, after M. Ueberwasser) .	162
10. Gothic baldachins based on a triangle and a rectangle (from the gold- smiths' patterns, Basle, c. 1500, after M. Ueberwasser)	162
11. The stratified architecture of Gothic altars (from the goldsmiths' patterns, Basle, c. 1500, after M. Ueberwasser)	163
12. Projection and structure of a dodecagonal Gothic baldachin (from the goldsmiths' patterns, Basle, c. 1500, after M. Ueberwasser)	164
13-17. Drawings by Villard de Honnecourt (Figs. 13, 14, 16 and 17 in the Manuscripts Department of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, Fig. 15, after H. R. Hahnloser)	166-169

I. THE AESTHETICS OF THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

A. EASTERN AESTHETICS

1. Background

1. CHRISTIANITY. Even before the 1st century B.C., at a time when Hellenistic culture was still flourishing and Rome was at the height of her power, a change took place in men's attitude to life and the world. Their minds were drawn away from temporal things and turned to those of another world. In certain circles, a rational attitude gave place to mysticism; immediate needs took second place to the demands of religion. These new attitudes and demands produced new religions, sects, rituals and religio-philosophical systems, a whole new view of the world, and, with it, a new aesthetics. Materialistic and positivistic philosophies lost ground, and Platonism came into its own again. A special feature of the epoch was the appearance of the Neo-Platonic system of Plotinus; monistic, transcendent, emanative, with a theory of knowledge, ethics and aesthetics based on ecstasy.

But most fruitful of all in its consequences was the rise of the Christian religion. For three centuries after its inception, when its adherents were still few and without influence in politics and in society generally, the old forms of life and thought lingered on. These centuries still belong to the period of antiquity. But from the 4th century, or to be more precise, from 313, when, by an edict of Constantine the Great, Christianity could be professed without hindrance, and especially from 325, when it became the state religion, the new ways of living and thinking gained the ascendancy over the ancient; a new period had begun in the history of the "inhabited world".

The basis of Christianity lay in its faith, its moral law, its principle of love and its proclamation of eternal life. It had no need of science or philosophy, still less of aesthetics. "Love of God is the true philosophy", said John Damascene, and Isidore of Seville wrote: "The first task of science is to seek after God, and the second to strive for nobility of life". Thus, if Christianity were to propound a philosophy, it would be a philosophy of its own, different from any which had gone before.

The Fathers of the Latin Church, living in the austere regions of Africa and the sober circles of Rome, preferred to renounce philosophy altogether. Not so the Fathers of the Greek Church. Living among the philosophical traditions of Athens or Antioch, they realized that with the pagans, too, philosophy was shifting towards

a religious attitude. They understood the need for philosophy and the possibility of making use of Greek philosophy in the creation of a Christian philosophy. Tertullian tried to form a Christian philosophy on the basis of Stoicism, Gregory of Nyssa on the basis of Platonism, and Origen one based on Neo-Platonic philosophy. But the Church did not give its approval to these efforts. By the 4th and 5th centuries, however, a Christian philosophy, comprising Christian belief together with elements of ancient learning, was recognized by the Church, and it is to be found in the writings of the Greek Fathers and Augustine. Aesthetics was not of primary importance, but it had a place in this philosophy.

It so happened that those who first developed early Christian philosophy had considerable interest and competence in aesthetics. Apart from Greek ideas, their aesthetics, like their whole philosophy, was derived from the *Holy Scriptures*. Thus, one should start a history of the aesthetics of the period with the aesthetic ideas contained in the *Holy Scriptures*.

2. THE TWO EMPIRES. In this same 4th century which marked the beginning of the Christian era and in which the foundations of Christian philosophy and aesthetics were laid, another important change took place: the "inhabited world" split into an Eastern and a Western Empire. The Eastern and Western parts of the Roman Empire differed greatly in their political systems and mentality, but these differences were deepened when, in 395, the Empire became divided politically into East and West. From that time onwards, the political and cultural history of the two Empires went separate ways. The Western Empire soon disintegrated; the Eastern Empire survived a thousand years. And while the Western Empire underwent change, the conservative Eastern Empire tried to arrest development: and it succeeded. The Western Empire had to adapt itself, at least partially, to the customs and tastes of its northern conquerors, while the Eastern Empire, standing on the frontiers of Eastern Europe, was open to Asiatic influences. Most important, it was possible in the East to preserve the forms of ancient culture; in the West, they were destroyed and forgotten. The East was able not only to preserve and live by these ancient cultural forms, but also to develop them; the West, having lost its ancient and more perfect cultural forms, had to create new ones, starting from the beginning. In the East, an era was coming to an end; in the West, a new period of history was beginning. If the new forms of culture which were created in the West after the fall of Rome are to be called "medieval", then the East had no Middle Ages. True, the East too adapted itself to new forms of life and culture, but it did not start entirely from the beginning. It perpetuated those of antiquity.

The history of Christian culture, art and aesthetics should therefore follow these two separate lines of development, and since its standpoint is directly connected with antiquity, one should start with the East. Here, for many centuries, the Byzantines continued to speak Greek and think in the Greek manner, while beginning to think in a Christian way. The Academy of Plato survived until the 6th century. Constantine the Great intended Byzantium to take over the heritage of Rome, and

it did in fact become the "New Rome". At the same time, by virtue of its geographical and historical position, it enjoyed the heritage of Greece. There was no lack of ancient models here: at the order of the emperors, ancient works of art throughout the Empire were seized and brought to Byzantium. In front of the church of St. Sophia alone, 427 Greek and Roman statues were erected. Such were the surroundings in which Christian music and the Christian visual arts began, and here the first great Christian shrines arose, foremost among them St. Sophia. It was here too that the Christians started thinking about aesthetic matters.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Historians, on the assumption that the Middle Ages were concerned with theology or at most with psychology and cosmology, did not think of looking for aesthetics in the medieval heritage; thus, for a long time there was no literature on medieval aesthetics. It was not dealt with in general works on the history of philosophy, and specialized works on the history of aesthetics passed the medieval period by: after dealing with ancient aesthetics, they passed directly to the treatment of modern aesthetics.

Although the writers of the Middle Ages did not leave behind any treatises on aesthetics, we find certain principles and deductions of aesthetic interest in theological, psychological and cosmological treatises, which reflect a conception of beauty and art. Many texts of interest to the historian of aesthetics are contained in the publications of J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (quoted below as *PG*) in its 161 volumes, and *Patrologia Latina* (quoted as *PL*) in 221 volumes, and also in later, and for the most part better, editions of medieval writers. Some of the works of these writers are still in unpublished manuscripts.

The first works on medieval aesthetics were monograph studies of Augustine, and then of Thomas Aquinas, at the end of the 19th century. They were few and covered only a small part of the subject. After the Second World War, however, there immediately appeared a work on the whole medieval heritage: Edgar de Bruyne, *Etudes d'Esthétique Médiévale*, 3 volumes (Ghent University Press, 1946). Thanks to the work of this one man, a fuller collection of sources for the history of aesthetics is available for medieval than for ancient times. This material has been dealt with in great detail, but has not yet been condensed and collected from hundreds of monographs. It is on the material collected by de Bruyne that the present work is largely based; it calls for condensation and selection, since along with texts of importance to aesthetics, de Bruyne's work contains many that are not essential. Apart from the publication of these source studies, de Bruyne has twice published a systematic exposition of medieval aesthetics: in French, *Esthétique du Moyen Age* (Louvain, 1947), and in Flemish, *Geschiedenis van de Aesthetica de Middeleeuwen* (Antwerp, 1951-1955).

The material collected by de Bruyne does not cover the aesthetics of Eastern Christendom, and it begins with the aesthetics of the West after Augustine. De

Bruyne's *Etudes* deal with Boethius in vol. I, p. 3, with Cassiodorus I, 35, with Isidore I, 74, with Carolingian aesthetics I, 165, with medieval poetics I, 216 and II, 3, with the medieval theory of music I, 306 and II, 108, with the theory of visual art I, 243, II, 69, and II, 371, with the aesthetics of the mystics III, 30, with Victorine aesthetics II, 203, with William of Auvergne, William of Auxerre and the *Summa Alexandri* III, 72, with Robert Grosseteste III, 121, with Bonaventure III, 189, with Albert the Great III, 153, with Thomas Aquinas III, 278, and with Vitelo III, 239.

De Bruyne writes in his foreword that he intended to give "*un recueil de textes devant servir à l'histoire de l'esthétique médiévale*", but he has fallen short of this intention. He has included the texts partly in the body of his own comments, partly in the notes, giving them mostly in the original, sometimes with a translation, and occasionally only in French. There is still no collection of sources for medieval aesthetics. In view of this, in the present work we have undertaken the task of collecting together, as has been done for ancient aesthetics, those texts which seem most important. The collection is not complete, but some ideas in the field of aesthetics were repeated so often by medieval authors that a complete collection would cease to be of use by its very monotony; a selection of typical texts seemed more appropriate.

The only major collection of texts on medieval aesthetics to date is published in Italian translation in *Grande Antologia Filosofica*, vol. V (1954): R. Montano, *L'estetica nel pensiero cristiano*, pp. 207-310.

Apart from the works of de Bruyne, it is the Italian literature on the subject that possesses the fullest synthetic treatment of medieval aesthetics, in the collective publication *Momenti e problemi di storia dell'estetica*, vol. I (1959), viz.: Q. Cataudella, *Estetica cristiana*, pp. 81-114, and U. Eco, *Sviluppo dell'estetica medievale*, pp. 115-229. This publication also contains the most complete bibliography on the subject (pp. 113-114 and 217-229). It had to be supplemented mainly by some works on the history of literature, music and the visual arts, covering general questions of an aesthetic nature. As a whole, the monographical literature on medieval aesthetics is very limited, and has enormous gaps. In the present *History*, the most important texts are given in references, in particular those connected with the *Holy Scriptures* (pp. 5-10), the aesthetics of the Fathers of the Church (pp. 15, 18, 19, 20), Byzantine aesthetics (pp. 35, 37, 38, 40, 42, 43), the aesthetics of Augustine (pp. 48, 50, 55, 56), of Thomas Aquinas (p. 246), the aesthetics of the visual arts (pp. 140, 143, 144, 145, 146, 150, 151, 153, 159, 160, 169, 170), of music (p. 125), and of poetry (pp. 114, 116).

2. The Aesthetics of the *Holy Scriptures*

The early Christian writers who initiated Christian philosophy also initiated Christian aesthetics; they were, on the one hand, the Greek Fathers, especially St. Basil, and on the other, the Latin Fathers, led by St. Augustine. The former

took Greek, the latter Roman sources as their point of departure; and both groups were acquainted with ancient theories of beauty and art and drew on them. This, however, was only one source of their aesthetics; another, naturally, was their own Christian beliefs, contained in the *Holy Scriptures*. Although the *Holy Scriptures* served other than aesthetic purposes, the early writers none the less found ideas on aesthetics in them, especially in the *Old Testament*.

The word "beautiful" (*kalos*) occurs several times in the *Septuagint*, the Greek version of the *Holy Scriptures*. Certain aesthetic questions are raised and treated there. Most of these aesthetic questions are raised in two books of the *Old Testament*, each of them completely different in character: *Genesis* and the *Book of Wisdom*. Beauty is also very prominent in the *Song of Solomon*. But in the *Ecclesiastes* and *Proverbs*, it is mentioned less frequently.

1. THE BOOK OF GENESIS. The first chapter of *Genesis* contains a statement of great importance for aesthetics, because it concerns the beauty of the world. This chapter relates how God, surveying the world he had created, appraised his work. *Genesis* says: "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very beautiful".⁽¹⁾ This expression is repeated several times in *Genesis* (1, 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31). Here one finds, first, the belief that the world is beautiful (the belief in *pankalia*), and secondly, the belief that it is beautiful because like a work of art it is the conscious creation of a thinking being.

Though *Genesis* certainly contains these ideas in the Greek version, it seems that they are not to be found in the original, but were introduced by the translators. The sense of the Hebrew original, according to the experts*, is different: the word which the translators of the *Septuagint*, Jewish scholars of Alexandria in the 3rd century B.C. translated by the Greek *kalos*, "beautiful", was an adjective of wider meaning, denoting external and internal qualities (especially moral qualities: "valour", "usefulness", "goodness"), but not necessarily aesthetic ones. The real sense of the words of *Genesis*, in which God appraises his work, is that it was successful. These words contain a general, and not specifically aesthetic, approbation of the world, not a specific aesthetic appraisal. This accords with the general mood of the *Old Testament* and with the fact that beauty played practically no part in biblical worship and religion.

Nonetheless, the translators had grounds for using the word *kalos*, which also had a wide sense, with many shades of meaning, and denoted not only aesthetic, but also moral beauty, and, in general, anything deserving praise and affording pleasure. It is possible that they used it without having aesthetic beauty especially in mind, and that it was only in later times that the word was understood in this sense. But it is also possible that the translators themselves interpreted it in this sense; for in the 3rd century B.C. the intellectual life of Alexandria was Greek,

**Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, hrsg. v. G. Kittel (1938), vol. III, p. 539 (article *καλός* by W. Grundmann).

and the Jews, too, were subject to Greek influence, and were therefore inclined not to take a purely moral attitude towards the world.

One way or another, deliberately or not, by translating the biblical idea that the world was a success by the word *kalos*, the translators of the *Septuagint* introduced into the *Bible* a Greek idea about the beauty of the world. This was the result, if not the intention, of the translation. Once introduced, the idea continued to exert its influence. It did not pass into the Latin version of the *Holy Scriptures*; the *Vulgate* translated *kalos* by *bonum*, and not *pulchrum*. Nonetheless, it remained in both medieval and modern Christian culture.

Though the Christian aestheticians, who put forward the view that the world is beautiful, appealed to the *Old Testament*, this idea did not have its source there. One cannot even say that it had two sources, a Greek and a biblical. It was entirely Greek. What appears to be biblical aesthetics, was in fact Greek in origin and found its way into the *Bible* through Greek influence, by way of translation into Greek.

This idea of the beauty of creation, as stated in the *Book of Genesis*, recurs in the *Book of Wisdom* (XIII, 7 and XIII, 5) and *Ecclesiasticus* (XLIII, 9 and XXXIX, 16),⁽²⁾ where the operation of Jehovah in nature and history is called in Greek *kala*. The same idea occurs in *Ecclesiastes* (III, 11),⁽³⁾ and in *Psalms* XXV, 8: "Lord, I love the beauty of thy house"⁽⁴⁾ and, in slightly different terms, in *Psalms* XCV, 6, where the word *horaios*, which has a more specifically aesthetic meaning than *kalos*, is used. In all these passages of the *Holy Scriptures*, one sees a reflection of the aesthetic tenets of Hellenism.*

These books of the *Old Testament* have their origin in the Hellenistic period: *Ecclesiastes* is said to date from the 3rd century B.C., *Ecclesiasticus* from the beginning of the 2nd century, and the *Book of Wisdom* from as late as the 1st century B.C., that is, from the period when Jewish theologians, like Philo of Alexandria, had a good knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy.

2. THE BOOK OF WISDOM. The *Book of Wisdom* is the book of the *Old Testament* in which beauty is mentioned most. It speaks of the beauty of creation, and this beauty is regarded as a sign of the existence and activity of God. Through the greatness and beauty of his creation, the Creator, who brought it into being, is known analogically (XIII, 5).⁽⁵⁾ The book speaks not only of the beauty of divine creation, but also of human "creation", that is, the beauty not only of nature, but also of works of art, whose charm is so great that "people ascribe divinity to them".

But apart from this, the book introduces another, completely different idea, which was not religious but philosophical and purely Greek, Pythagorean and Platonic. It is: that God arranged "everything according to measure, number and weight",

*Some theologians call the *Book of Genesis* plainly "Greek": J. Hempel, "Göttliches Schöpfer-tum und menschliches Schöpfertum", in: *Forschungen zur Kunstgeschichte und christlichen Archäologie*, vol. II (1953), p. 18: "In einer für das ganze Kulturbewusstsein des alten Israel und seine Ausstrahlungen im Mittelalter weithin kennzeichnenden Weise tritt ein Gefühl für den ästhetischen und damit einen Eigenwert des Geschaffenen vor der 'griechischen' *Sapientia Salomonis* nie auf."

omnia in mensura et numero et pondere (XI, 21);⁽⁶⁾ this is a mathematical theory of aesthetics. Such a theory in a religious book was evidence of the extent of Greek influence and in this case, not only on the translation, but on the book itself. The fact that this theory found its way into the pages of the *Holy Scriptures* was of the greatest importance in medieval aesthetics; the authority of the *Scriptures* allowed it to be propounded and led to the unexpected result that a mathematical theory became one of the main aesthetic theories of a religious period. This idea occurs more than once in the *Old Testament*: according to *Ecclesiasticus*, God measured out his creation, *denumeravit et mensus est* (I, 9).⁽⁷⁾

3. ECCLESIASTES AND THE SONG OF SOLOMON. While, through the Greeks, aesthetic optimism and mathematical notions of beauty found their way into the aesthetics of the *Bible*, the attitude of the Hebrews themselves contributed a completely different element,* namely, an indifference to beauty and to the appearance of things. When talking of buildings, the Hebrews would describe how they were made, but never how they looked. True, it is said that Joseph, David or Absalom were beautiful, but their beauty is not described. The Hebrews betrayed no interest in the appearance of things or of people; their mind did not dwell on appearances; it was as though these escaped their attention. If they paid any attention to external qualities in people, it was only to those which expressed their inner experiences.

From indifference it was not a great step to aversion. *Proverb* expresses a sense of the vanity of beauty: *Fallax gratia et vana est pulchritudo* (XXI, 30).⁽⁸⁾ Even here one might discern a Greek theme which had its origins in Sceptic circles among Greek philosophers; but the biblical attitude to beauty was more scornful than that of the Greek philosophers. It is characteristic of *Holy Scriptures* to speak of a sensuous, visible and aesthetic beauty when describing the Tree of Knowledge, which the *Vulgate* calls *pulchrum oculis aspectuque delectabile*, "beautiful to the eyes and pleasant to look at": here it is a question of something dangerous, the source of human misfortunes.

The negative attitude to beauty contained in the *Old Testament* did not find a general response among Christians. It did not prevent some of them from glorifying beauty and regarding it as a good gift of God, a testimony to His perfection. These two opposite attitudes to beauty—beauty as vanity and beauty as a manifestation of the divine—were to recur constantly in Christian aesthetics throughout the ages.

Another peculiarity of the Hebrew attitude to appearance was that they regarded it symbolically. They were convinced that the visible is not important in itself, but only as a sign of the invisible. A man's beauty is determined by his internal qualities, which manifest themselves outwardly in his appearance. If the Hebrews carved or painted images of their prophets, of the sacrifice of Isaac or of Moses in the

* T. Boman, *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem griechischen* (Göttingen, 1954)—My further remarks on the attitude of the *Old Testament* and the Hebrews to beauty are also to a large extent based on this book, especially on pp. 60–103.

Burning Bush (which in fact they did, though rarely, as has been proved by archaeological discoveries dating from the third century at Dura-Europos on the Euphrates), then the purpose of this was to depict the activity of God. The Gentiles painted and carved their gods, while the Hebrews painted and carved the symbols and the works of their God. Although the Christians in part took over this attitude, they also took over the attitude of the pagans. Because of this, their attitude to beauty and art was twofold: immediate and symbolic apprehension. Both attitudes are to be found in their aesthetics.

Yet another peculiarity of the Hebrew conception of beauty is reflected in the description of the beloved in the *Song of Solomon*. Two features which make for beauty are described here: on the one hand, moral purity and inaccessibility (she is compared with a tower and a fortress), which are interior qualities manifested outwardly. But on the other hand, the beloved has other qualities which give her charm, on account of which she is compared to flowers, jewellery, things pleasant to taste and fragrant, the sweetness of wine, the perfumes of Lebanon, of saffron, and of aloes, and to a spring of fresh water.

Both these features point to a conception of beauty different from that of the Greeks.

4. THE HEBREW AND GREEK CONCEPTIONS OF BEAUTY. 1. For the Greeks, things had an immediate beauty, but in the *Old Testament* their beauty was indirect, symbolical. 2. For the Greeks, the properties of things determined their beauty; for the Hebrews, it was their effect, the impression they made on the subject. 3. For the Greeks, beauty was basically visual; for the Hebrews, it was as much, if not more, a matter of tastes, smells, sounds; it was synonymous with sensuous attraction which is as strong, if not stronger, in the other senses. And also 4. for the Greeks, beauty consisted in harmony, that is, in the harmonious arrangement of elements, while for the Hebrews it belonged to the elements themselves; thus, for the Greeks beauty lay in the combination of elements, while for the Hebrews it lay in the fact that they were not combined; it was the pure and unmixed that was beautiful. The light of the sun and moon and individual colours were, for the *Old Testament* Hebrews, more beautiful than any combination of colours; the same was true of music. 5. Thus, while among the Greeks it was form that constituted the beauty of a thing, here it was the intensity of its properties, colour, light, smell and sound. For the Hebrews, beauty lay in what was alive and active: in grace, fullness and strength, and not in perfect proportion or in form. "The Hebrews found the highest beauty in shapeless and terrifying fire, and in life-giving light."* 6. While the Greeks were susceptible to colour and form, the Hebrews were susceptible to light; and they were more susceptible to the saturation of light than to shades of colour.† The colours they admired also differed from those admired by the Greeks. While

* T. Boman, *op. cit.*

† H. Guthe, *Kurzes Bibelwörterbuch* (Tübingen, 1903).

one may assume that the Greeks regarded blue as the most beautiful of colours, the colour of the sky and of Athene's eyes, the Hebrews, according to the philologists, did not even have a specific name for it; for them, red was a beautiful colour. Next: 7. Beauty in the Greek classical epoch was static, it was a beauty of calm and balance; while for the Hebrews beauty had always been dynamic; it was the beauty of movement, life and action.* 8. The presence of beauty in nature was something basic to the Greeks; with the Hebrews, the beauty of nature played a minor part. 9. The Greeks represented their gods in stone, while the Hebrews were forbidden to depict God at all. Since they conceived Him as imageless, beauty, in the true sense of the word, could not be one of His attributes. True, the *Scriptures* say that God created man "in Our image, after Our likeness", but this *imago Dei* was understood, not as a reproduction of God's physical appearance, but as a physical image of a non-physical God; the *imago* here was a form in which deity appeared, and not a likeness of the deity.†

The God of the *Old Testament* was characterized by the highest attributes which included greatness and magnificence, but not beauty. And yet, in the *Song of Solomon* and not, as one would expect, in the *Pentateuch*, one finds this sentence: *ostende mihi faciem tuam ... facies tua speciosa*⁽⁹⁾—"Let me see thy countenance... thy countenance is comely". This can only be reconciled with Hebrew view of beauty if one assumes that the word *speciosus*, "beautiful", is used here in a different sense, in a sense which could be applied to the deity, beautiful as affording, not sensuous, but purely intellectual pleasure. The beauty of God was also mentioned in another sense by a philosopher Philo of Alexandria whose work was closely related to the *Old Testament*, to see that which is divine and not created, he wrote, is better than good and *more beautiful than beauty*.⁽¹⁰⁾ This refined conception of beauty was to consolidate itself in Christian aesthetics.

The conception of beauty contained in the *Old Testament* certainly had more than one source; it grew out of the conditions in which the Hebrews lived, from their monotheistic religion, and in particular from the prohibitions introduced by this religion.

5. THE BAN ON PAINTING AND SCULPTURE. Moses forbade the representation of God, and, indeed, of any living thing whatsoever. In the *Pentateuch*, this ban is laid down most explicitly and repeated no less than eight times (*Exod.* XX, 4; *Exod.* XX, 23; *Exod.* XXXIV, 17; *Lev.* XXVI, 1; *Deut.* IV, 15; *Deut.* IV, 23; *Deut.* V, 8; *Deut.* XXVII, 15). Six times the making of idols is prohibited; once the making of graven images or of anything "in the form of man or woman", and four times the

* "Die Bildlosigkeit der Jahwereligion erstreckte sich nicht nur auf Skulptur und Gemälde, sondern auch auf das fromme Bewusstsein. Ihre Vorstellungen von Gott waren motorisch, dynamisch, auditiv." (Boman, *op. cit.*, p. 92).

† Yet another contrast is to be found by comparing descriptions from Homer and the *Bible*: E. Auerbach, *Mimesis, the Representation of Beauty in Western Literature* (1957; German original: 1946).

carving of any living being, of any likeness of what is in the sky above and on the earth below, or of what is in the waters under the earth.⁽¹¹⁾ The bans prohibited "images" in general, and sculpture in particular, whether molten or graven or wrought images; in one place, both molten and graven images are mentioned together (*Deut.* XXVII, 15).⁽¹²⁾

The intention of these bans was undoubtedly religious in character. They were introduced in order to prevent idolatry.* Their thoroughness is striking: they covered all living beings; and they were remarkably effective. They were scrupulously observed for many centuries. They account for the absence of Hebrew sculptors and painters and for the fact that the Hebrews ceased generally to practise the fine arts. A further consequence seems to have been a diminution of the nation's aesthetic needs. If these needs found an outlet, it was not in beauty of form, but in richness of material. *Ezekiel* writes (XXVIII, 13): "Every precious stone was thy covering, the sard, topaz and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald and the carbuncle". What is precious or magnificent was considered to be of the highest beauty by the Hebrews.

The attitude of the *Old Testament* to music was entirely different from its attitude to the visual arts: not only was music not forbidden, it formed part of religious worship. We have evidence for this in the *Psalms*, especially in *Psalm* CL: "Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet: praise Him with the psaltery and harp... praise Him upon the high sounding cymbals". The most beautiful words about music are to be found in 2 *Kings*, III, 15, where Jehoshaphat asks Elisha about the future, and Elisha, not being endowed with the gift of prophecy, says: "But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him. And he said, Thus saith the Lord". Religious and secular writers have often put forward the view that truth can be arrived at by music, or by art in general, as well as and better than by science and philosophy, but they have never expressed themselves more forcibly than does this verse from the *Bible*. And despite the differences between the biblical attitude to art and that of Greek classical philosophy, the distinction between the visual arts and music was common to both.

6. THE HERITAGE OF ANTIQUITY. To sum up: three aesthetic themes were of major significance in the *Old Testament*; first, the beauty of the universe, secondly, the derivation of beauty from "measure, number and weight", and thirdly, the vanity and even the danger inherent in beauty. All three were familiar to the Greeks: the first was the Hellenistic theme of *pankalia*, the second the Pythagorean theme of measure, and the third a theme taken from the Cynics. The first two probably entered

* L. Pirotta and A. Robert, *Dictionnaire de la Bible*, Suppl. vol. IV (1949): article "Idoles, idolatrie", by A. Gelin, p. 169ff., and article "Images", by J. B. Frey, p. 199ff.—Cf. P. Kleinert in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vols. III and VI (1897 and 1899).—G. F. Moore in Cheyne's *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, vol. II (1901).—A. Lods in Hasting's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. VII.—L. Bréhier, *La Querelle des images* (1904).—J. Tixeront, *Histoire des dogmes*, vol. III (1928).

the *Old Testament* through the Greeks; only the third was an original contribution on the part of the author of *Ecclesiastes*.

Some historians have called the theme of measure the "sapiential theme",* that is, the theme of the *Book of Wisdom*, but the author of this work undoubtedly took it from the Greeks and did not invent it himself. The theme of *pankalia*, however, although it also had its origin among the Greeks, may be more closely connected with the *Bible*, since in the *Bible* it assumed a meaning which it did not have among the Greeks and can more correctly be described as the "biblical theme".

Christian aesthetics drew both on the *Old Testament* and on the Greek authors. The fact that in some books, and especially in the *Septuagint* translation, the *Old Testament* itself drew on the Greek, made the combination of the two sources easier. Nevertheless, duality, tension and contradictions remained. In Christian aesthetics, beauty was both symbolically and immediately apprehended; there was the beauty of light and the beauty of harmony, the beauty of life and the beauty of peace. Christians regarded beauty as *vana pulchritudo*, and at the same time as one of the supreme perfections of creation. Tertullian supported the ban on the making of images (though on different grounds: namely to avoid the falsehood to which every form of representation is prone), but the majority of Christians followed the example of the Greeks. They engaged in the arts and depicted not only the works of creation, but the Creator himself. The dual source of Christian aesthetics was reflected more in practice, in tastes, preferences, and in the works themselves, than in theory and scientific generalization, because in the latter the Christians followed the Greeks.

The early Christians, living in the Hellenistic world, dealt with aesthetic problems, when they did so, in terms of the Hellenistic concepts which were then current. The better educated were also acquainted with Greek theories, such as the view, popularized by the Eclectics, that beauty consists in the arrangement of parts, and the more recent theory of Plotinus that beauty consists in light and brilliance.

But the aesthetic views taken over from antiquity were put by the Christians to new uses and took on a new meaning. This was due to their religious attitude, which referred all values to God, and also to their moral attitude, according to which all human activity is subordinated to moral considerations. The world is beautiful—because God created it. The world has measure and number—because these have been conferred on it by God. Beauty is vain when compared with eternal values and with the moral purposes of man. It was on account of these assumptions that the transition from ancient to Christian aesthetics—even though the Christians took over the main ideas of the Greeks and Romans—terminated in new set of ideas; it was not due to any single idea, but to a new view of the world.

7. THE GOSPEL. The Christian view of the world was based first and foremost on the *New Testament*. But the *New Testament* contains even less aesthetics than the

* E. de Bruyne, *Esthétique du Moyen Age* (Louvain, 1947).

Old Testament; one could even say it contains none at all. True, the word "beautiful" (*kalos*) does occur several times: in the *Gospel according to St. Matthew*, it is said that trees yield beautiful fruit (VII, 17; XII, 33), that the sower sows beautiful seed (XIII, 27, 37, 38), and especially that deeds are beautiful (V, 16). This beauty, however, is never aesthetic, but always and exclusively moral; it is beauty and goodness in the Christian sense, that is, in the sense of an act performed out of love and faith. When St. John the Evangelist speaks of *ho poimen ho kalos* (19, 11 and 14), one can only translate this as "good shepherd", and not as "beautiful shepherd". In the same way, in early Christian literature, *kalos nomos* is used in the sense of "good law", and *kalos diakonos* in the sense of "good priest".

Of the types of beauty known to Hellenism, the *Gospel* exalted only one: moral beauty. Beauty in the narrowly aesthetic sense, beauty of appearance or form, was not important. And yet the beauty of things is not scorned; in the Sermon on the Mount (*Matth.* VI, 28–29) it is said: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these".⁽¹³⁾ The physical world and its beauty has its importance because, as St. Paul says, through it eternal power and divinity have made themselves visible.⁽¹⁴⁾

If the early Christians found no specifically aesthetic ideas in the *Gospel*, they did find some indication of the attitude which they should adopt to every aspect of life, including beauty and art. This attitude was based on a belief in the superiority of the eternal over the temporal, of the spiritual over the physical, and of the moral over every other good. Thus, though no aesthetic theories are to be found in the *New Testament*, it contained a criterion which determined what aesthetic theories a Christian could accept. It was not long before Christian thinkers began to employ this criterion.

A. Texts from the *Holy Scriptures*

GENESIS I, 31

(cf. I, 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25)

1. Καὶ εἶδεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα, ὅσα ἐποίησεν καὶ ἰδοὺ καλὰ λίαν.
(Viditque Deus cuncta, quae fecerat, et erant valde bona).

ECCLESIASTICUS, XXXIX, 21

2. τὰ ἔργα κυρίου πάντα ὅτι καλὰ σφόδρα.
(Opera domini universa bona valde).

ECCLESIASTES, III, 11.

3. σύν τὰ πάντα ἐποίησεν καλὰ ἐν καιρῷ αὐτοῦ.
(Cuncta fecit bona in tempore suo).

THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD

1. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very beautiful.

2. All the works of the Lord are very beautiful.

3. He hath made everything beautiful in its time.

PSALM XXV, 8

4. κύριε, ἠγάπησα εὐπρέπειαν οἴκου σου.
(Domine, dilexi decorem domus tuae).

4. Lord, I love the beauty of thy house.

PSALM XCV, 6

ἐξομολόγησις καὶ ὠραιότης ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ.
(Majestas et decor praecedunt eum).

Honour and beauty are before him.

BOOK OF WISDOM, XIII, 5.

5. Ἐκ γὰρ μεγέθους καὶ καλλονῆς κτισμάτων ἀναλόγως ὁ γενεσιουργὸς αὐτῶν θεωρεῖται.
(A magnitudine enim speciei et creaturae cognoscibiliter poterit creator horum videri).

ALL THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD
REVEALS THE CREATOR

5. For from the greatness and beauty of the creation, the creator of these things can easily be recognized.

BOOK OF WISDOM, XI, 21.

6. πάντα μέτρῳ καὶ ἀριθμῷ καὶ σταθμῷ διέταξας.
(Omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti).

THE WORLD OWES ITS BEAUTY
TO MEASURE, NUMBER AND WEIGHT

6. Thou hast arranged all, o Lord, according to its measure, number and weight.

ECCLESIASTICUS, I, 9.

7. κύριος αὐτὸς ἔκτισεν αὐτήν καὶ εἶδε καὶ ἐξηρίθμησεν αὐτήν.
(Ille creavit illam in Spiritu sancto et vidit, et dinumeravit, et mensus est).

7. God created it (wisdom) in the Holy Ghost, and he saw and counted and measured.

PROVERBS, XXXI, 30.

8. ψευδεῖς ἀρεσκειαι, καὶ μάταιον κάλλος.
(Fallax gratia et vana est pulchritudo).

THE INSIGNIFICANCE OF BEAUTY

8. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain.

SONG OF SOLOMON, II, 14.

9. Ostende mihi faciem tuam et auditum fac mihi vocem tuam, quoniam vox tua suavis est mihi et facies tua speciosa.

THE BEAUTY OF GOD

9. Let me see thy countenance, and let me hear thy voice, for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA,

Legatio ad Gaium, 5.

10. Τὸ ἀγένητον καὶ θεῖον ὄραν... τὸ κρείττον μὲν ἀγαθοῦ, κάλλιον δὲ καλοῦ.

10. To see that which is divine and not created is better than good and more beautiful than beauty.

EXODUS, XX, 5.

11. Οὐ ποιήσεις σεαυτῷ εἶδωλον οὐδὲ παντὸς ὁμοίωμα ὅσα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἄνω

AGAINST IMAGES

11. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image nor any likeness of any thing that

καὶ ὅσα ἐν τῇ γῆ κάτω καὶ ὅσα ἐν τοῖς
ὕδασιν ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς.

(Non facies tibi sculptile neque omnem similitudinem quae est in coelo desuper et quae in terra deorsum nec eorum quae sunt in aquis sub terra).

is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath
or that is in the water under the earth.

DEUTERONOMY, XXVII, 15.

12. ἐπικατάρατος ἄνθρωπος ὅστις ποιήσει
γλυπτὸν καὶ χωνευτὸν, βδέλυγμα κυρίου,
ἔργον χειρῶν τεχνιτῶν.

(Maledictus homo, qui facit sculptibile et conflabile, abominationem Domini, opus manuum artificum).

12. Cursed be the man that maketh any
graven or molten image, an abomination unto
the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman.

MATTHEW, VI, 28–29.

13. Considerate lilia agri quomodo crescunt: non laborant neque nent. Dico autem vobis quoniam nec Salomon in omni gloria sua coopertus est sicut unum ex istis.

PAUL, Romans, I, 20.

14. Invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi, per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur.

THE BEAUTY OF NATURE

13. Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

GOD VISIBLE IN THE CREATION

14. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.

3. The Aesthetics of the Greek Church Fathers

1. THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH. Christian writers, especially the earlier writers, were concerned with Christian life and worship rather than with beauty and art; nevertheless, they often had to take up an attitude towards them. The question was open. It was not decided in advance by *Holy Scripture*. They could adopt either a favourable or unfavourable attitude. Some Fathers, like Tertullian, regarded works of art (*artifices statuarum et imaginum*) as the work of the devil. These, however, were in the minority; the majority of early Christian writers had been educated in the Greek schools and were favourably inclined towards beauty in both nature and art, seeing God revealed in it.

Christian positions in aesthetics were established earlier in the East than in the West. The biblical commentaries of the Fathers, and in particular commentaries on the *Book of Genesis*, afforded an opportunity to develop these views. The Greek Fathers, i.e., those living in the East and writing in Greek, who expressed opinions on the subject included Clement of Alexandria, a member of the Alexandrian school with a wide knowledge of Greek philosophy, who lived in the 3rd century. In the 4th century they were more numerous: Athanasius (299–373), Patriarch of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nazianzus (330–c. 390), Bishop of Nazianzus and

Constantinople. But above all: Basil of Caesarea, whose views reflected most fully the aesthetics of the Fathers.*

2. **St. BASIL.** Basil (329–379), called the Great, was by vocation a preacher, not a scholar, but he possessed a considerable secular knowledge acquired in the schools of Caesarea, Byzantium and Athens. Gregory of Nazianzus, with whom he studied, writes enthusiastically of his great knowledge of philosophy, grammar, astronomy, of geometry and medicine. Basil himself mentions his conversations with poets, historians, orators and philosophers. In the intellectual circles of Athens, it was the teachers of rhetoric who were held in the highest esteem; to these Basil owed his knowledge of Greek literature and his acquaintance with Pythagoras, the Sophists, Socrates and Plato. What he learned from them he combined with ideas drawn from the *Gospel* and the *Old Testament*. There are, therefore, two elements in his works: Greek and Christian; three, in fact, because the Greek element is twofold: on the one hand, the old Greek Eclectic aesthetics, and, on the other, the newer Neo-Platonic. He drew his main ideas from the *Book of Genesis*; his arguments, however, were drawn from the Greek philosophers. Like the other Greek Fathers, he did not write any treatise specifically on aesthetics, but his writings, in particular the *Homily to Hexaemeron*, contain so many statements on beauty and art that one can build up a reasonably complete aesthetic theory from them.†

3. **LIGHT AND VISION.** His conception of beauty was Greek. It was, as has been said, twofold, drawn from both streams of Greek aesthetics, the older one and the Neo-Platonic, with now one, now the other predominating. Following the older Greek thinkers, he regarded beauty as a relationship of parts and as therefore occurring in composites; but following Plotinus, he also regarded it as simple.

He expressed the first view—that of the Stoics, the Eclectics and Cicero—by saying that beauty is based on the assemblage, arrangement and selection of parts. He took as his point of departure the Stoic definition: physical beauty results from a proportion between parts, and from pleasing colour.⁽¹⁾ No individual part of a statue is beautiful in itself: separated from the rest, it loses its aesthetic value; the statue is only beautiful as a whole. A detached hand, an eye removed from its face, some member torn from the statue would not give a feeling of beauty. But once they are restored to their position, their beauty, which comes from their relationship to the whole, will be immediately apparent. This applies not only to the beauty of statues, but also to the beauty of living bodies, human and animal⁽²⁾.

At other times, however, Basil would say, following Plotinus, that beauty occurs

* The most extensive works on patristic aesthetics are: E. de Bruyne, "Esthétique païenne, esthétique chrétienne. A propos de quelques textes patristiques", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 31 (1955), pp. 130–144.—*Geschiedenis van de Aesthetica*, vol. III, (1951).—Q. Cataudella, "Estetica cristiana", in the collective work *Momenti e problemi di storia dell'estetica* (1959).—Selection of texts: R. Montano, "L'estetica nel pensiero cristiano", in: *Grande Antologia Filosofica*, vol. V (1954), p. 151ff.

† Y. Courtonne, *St. Basile et l'hellénisme* (Paris, 1934) (§ IX: Beauté de la création).

in simple things, and is not therefore based on relationship and proportion: gold is beautiful, not because of its proportion, but because of its colour, the sun and the evening star are beautiful because of their brilliance. Light and brilliance, therefore, are no less determining factors of beauty than the harmony of components⁽¹⁾.

Basil realized that Plotinus's view differed from that of Cicero. He was inclined to consider both of their views correct and tried to reconcile them. This he did by reducing Plotinus's views to Cicero's. Light is certainly beautiful, although it is a homogeneous substance between whose parts there is no proper proportion, but this does not invalidate the view that beauty is based on proportion. For light also has its proper proportion, its proper relation. This is not the interrelation of its parts, but its relation to the organs of vision.⁽¹⁾ Beauty is dependent on this relation.

Basil was aiming at a compromise between two views, but what resulted was a new view. In trying to decide between the two conceptions of beauty, he hit on a third. Historically, this conception was of considerable importance, because it introduced a subjective factor into the concept of beauty. Beauty, it is true, is to be found in the external world, in light, colour and form; but to perceive the beauty of light, colour and form, sight is necessary. In more general terms: they must be apprehended by a subject. A religious thinker could see this better than the classical aestheticians, because a religious attitude transfers attention from the external to the internal world, from object to subject.

4. BEAUTY AND APPROPRIATENESS. What is the beauty of things based on? Above all, on the fact that they are pleasant to the eye and the ear. But the early Christians had also something else in mind when they spoke of beauty. When, as *Genesis* relates, God praised the beauty of the world, this was not because the world was pleasing to His senses, but because it had fulfilled the purpose for which it was created. That is, the world is beautiful because of its purposefulness. Every individual thing is beautiful to the extent that it fulfils its purpose; it is beautiful according to the function it serves, according to the perfection with which it performs its appointed task.⁽³⁾

Beauty can thus be understood in two ways: as immediately sensible and as based on conformity to a purpose. Basil illustrated this duality by quoting the example of the sea. It has its immediate beauty, the beauty which pleases the eye; but it has another beauty which consists in its being the source of moisture, an inexhaustible reservoir of water, useful economically and socially, a link between continents, making trade possible and thus providing wealth. The intention behind these considerations was theological, but their content was of some importance for aesthetics. The ancients had explained the beauty of things by the fact that they were *apta*, that is, appropriately constructed and matching up to their purpose. Basil saw the same kind of beauty not only in individual things, but also in the universe as a whole. And appropriateness, which for the ancients was at most one of the forms of beauty, became for him a universal feature of beauty. Other fea-

tures—such as order, proportion, or a harmonious arrangement of parts, and their ability to act on the mind and senses and afford pleasure—dropped into the background and took second place to this fundamental feature, appropriateness.

Men judge beauty by the sensory pleasure it arouses; but this, Basil considered, is due only to limitation. Were it not for this, man would judge the beauty of things by their appropriateness. God certainly judges it in this way. On this basis, there were for Basil and for all the early writers, two kinds of beauty, one human, and the other divine, that is, superficial and real, subjective and objective beauty.

5. PANKALIA. The world is purposeful in its structure. As Basil says, nothing in creation is superfluous, nor is there a lack of any necessary thing. Nothing was made without reason, nothing by chance: everything reflects an inexpressible wisdom.⁽⁴⁾ And it is because it is purposeful that the world is beautiful.

In upholding the appropriateness and beauty of the world, Basil reiterated the *pankalia* theme from the *Book of Genesis*. It was also reiterated by the other Greek Fathers. The classical writers, especially the Stoics, had spoken of *pankalia*—but it was only now that it found its way into the foreground of aesthetics. It was now understood teleologically: the world is beautiful not in the sense that it pleases everyone at all times, but in the sense that it is purposefully constructed.

And since the world is beautiful because it is purposefully constructed, it is similar in this respect to a work of art. As Basil says: “We walk the earth as though visiting a workshop in which the divine sculptor exhibits his wondrous works. The Lord, the creator of these wonders and an artist, calls upon us to contemplate them”.⁽⁵⁾ The conception of God as an artist and of the world as something intended for contemplation was of no small importance to aesthetics.

The idea that the world is, as it were, the work of an artist and that all beauty is similar to artistic beauty had been put forward by some classical writers, such as Cicero and Plutarch; but now it came to the fore and was universally accepted. It is to be found in the *Book of Wisdom*, in Basil, in other Greek Fathers, Athanasius and Clement, and in the Latin Fathers, Justin and Lactantius. Like *pankalia*, it was typical of patristic aesthetic writing. It was the complement of *pankalia*: the world is not only beautiful, but beautiful in the same way as a work of art is beautiful.

The ancients saw the difference between nature and art more clearly than they saw their similarity. And if they connected them, they conceived of art in the likeness of nature, rather than nature in the likeness of art: a work of art was like nature because it imitated nature. Basil and the other Fathers put forward the idea that not only is nature like a work of art but that it reveals the mind of its artistic creator. As Athanasius put it: not only is the work itself seen, but also the artist;⁽⁶⁾ a man is at fault if, in admiring a building, he does not remember the architect.⁽⁷⁾ Not surprisingly he applied this to nature: since it was natural in view of his religious cast of mind to look on nature not as the ultimate reality, but as a divine creation.

Although the Fathers regarded the world as beautiful, they did not consider it beautiful of itself, but because it is the work of God. It is for this reason that it possesses appropriateness, order and harmony. "God is the cause of all that is beautiful",⁽⁸⁾ wrote Clement of Alexandria. And Athanasius: "Creation, like the words of a book, points, by its order and harmony, to its master and creator".⁽⁹⁾ The principle of *pankalia* thus took on, not only a teleological, but also a theological significance.

There was soon to evolve the notion that God is Beauty, the greatest beauty, and even the only true beauty; but this idea was not yet present in the Fathers of the 3rd and 4th centuries. For them, beauty was a property of creation, and not of the Creator, a property of visible things and not of an invisible God. On the other hand, God was for them the cause of beauty. Beautiful things give us a proper notion of God,⁽¹⁰⁾ the thoughts of those who look at beautiful things pass from the things themselves to their cause.

The value of beautiful things varies. Beauty of body, beauty of nature and all visible beauty is transient and not without dangers.⁽¹¹⁾ The surest beauty derives from health and is an outward manifestation of health (thus a healthy life is the best way of becoming beautiful, Clement of Alexandria argued).⁽¹²⁾ Yet internal beauty is greater and better than any outward beauty; the soul is more beautiful than the body. The traditional conception of beauty, taken over from the Greeks, and in particular from Plato, had included beauty of soul; in Christian thought, beauty was transferred to the spiritual world; there was a spiritualization of beauty. Using the example of the perfect work of art constantly used by Greek aestheticians, namely, Phidias' statue of Olympic Zeus, Origen held that even this extremely beautiful statue cannot match a virtuous soul in beauty. "If in pureness of spirit you enter into yourself, you will discover in the beauty of your soul the reflection of the beauty of Him who is your cause."

Against this background, there grew up a particular view of portraiture. In the *Acts of St. John* it is said: "My portrait is like unto me, and yet not like unto me, for it is but my fleshly image; and inasmuch as a painter, depicting my countenance, wishes to draw my true portrait, he will not succeed in this; for this there is need of something more than colours".* We know that Paulinus of Nola (353-431) did not want to have his portrait painted, believing that only "the divine image of man" (*imago celestis hominis*) matters; art can only give an earthly image.†

There was, however, one difficulty for the early Christians in depreciating physical beauty: namely that Christ was incarnate. Was He beautiful?‡ The *Gospel* did not mention his outward appearance; and opinion among the Fathers differed. Some—

* A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Medieval Aesthetics, I: Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite and Ulrich Engelberti of Strassburg", *Art Bulletin*, XVII (1935).

† Similarly, a thousand years later, Eckhart, I, 408: "Whosoever sees my likeness does not see me... My appearance is not my nature". Quoted by Coomaraswamy, *op. cit.*

‡ *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, hrsg. v. G. Kittel (Stuttgart, 1938), vol. III, p. 513ff., article by P. Bertram.

quoting the 45th *Psalm*—maintained that he was beautiful, while others, quoting the prophet Isaiah (LII, 14) said that he was not. Clement of Alexandria says that “the Saviour surpasses all human nature and is beautiful”,* others held that he was slight of build and ugly. The basis for the first view was that Christ could not have lacked any quality, including beauty; the basis for the second was that beauty is not really a quality to be compared with moral qualities. The dispute was theological, but it afforded an opportunity for aesthetic speculation. The first view was based on the optimistic outlook which regarded the material world as a divine creation and therefore beautiful, while the latter view was based on a contrast between the misery and ugliness of the material world and the perfection and beauty of the divine world. Both these conflicting views seemed equally convincing to the early Christians, and people vacillated between them. In early Christian art, the former predominated: Christ was depicted on the walls of the catacombs as a handsome young man.

6. CONCEPTION OF ART. Such was the mentality of the early Christians that what was under their eyes ceased to attract or interest them, lost its importance and its reality in favour of what was remote, supernatural and invisible. Given this outlook, one might expect the fine arts to have disappeared. They did not disappear, but their character changed, and this change was parallel to the change in a conception of beauty.

(a) The criterion of the value of art no longer consisted in conformity with nature. It became internal: conformity with the idea of a perfect, suprasensual and spiritual beauty. Since the world was governed first and foremost by the law of God (*lex Dei*), this should also be reflected in art. It was more important for art to give expression to the wisdom and greatness of the world than to conform to the accidental appearance of the world.

(b) The function of art could no longer be formal perfection. Art had to represent the saints as models for people to imitate, and important events as testimonies to the grace and wonder of God. Because of this, art acquired features it had not possessed in antiquity. Since it had to present examples of goodness and to testify to the truth, it became illustrative and didactic. It had not only to depict truth, but to teach and propagate it; thus, its functions were not only cognitive, but also educational.

7. THE EVALUATION OF ART. Given this conception of art, the evaluation of art had to change, too. The Fathers of the Church detected a tendency among artists to produce increasingly beautiful works and to pursue appearance (*species*), form (*figura*) and adornment (*ornatus*); statues were so beautiful that people even began to worship them. This they regarded as evil. Even so learned a man as St. Jerome, well acquainted as he was with ancient culture, was opposed to art:† he did not want

* *Stromata*, II, 5, 21, 1.

† R. Eiswirth, “Hieronymus Stellung zur Literatur und Kunst”, *Klassisch-philologische Studien*, 16 (1955).

to include painting and sculpture among the liberal arts,⁽¹³⁾ and he condemned ornate buildings⁽¹⁴⁾, preferring the beauty of nature to the beauty of art.⁽¹⁵⁾

It is understandable that Christians should consider that some works of art should be condemned. In their eyes, they were an embodiment of paganism. Christians themselves had no desire to pursue these arts, or pursued them as little as possible. The sculpture of the ancient Greeks and Romans, with their statues of gods formed in the likeness of man, especially aroused their opposition. Opposition was expressed by the Fathers, more particularly by Athenagoras. He condemned those who admired the statues of the gods; "it is art they admire, and not the gods". But this attitude to the art of sculpture and to pagan art was not universal. The codex of Theodosius made an essential distinction between the religious and the artistic value of this form of art. The statues of pagan gods, he said, should be appraised on the basis of their artistic, and not of their religious value.⁽¹⁶⁾ This distinction and this statement were to crop up throughout the Middle Ages.^(16a)

The Fathers of the Church were as suspicious of music as they were of sculpture.* At first, they had deep-rooted objections to singing. The Lord should be worshipped in silence and recollection, and not by singing. Practically all of them had reservations about the use of musical instruments. This is probably due to the fact that for them musical instruments were connected with pagan ceremonies and with the theatre. Thus, for instance, Clement of Alexandria would tolerate only the lyre and the zither, because King David had used them.† Jerome condemned all instruments.‡ So, too, Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (c. 260–c. 340), who condemned even the zither. The human body, he wrote, should be man's musical instrument and the soul should sing. On the other hand, John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (345–407), condemned only the "songs and dances of Satan", but otherwise showed an understanding and appreciation of music. And Basil in particular, overcoming the fears and reservations of the clergy, praised music, seeing in it a good means of propagating the faith. As with other artistic problems, here too, two opposite points of view found expression among Christians from early times: worldliness and asceticism.

The consequences of these Christian doctrines were less harmful, however, in the case of painting, architecture and decorative art, though they changed the character of these forms of art. To be acceptable to Christians, painting had to depict Christ and the saints; and architecture and the decorative arts had to symbolize divine things. They existed for worship, and not for the sake of art itself.

As to the symbolism of works of art, it was, in accordance with ancient tradition, chiefly a matter of numbers: five church doors symbolized the five wise virgins, and twelve columns the twelve apostles. Pulpits were supported by eleven columns, symbolizing the eleven apostles who were present at the Descent of the Holy Ghost, and

* Th. Gérold, *Les Pères de l'Eglise et la musique*.

† *PG*, vol. 8, p. 443.—Cf. G. Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages* (1940).

‡ *PG*, vol. 22, p. 871.

the ciborium on ten columns symbolized the apostles who were not present at the Crucifixion.

The most difficult problem to decide was how to regard works which not only symbolized, but also represented God. Did their content confer divinity on them, or were they to be treated as any other work of the human hand? The dispute about the reverence due to images of God, which was later to flare up in Byzantium, already faced the early Church Fathers. In his youthful work *Contra gentes*, Athanasius condemned the reverence which people showed to stones and pieces of wood.⁽¹⁷⁾ But later, in the *Sermo de sacris imaginibus*, he spoke differently. Using the analogy of the portrait of a king, he said that, since it contains the same form as the king, anyone looking at it sees in it the real king.⁽¹⁸⁾ In this way, he moved from what was to be the iconoclastic view to the view of the iconophiles. Basil also held that reverence shown to an effigy is transferred to its prototype.⁽¹⁹⁾ Strictly speaking, this was not an aesthetic problem, because it was not a question of the beauty but of the holiness of images; but it was a problem essential to the contemporary theory of art.

One of the Latin Fathers, Tertullian, opposed not only the cult of images and the making of a likeness of God, but the making of any likeness whatsoever. He remained true to the *Old Testament*. But the Church did not accept his view. Tertullian's argument was that every likeness and all representational art is fictitious and false, and that there should therefore be no place for it.⁽²⁰⁾

In the patristic age, the same criterion of truth and falsehood was applied to poetry. Beside those who accused poetry of being a fiction, there were those who defended the truth which it contained. Lactantius, one of the Latin Fathers, wrote: "Nothing is entirely invented by poets, but rather transformed".⁽²¹⁾ In the Christian theory of poetry, as in the Greek theory, the question of truth remained in the foreground.

8. CONCLUSIONS. A consideration of the views of the Greek Church Fathers, and in particular of Basil, leads to a rather unexpected conclusion. Though they posed aesthetic problems only incidentally, they dealt with a considerable number of aesthetic themes. Apart from the notion of *pankalia*, there was also the notion of beauty as appropriateness. They regarded nature as a work of art, and brought internal and symbolical beauty to the fore. They considered the function of art to be illustrative and didactic, and they regarded purely sensuous art as vain and harmful. These ideas were less the fruit of aesthetic inquiry and artistic experience than of the application of a religious and moral viewpoint to aesthetics. Some ideas put forward by the Fathers, though by no means all, were of value to aesthetics, as, for example, those connected with the subjective aspect in beauty.

The Greek Fathers, being men of Greek culture, used traditional Greek concepts in talking of beauty and art. But their view of the world was incompatible with the axioms of the ancient theory of beauty and art. Their heteronomous conception of art undermined the freedom art had enjoyed in antiquity, their interest in sym-

bolism undermined its realism, and their spiritual point of view its concentration on form.

Basing themselves on the *Gospel*, in which there was no aesthetics, and drawing on the Greeks, who had had a different aesthetics, the early Christian thinkers—as a by-product of their theological studies—created a spiritual and theocentric aesthetics. Later Christian aestheticians in the Middle Ages extended and deepened these ideas, retaining, however, the basic ones.

B. Texts from the Greek Church Fathers

BASIL OF CAESAREA,

Homilia in Hexaëm., II, 7 (PG 29. c. 45).

1. Εἰ δὲ τὸ ἐν τῷ σώματι καλὸν ἐκ τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα τῶν μερῶν συμμετρίας καὶ τῆς ἐπιφανομένης εὐχρόιας τὸ εἶναι ἔχει, πῶς ἐπὶ τοῦ φωτὸς ἀπλοῦ τὴν φύσιν ὄντος καὶ ὁμοιομεροῦς, ὁ τοῦ καλοῦ διασώζεται λόγος; ἢ ὅτι τῷ φωτὶ τὸ σύμμετρον οὐκ ἐν τοῖς ἰδίοις αὐτοῦ μέρεσιν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν ἀλύπω καὶ προσηγεῖ μαρτυρεῖται; οὕτω γὰρ καὶ χρυσὸς καλὸς, οὐκ ἐκ τῆς τῶν μερῶν συμμετρίας, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς εὐχρόιας μόνης, τὸ ἐπαγωγὸν πρὸς τὴν ὄψιν καὶ τὸ τερπνὸν κεκτημένος. καὶ ἔσπερος ἀστέρων κάλλιστος, οὐ διὰ τὸ ἀναλογοῦντα ἔχει τὰ μέρη, ἐξ ὧν συνέστηκεν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ ἄλυπὸν τινὰ καὶ ἡδεῖαν τὴν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ αὐγὴν ἐμπύπτει τοῖς ὀμμασιν. ἔπειτα νῦν ἡ τοῦ Θεοῦ κρίσις περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ οὐ πάντως πρὸς τὸ ἐν ὄψει τερπνὸν ἀποβλέποντος, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὴν εἰς ὕστερον ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ὠφέλειαν προορωμένον γεγένηται. Ὄφθαλμοὶ γὰρ οὐπω ἤσαν κριτικοὶ τοῦ ἐν φωτὶ κάλλους.

BASIL OF CAESAREA,

Homilia in Hexaëm., III, 10.

2. ἐπεὶ καὶ χεὶρ καθ' ἑαυτὴν, καὶ ὄφθαλμὸς ἰδίᾳ, καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν τοῦ ἀνδριάντος μελῶν διηρημένως κείμενα, οὐκ ἂν φανεῖη κατὰ τῷ τυχόντι πρὸς δὲ τὴν οἰκείαν τάξιν ἀποτεθέντα, τὸ ἐκ τῆς ἀναλογίας, ἐμφανὲς μάλιστα ποτὲ, καὶ τῷ ἰδιώτῃ παρέχεται γινώσκον ὁ μόντος τεχνίτης καὶ πρὸ τῆς συνθέσεως οἶδε τὸ ἐκάστου καλὸν, καὶ ἐπαινεῖ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον, πρὸς τὸ τέλος αὐτῶν ἐπαναφέρων τὴν ἔννοιαν. τοιοῦτος οὖν δὴ τις καὶ νῦν

BEAUTY OF PROPORTION AND BEAUTY OF LIGHT

1. If physical beauty derives from the mutual proportion of parts and from good colour, can such a conception of beauty be applied to light, which is simple and homogeneous? Can it not be applied because the proportionality of light occurs not between its parts, but in relation to the sight, for which light is joyous and pleasant? Gold, too, is beautiful not because of the proportion of its parts, but because of the beautiful colour itself, which attracts and gladdens the sight. Similarly, the evening star is the most beautiful of the stars not because of the proportion of its component parts, but because it affords the eyes a joyous and pleasant brilliance—Let us add that God's judgment of the beauty of light was based not only on the pleasure of the eyes, but envisaged the subsequent usefulness of light. There were not yet eyes to judge what beauty lies in light.

BEAUTY CONSISTS IN THE ARRANGEMENT OF PARTS

2. The hand lying separate, the eye detached from the face, some part of a statue separated from it could give no one an impression of beauty; but it suffices to return them to their proper place, and the beauty lying in their proportion, a moment before barely perceptible, will strike the eyes even of the layman. And as to the artist, even before he has assembled them, he knows the beauty of the individual parts and values them, referring the thought to their

έντεχνος ἐπαινέτης τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἔργων ὁ Θεὸς ἀναγράφεται· μέλλει δὲ τὸν προσήκοντα ἔπαινον καὶ παντὶ ὁμοῦ τῷ κόσμῳ ἀπαρτισθέντι πληροῦν.

BASIL OF CAESAREA,

Homilia in Hexaëm., III (PG 29 c. 76).

3. καὶ εἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς ὅτι καλόν. οὐχὶ ὀφθαλμοῖς Θεοῦ τέρψιν παρέχει τὰ παρ' αὐτοῦ γινόμενα, οὔτε τοιαύτη παρ' αὐτῷ ἢ ἀποδοχὴ τῶν καλῶν, οἷα καὶ παρ' ἡμῶν· ἀλλὰ καλὸν τὸ τῷ λόγῳ τῆς τέχνης ἐκτελεσθὲν, καὶ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ τέλους εὐχρηστίαν συντεῖνον.

BASIL OF CAESAREA,

Homilia in Hexaëm., V, 8 (PG 29 c. 113).

4. οὐδὲν ἀνάτιον· οὐδὲν ἀπὸ ταῦτο-μάτου· πάντα ἔχει τινὰ σοφίαν ἀπόβρητον· τίς ἂν ἀφίκοιτο λόγος; πῶς ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς πάντα μετ' ἀκριβείας ἐπέθει, ὥστε καὶ κατιδεῖν τὰς ἰδιότητας, καὶ τὰς πρὸς ἕκαστον διαφορὰς ἐναργῶς διακρίνει, καὶ τὰς κεκρυμμένας αἰτίας ἀνευδεῶς παραστήσῃ;

BASIL OF CAESAREA,

Homilia in Hexaëm., IX, 5 (PG 29 c. 200).

4a. καὶν αὐτὰ τὰ μέλη τῶν ζώων καταμάθητις εὐρήσεις, ὅτι οὔτε περιττόν τι ὁ κτίσας προσέθηκεν, οὔτε ἀφείλε τῶν ἀναγκαίων.

BASIL OF CAESAREA,

Homilia in Hexaëm., IV, 33 c (PG 29 c. 80).

5. ἡμεῖς δὲ ἄρα, οὗς ὁ Κύριος, ὁ μέγας θαυματοποιὸς καὶ τεχνίτης, ἐπὶ τὴν ἐπίδειξιν συνεκάλεσε τῶν οἰκείων ἔργων, ἀποκαμουόμεθα πρὸς τὴν θέαν, ἢ ἀποκυήσομεν πρὸς τὴν ἀκρόασιν τῶν λογίων τοῦ πνεύματος.

ATHANASIUS, Oratio contra gentes, 35 B
(PG XXV, 69).

6. ἐκ γὰρ τῶν ἔργων πολλαίκις ὁ τεχνίτης καὶ μὴ δρώμενος γινώσκεται· καὶ οἷόν τι λέγουσι περὶ τοῦ ἀγαματοποιοῦ Φειδίου, ὡς τὰ τοῦτου δημιουργήματα ἐκ τῆς συμμετρίας καὶ τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα τῶν μερῶν ἀναλογίας ἐμφαίνειν καὶ μὴ παρόντα Φειδίαν τοῖς δρώσιν.

purpose. And for us, God is depicted as such an artist valuing each individual work. And he will extend his appreciation to the whole universe when this is completed.

**BEAUTY CONSISTS
IN APPROPRIATENESS**

3. "And God saw that his work was beautiful." This does not mean that the work pleased his sight and that its beauty affected him as it affects us; but that that is beautiful which, in accordance with the principles of art, is completed and serves its purpose well.

THE PERFECTION OF THE WORLD

4. Nothing is without cause; nothing is by chance; everything contains an ineffable wisdom. What words could express it? How could the human intellect go through all this exactly, so as to cognize the peculiar properties of things and clearly evaluate the differences between them and exhaustively show the hidden causes?

4a. If you consider the members of animals, you will notice that the Creator has neither added anything superfluous nor omitted anything necessary.

5. We walk the earth as though we were visiting a workshop in which the divine sculptor exhibits his wondrous works. The Lord, the creator of these wonders and an artist, calls upon us to contemplate them.

THE WORK AND THE ARTIST

6. In his works, the artist is recognized, even if he himself is not seen. Thus they speak of the sculptor Phidias: through the harmony and proportion of their parts, his works revealed the artist to those who looked at them, even though he himself was not there.

ATHANASIUS, Or. contra gentes, 47
(PG XXV, 96).

7. ὅμοιον γὰρ εἶ τις τὰ ἔργα πρὸ τοῦ τεχνίτου θαυμάσει, καὶ εἰ τὰ ἐν τῇ πόλει δημιουργήματα καταπλαγείς τὸν τούτων δημιουργὸν καταπατοίῃ· ἢ ὡς εἴ τις τὸ μὲν μουσικὸν ὄργανον ἐπαινοίῃ, τὸν δὲ συνθέντα καὶ ἁρμοσάμενον ἐκβάλλοι.

7. [A man would not act rightly] if he admired the works instead of the artist, if in a city he were delighted by the buildings and neglected the builder, or if he praised the musical instrument and rejected the composer.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA,
Stromata, 5 (PG 8, p. 71).

8. πάντων μὲν γὰρ αἴτιος τῶν καλῶν ὁ Θεός.

GOD—THE CAUSE OF BEAUTY

8. God is the cause of all that is beautiful.

ATHANASIUS, Or. contra gentes, 34
(PG 25, c. 69).

9. ... τῆς κτίσεως ὡσπερ γράμμασι διὰ τῆς τάξεως καὶ ἁρμονίας τὸν ἑαυτῆς δεσπότην καὶ ποιητὴν σημαίνουσας καὶ βοῶσας.

9. The creation, like the words of a book, points, by its order and harmony, to its master and creator and speaks loudly of him.

BASIL OF CAESAREA,

Homilia in Hexaëm., III, 10 (PG 29 c. 77).

10. ὁ δὲ τὰ μεγάλα δημιουργήσας Θεός, δώῃ ὑμῖν σύνεσιν ἐν παντὶ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἀληθείας, ἴν' ἐκ τῶν ὄρωμένων τὸν ἀόρατον ἐννοῆτε, καὶ ἐκ μεγέθους καὶ καλλονῆς τῶν κτισμάτων τὴν πρέπουσαν δόξαν περὶ τοῦ κτίσαντος ὑμᾶς ἀναλαμβάνητε.

10. May God, the creator of great works, give you in everything an understanding of this truth, so that from visible things you might proceed to the grasping of the invisible with your reason and that the greatness and beauty of creations might give you a proper notion of the Creator.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA,
Paedagogus, II, 8 (PG 8, 480).

11. ὡσπερ οὖν τὸ κάλλος, οὕτω καὶ τὸ ἄνθος τέρπει βλεπόμενον· καὶ χρῆ δι' ὅψεως ἀπολαύοντας τῶν καλῶν, δοξάζειν τὸν Δημιουργόν· ἢ χρῆσις δὲ αὐτῶν ἐπιβλαβής... ἄμφω γὰρ μαραίνεται, καὶ τὸ ἄνθος, καὶ τὸ κάλλος.

THE INSIGNIFICANCE OF PHYSICAL
BEAUTY

11. The beauty of the body as well as that of the flower give pleasure when they are looked at. Benefiting from these beautiful things with the sight, one should praise the Creator. In use, however, these things are harmful. Both of them wither, the flower as well the beauty of the body.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA,
Paedagogus, III, 11 (PG 8, 640).

12. κάλλος γὰρ ἄριστον πρῶτον μὲν ψυχικόν... ὅτ' ἢ κεκοσμημένη ψυχὴ ἀγίῳ πνεύματι καὶ τοῖς ἐκ τούτου ἐμπνεομένη παιδρύσμασιν, δικαιοσύνη, φρονήσει, ἀνδρία, σωφροσύνη, φιλαγαθία τε καὶ αἰδοῖ, ἥς οὐδὲν εὐανθέστερον χρῶμα ἐώραται πώποτε· ἔπειτα

SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL BEAUTY

12. First of all, the best beauty is spiritual beauty... and it appears when the soul is adorned by the Holy Spirit and inspired by its lustre, justness, reason, courage, moderation, love of good and shyness, which is matched by nothing in pleasant colour. Secondly, a place is

καὶ τὸ σωματικὸν κάλλος ἡσικήσθω συμμετρία μελῶν καὶ μερῶν μετ' εὐχροίας. ... ἄνθος δὲ τῆς υἰγείας ἐλευθέριον τὸ κάλλος· ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἔνδον τοῦ σώματος ἐργάζεται, τὸ δὲ εἰς τὸ ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος ἐξάνθησαν, φανεράν ἐνδεικνύται τὴν εὐχροίαν· αἱ γοῦν κάλλισται καὶ υἰγεινόταται ἀγωγαί, διαπονοῦσαι τὰ σώματα, τὸ κάλλος τὸ γνήσιον καὶ παράμουνον ἐργάζονται.

SAINT JEROME, *Epistolae*, 88, 18.

13. Non...adducor, ut in numerum liberarum artium pictores recipiam, non magis quam statuarios aut marmorarios aut ceteros luxuriae ministros.

SAINT JEROME, *Epistolae*, 90, 25.

14. Quid loquar marmora, quibus templa, quibus domus fulgent? quid lapideas moles in rotundum ac leve formatas, quibus porticus et capacia populorum tecta suscipimus?... vilissimorum mancipiorum ista commenta sunt: sapientia altius sedet.

SAINT JEROME, *In Evang. Matthaei*, 1, 6 (PL 26, c. 47).

15. Quod sericum, quae regum purpura, quae pictura textricum potest floribus comparari? quid ita rubet ut rosa? quid ita candet ut liliium? Violae vero purpuram nullo superari murice, oculorum magis quam sermonis iudicium est.

CODEX OF THEODOSIUS, VI, 10, 8 (J. Gothofredi, 1743, vol. VI, pars 1, p. 300).

16. (In aede) simulacra artis pretio, non divinitate metienda.

HILDEBERT DE LAVARDIN, *Carmina miscellanea*, LXIII (PL 171, c. 1409).

16a. Non potuit natura deos hoc creare, Quo miranda deum signa creavit homo, Vultus adest his numinibus, potiusque coluntur Artificum studio quam deitate sua.

due to physical beauty, the proportion of members and components, in conjunction with good colour... Beauty is a noble flower growing from good health; health is within the body, and beauty grows outwardly, manifesting itself in good colour. The most beautiful and most healthy ways of life, by exercising the body, create true and lasting beauty.

CONDEMNATION OF PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS

13. I shall not be persuaded to admit into the liberal arts painters as well as sculptors and stone-masons, and other minions of dissoluteness.

14. Wherefore am I to speak of the marbles with which shrines and homes gleam? Wherefore of the rounded and polished stones with which we support porticos and roofs which give shelter to many people? These are the most base inventions... Wisdom has its seat in a higher place.

FLOWERS ARE MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN ART

15. What silk, what royal purple, what weaving-patterns can be compared with flowers? What blushes like the rose? What beams white like the lily? The eyes, even more than words, pronounce that no other purple matches the purple of the violet.

ARTISTIC VALUE

16. The statues of gods [remaining from the ancient shrines] should be evaluated according to their artistic, and not to their cult value.

16a. Nature could not have created gods with such an appearance as that with which man has created their wondrous statues. These deities have an individual expression and are venerated by virtue of the skill of the artists rather than by virtue of their divinity.