

# Beauty Will Save the World

Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky declared that “beauty will save the world.” In his Nobel Laureate speech, fellow Russian Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said what we all were thinking: “What sort of a statement is that? ... When in bloodthirsty history did beauty ever save anyone from anything?”

Walking on two feet, man’s gaze is naturally turned toward the heavens. We are biologically created – the posture of our physical bodies demands – to seek after higher things.

Yet, we have a fundamental weakness. St. Augustine described man as *curvatus in se*, or “turned in upon himself.” Anthropologically and spiritually, if a person is bent over and only attending to base, lower things, he is unable to flourish as a human ought to.

This fallen state of human affairs necessitates the function of redemptive beauty: beauty invades, chooses, and changes the one to whom it appears, bringing him back to the proper spiritual and biological posture. Beauty enflames even the darkest, coldest soul to higher spiritual experiences.

But beauty can seem like a very abstract concept, and I am not a gifted artist – I mean, have you seen my drawing skills? Just *how* do we see beauty and *how* will beauty save the world?

The answer is easy. Look *outward* and *upward*! If beauty is to save the world, then it is a moral imperative to forget oneself, upend being “curved in,” and attend outwardly!

Beauty’s redemptive qualities are twofold: it breaks into the soul through great works of art, and similarly animates and uplifts great civilizations through a robust vitalism. These two initiatives are the qualities that Dostoevsky speaks of in reference to the world’s salvation.

Beauty as expressed in great art seeks to raise people out of that inward-looking state and get them looking *outward* towards higher forms – great plans, philosophic ideas – and *upward* towards the heavens and God. Thus, great works of art purge the soul of ugliness and anger, allowing it to be utterly captivated by the surrounding beauty.

Beauty communicated through great art also brings a sense of meaning and joy to culture. From this, a vibrant *vitality* emerges. The traditional Italian culture is a prime example of this. Their vitality is expressed through their love of art, food, and religion. When this vital, beautiful spirit is stripped from culture, the people lose something.

This phenomenon is played out in American culture as we see many express a lack of purpose or psychological problems, see our crumbling social infrastructure, and observe the lack of great artistic production. Films, for example, have become base and repetitive, often poorly remaking the *same* movie series several times within the *same* decade (I'm looking at you, Spiderman.) Other film companies swallow sagas and rewrite stories in the mold of Critical Theory.

It is understandable why there is a lack of great artists. This happens as the foundations of civilization – faith and identity – erode. It also happens as history – which determines the future – is poorly rewritten before our eyes. Our current politics become limited in their capacity to point *outward* and *upward*, instilling beauty in the citizenry.

What about that other element, vitalism? Admittedly, it's a concept that's a bit ethereal, but at its core it's an element that requires us to get out there and live life. For a man, it means not sitting in your mother's basement, but getting out, being courageous, doing great exploits, being a leader that guides others toward true and beautiful ways of living.

While we may not all be talented artists or charismatic leaders, we all must answer the summons beckoning us to create something beautiful, to elevate the earthly through the ecstatic glorification of this life we live, and to promote beauty through body, speech, and action. A pursuit and elevation of beauty above all else needs to be the duty of every freedom-loving citizen constricted by the ever-tightening tentacles of the socio-political Leviathan around us.

I conclude by returning to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's earlier statement: "In that case Dostoevsky's remark, 'Beauty will save the world,' was not a careless phrase but a prophecy? After all HE was granted to see much, an artist of fantastic illumination."

Dostoevsky, in fact, entreated us to look *outward* and *upward*.

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