

The Contradictions of Beauty and Death Point to the Glory of God

I barely noticed that the trees had turned beautiful before the cold came. It might very well be that these two manifestations of autumn actually coincided completely; or perhaps I have just not been paying attention.

I do enjoy the beauty of autumn leaves much more than the cold that comes with it. But so it is in life, is it not? The things we enjoy the most are usually accompanied by things we enjoy a lot less. No autumn cold, no autumn beauty.

The beauty of autumn leaves are not only accompanied, though, by the inconvenience of the cold; it comes at an actual cost. The beautiful autumn leaves are leaves that have died; as we admire their beauty, we are celebrating death. Most of us do not think about it much, I suspect: we just enjoy the beauty as we see it. Why would we not? But it is somewhat strange to think of, is it not? Well, to me it is.

In earlier days, when people did not know all that we know today, so that it was harder to ignore what one would rather not think about, it was obvious that the reality of death could not be denied, and hardly anybody even bothered to try. The beauty of death was explored in poetry and art, the beauty of the love willing to die for the beloved, and of the love mourning the beloved.

In our day and age we try keep the reality of death out of sight. Nevertheless, when the reality of death forces itself upon us, many are surprised to find how being confronted with death in all its ugliness opens our eyes to the beauty of that which is taken away from us, of life, and of love, so that even death itself, in a strange way, takes on a certain beauty and becomes a sweet sorrow, one might say, although that was not what Shakespeare meant. Now, this is a beauty in contradiction; and most certainly it does not take the pain out of the painful.

God hates death; He is the God of life. Death, which He hates, is the consequence of sin, which He hates, also. And yet, it is in death He displays His glory, in the Son having died for the salvation of sinners. In this, also, there seems to be a contradiction. But it is in the cross of Christ God reveals His goodness. And the goodness of God is His glory; so good is God!

The glory of the life He promises to those who believe in Him and belong to Him, though, is one that is entirely without contradiction. His goodness and His glory shall fill all things, undisturbed and undiminished; for God Himself shall be all in all, who is Himself whole and complete in His goodness.

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