



Transformed
by
Beauty

Beauty's Effect On the Human Heart



Can beauty do any good?

It's a valid question. We live in a world that glorifies utility and efficiency. The main question in our minds about anything is usually, "Does it work?" Or perhaps, "What can I get out of it?"

Viewed in such utilitarian terms, beauty can seem pointless and unnecessary—mere decoration that could easily be done away with.

But beauty isn't pointless. It can have a powerful effect on the human heart, drawing us out of ourselves into something greater and higher. It can break our hearts and open them to something transcendent and divine. It can fill us with a hunger for truth that transcends the mundane and ordinary.

Beauty isn't completely subjective?

In our subjective age, some might wonder if there is such a thing as beauty at all. Isn't beauty entirely relative, found only in the eye of the beholder?

While some might find something beautiful that another doesn't, beauty isn't completely subjective. There is an objective reality to it. Put simply, beauty is truth perceived by the senses.

And what is truth? Truth is ultimately the Eternal God himself. Beauty is a manifestation of God that compels us to God and to the transcendent. Every beautiful thing and person we encounter calls us out of ourselves and directs us to God.

Our encounters with beauty are passing. A song ends and the museums close. But what endures in us is yearning for the Divine.

Yet beauty can be severed from truth, and when it is, it can be a dangerous thing. The evil one seeks to destroy us and deceive us with false beauty. The evil one presents sin, such as pornography, as beautiful in an attempt to confuse us. He presents distortions as goodness and truth, all the while causing confusion in our lives that turns our gaze away from God.

How do we discern the difference between true and false beauty? We can know by asking ourselves if it's representing the Truth or not. Does it draw me closer into God's embrace? Does it deepen my relationship with the Blessed Trinity? If not, it is a counterfeit.

Transformed by Beauty

Each individual, family, community, and culture is capable of being transformed by natural and created beauty, because God is always able to transform us!

To bring into living color the transforming nature of beauty, we have interviewed three people who are well acquainted with beauty in art and sports. These artists and creators teach us how to seek and find true beauty both in the arts and in our daily lives. They show us that we need not settle for counterfeits like pornography that limit our bodies to something less and our gaze to something false.

By seeking and creating beauty, we open ourselves up to a new way of seeing, and this new way of seeing can in turn transform the way we live.

Immersing yourself in the beautiful can serve as one more antidote to the culture of porn, which denies the dignity of the human person. It is our hope that these interviews will demonstrate the transformational power of beauty.



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Beauty and its Mystery

Father Thomas J. Loya is a Byzantine Catholic priest, an artist, pastor, radio host, and conference speaker on topics like Theology of the Body and Eastern Christian spirituality.

Father Loya helps us to understand real beauty—including our desire for it, its origin and impact on culture, how we can be co-creators in it, and participate in God's awe and mystery.



Q: How would you define beauty?

A: Beauty is God revealing Himself. It's one of the most palpable ways in which we actually participate in God's glory and nature. God is true, good, and beautiful. God has woven certain elements into His entire order of creation that give us a profound sense of something wonderful, mysterious, and transcendent.

Q: Why are we as humans drawn to beauty?

A: As humans we are drawn to beauty because we are made in God's image and likeness, and God is beauty. Being made in the image and likeness of God, we human creatures are open to the transcendent—to things that inspire mystery, awe, and wonderment. We have a natural yearning and orientation to things that are partly understandable to us, yet at the same time lie beyond us.

Q: How does beauty impact the world?

A: As the great author Dostoyevsky said, "Beauty will save the world." This is true because God is beauty, and only God saves. Beauty gives us the true vision of reality. When we pursue beauty, it elevates how we see and interface with



everything, especially with the human person. Everything in life should be approached as an art, where we see the intrinsic beauty of it. This inspires us to imitate beauty, and in turn, it influences how we act and regard everything and everyone.

God is true, good, and beautiful.

Q: Is my perception of beauty different from the next person's perception of beauty?

A: In some ways beauty is in the eye of the beholder. However, we sometimes have to be taught what real beauty is. In this way, my perception of beauty may be different than someone else. Furthermore, because I have been an artist all of my life, my perception of beauty by nature may be more heightened than most people. That is what makes a person an artist. For the most part, human beings recognize beauty because we are made to perceive it and to long for it because beauty is of God.

Q: How does beauty impact individuals and humanity?

A: Beauty impacts individuals by inspiring them to do and pursue beautiful things. Beauty transforms our very souls,

our inner being, and our worldview. When people are sensitized to beauty and when they strive for it, they are happier, holier, more at peace, and more fully human.

Q: You're an artist. What draws the human eye to art work? Is it beauty?

A: What draws the human eye to artwork are the principles of beauty that the artist has the ability to convey and also the sense of the mystery of it. When we look at a great piece of art, we have a certain, "Wow, how did they do that?" experience. We are amazed at something that is

Artists strive to master the beauty of the human person, but this beauty is inexhaustible, just like God.

greater than the sum of its parts, something that defies full explanation. We are amazed at the person's gift to have created something of such awe and mystery.

Q: What draws us as men and women to art work that depicts the human person, clothed or unclothed? Why do you think artists have historically tried to capture the human body in art?

A: God has revealed Himself in the beauty of the created order. It is in the human body or person that the sum total of all of the elements of beauty and mystery of the created order are contained. This is why in the visual arts the human body is the constant motif. Artists strive to master the beauty of the human person, but this beauty is inexhaustible, just like God. This is why as viewers of art we are attracted to the presentation in art of the human body or person, whether clothed or naked.

Q: Are paintings, sketches, and sculptures of the human body depicted unclothed immodest?

A: When it comes to the presentation of the human body in art, especially the naked human body, it is a matter of how the body is presented, the intention of the artist, and how it is received. The naked human body is never itself immodest nor, therefore, an instrument of sin and lust. In fact, it is the clothing that is put on the human body that can be immodest or pornified, not the naked human body itself.



Pornography, or “pornovision,” differentiates itself from a modest and valid presentation of the naked human body by presenting the body in such a way as to trap the viewer’s eyes in certain areas. The intention is to objectify the person and incite arousal and lust. Certain positions, clothing, and other objects are often used for this purpose. The modest portrayal of the naked human body allows the eye to move through the entire body, to view the body in an integrated and holistic way. Modest presentations of the naked human body also communicate a sense that this is a person and not just an object.

Q: Why do you think pornography ever became a “thing”? Did it have to do with our desire for beauty?

A: Pornography, like all sin and bad things in life, is the backwards or negative side of something good. Our human sexuality is what makes the human person most like God. We desire relational intimacy and beauty. These things come to their fullest experience in the human person and, in particular, the sexuality of the human person. Pornography takes a shortcut—a counterfeit path—to what we really desire.

There are no shortcuts to experiencing God in the ways that God designed on this earth. We saw this with Adam and

Eve. God had a magnificent plan and destiny for the human person. But Eve, persuaded by the evil Serpent, reached for a shortcut to human glory, and instead lost what she and Adam did have and gained death and suffering in its place. As Eve tried to possess something beautiful, so do we with pornography. We do not possess anything in life. Everything is seen as beautiful, as a gift. It is ours to behold, relish in, be inspired, and transformed by. But nothing is ever ours to possess, consume, grab onto, and take for our own selfish purpose.

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Q: What do you tell to men and women who are trying to overcome and heal from pornography consumption? How do we seek true beauty in this life and the next?

A: For those trying to overcome addictions to pornography and move beyond lust, my principle recommendation is for them to learn how to see properly. I call it “putting on

sacramental-liturgical glasses” and seeing the entire created order, especially the human body or person as God sees it, as God intended us to see it. I call this the three-part pattern to “see, pray, and pass on.” This means to learn how to see the glory of God revealed in the human body or person. Even if a person encounters a pornified image through no fault of their own, such as seeing an immodestly dressed person walk by, turn that image into a prayer. Thank God for making such beauty, pray for that person, and then turn your eyes and minds to other things.

Our culture has a very disintegrated and non-sacramental approach to sexuality. We need to surround our environments with good art that uses the human body as a motif. We need to fill our environment with truly beautiful things so we live on a steady diet of beauty. When we feed ourselves on the real thing, we have less of an appetite for the counterfeit.

Vital to all of this is prayer and the sacramental life of the Church. Do not run from our sexuality. Rather, run toward it, but with the right vision fortified by ascetical disciplines—fasting, self-control, and prayer. We also need that voice in our heads, something like a drill sergeant, that orders us not to lust, but to see, pray, and pass on.



Having the Fullest Experience of Beauty


Our bodies are made for real beauty. In the words of Father Loya, our culture offers us “a counterfeit path to what it is we really desire”—and what we truly desire is beauty, which includes “relational intimacy,” not pornography. We are tasked with the pursuit of changing our gaze and our vision.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways can you start approaching everything in life as an art, where you see its intrinsic beauty?
2. How can you eliminate the shortcuts and counterfeit paths in your life and seek out God’s designs the way he created them to be sought?
3. How do you cherish and show respect to God’s gifts in your life? What is the opposite of cherishing and respecting God’s gifts?

Action Steps

1. When you see a beautiful image or person, even one that is sexualized, practice “seeing, praying, and passing on.” Give thanks for the beauty of the person that God created, and then direct your mind to something else.
2. Seek out something that inspires a sense of wonder and mystery. Then contemplate this image prayerfully.
3. Prayerfully meditate on the “giftedness” of all creation; nature, existence itself, and the beauty of the human person.



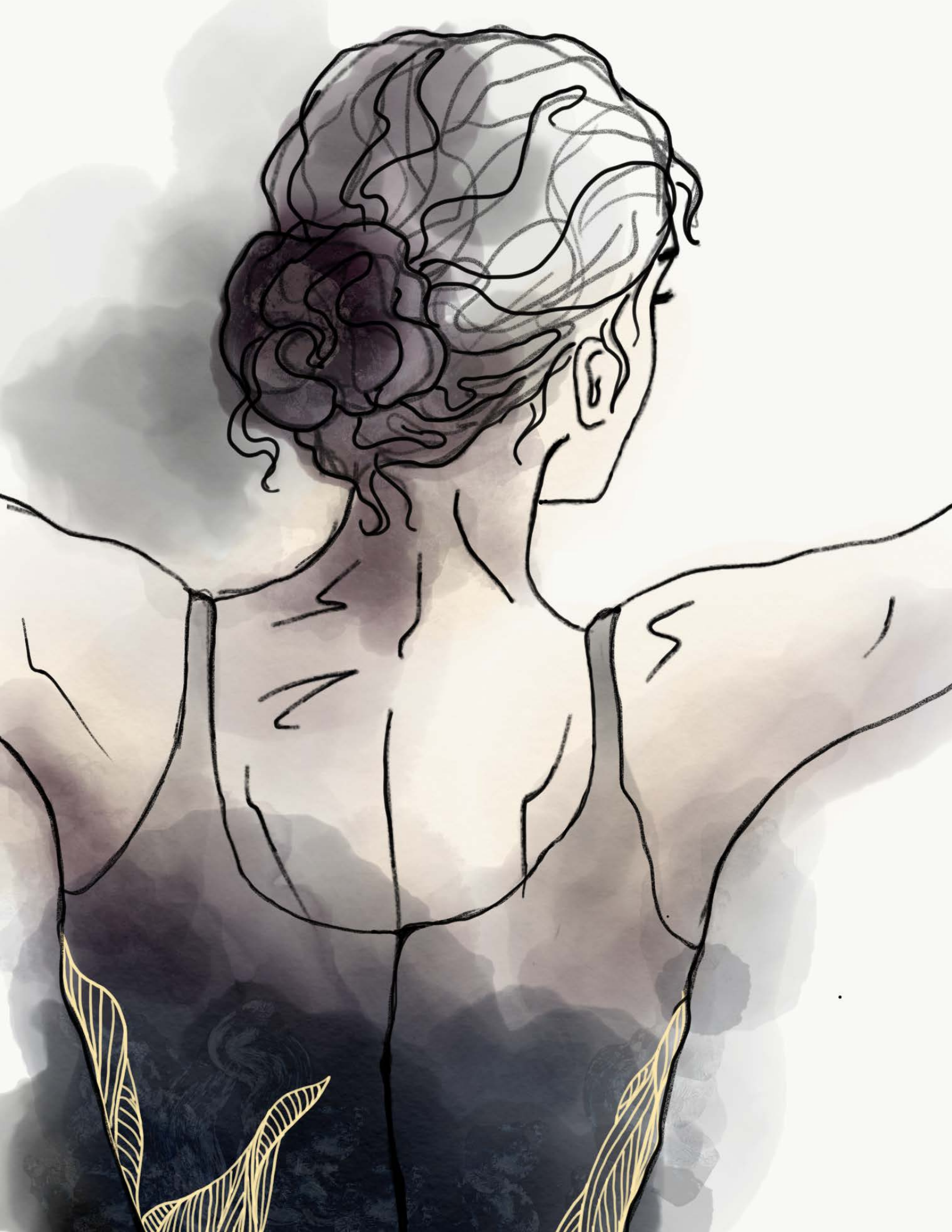
“ God has revealed
Himself in the beauty
of the created order.

Recognizing Real Beauty

When is the last time you listened—truly listened—to classical music? For many of us it's pretty rare, but for Dr. Theresa Notare, classical music captures "Heaven on Earth."

Dr. Notare is a Church historian, as well as the assistant director of the Natural Family Planning Program for the United States Conference of Catholic of Bishops.

Dr. Notare considers herself to be both a lover and student of the arts, specifically ballet. She believes that certain pieces of music, art, movies, dance, and stories are so beautiful that they capture the attention of the whole person and give a sense of heaven on earth.




Q: You're an artist (ballerina), so what inspires you to dance? How do you know when it's beautiful?

A: I was drawn to the arts from childhood—I have always found good art, whether it's the fine or performing arts, to be a vehicle to experience the Divine. In fact, my first undergraduate degree is in Fine Arts Education. I actually taught art education in an elementary school right out of college.

With regard to classical ballet, I had tried really hard to acquire the technique but failed for two reasons. I started the training too old (I was sixteen; for ballet, one has to start around age 6 or 7) and I have a congenital deformity in my hips. My hip sockets were flat, making it very difficult to turn out the legs from the hips. This is a required movement that is foundational to ballet technique. Although I still take ballet lessons, I now have artificial hips.

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In the past, I had performed in student workshops. That's very limited experience! That said, I can tell you that even in a ballet class, you know it is beautiful when you are working your hardest, not thinking of yourself but reaching out of yourself to express the music in the lines you are making with your body.

Q: How does ballet make you feel? Your body, your mind? How does it impact your spiritual life?

A: To me, dance, especially classical ballet, is analogous to the striving of the human heart to find God. Ballet movements are very, very difficult. They completely go against the body's structure. Ballet dancers need lots of discipline. They have to do the exercises, stretch, eat properly but not overeat, get enough rest, and so forth. They also have to submit to the direction of the teacher and later, choreographer. Ballet takes humility!

Likewise, if we want to grow in our relationship with the Lord God, we need to stay close to Him. We have to give ourselves a "life plan." By that I mean, we need to pray regularly, study the faith, give of ourselves in the work God has asked us to take up and avoid those things that will cause us to sin. It is hard work but almost "easy" when we consider that the life of faith is a love relationship with the Lord God!

Q: The human body is amazing and can be used for such incredible things, like dancing! But often we give our bodies to harmful things instead of using them to create beauty according to each of our God-given gifts. How would you encourage others to be open to their gifts?

A: This is a difficult question to answer. So many issues can impact how a person behaves—especially if a person becomes addicted to harmful substances or things like pornography. Unfortunately, if a person lives in an environment where a wise mentor cannot be found, there is a disadvantage—who then can provide reliable and good guidance?

Keeping the above in mind, first, I think we all need to pray for each other. We need to petition the Lord to “send wise and faithful mentors” to help guide people. We can also pray for each other that God will give us the grace to desire His better way!

With regard to facilitating the above, certainly parish or church groups can develop a reputation for helping people—even offering wise mentorship programs, spiritual direction, and days of reflection. Certainly, parishes ought to have information on resources and services that can help heal people with addictions or even emotional problems.

For the average person, it is important to spend some time in self-reflection to identify one's strengths and weaknesses. Self-knowledge is key to using one's talents and looking for opportunities to develop them. Humility is also essential in this quest. Humility can help us realistically see who we are and what we have to offer.

In general, if a person is not impaired by an addiction or clinical emotional problems, self-knowledge can move the

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person to look for opportunities to develop and share his/her talents. It is also important to think about one's talents and gifts as belonging to God who has entrusted them to the individual.

God has given each person unique gifts that He wants to be shared with the world. It is a real responsibility. Recall the parable of the master giving the servants talents. Some developed the talents and the master blessed them. One did not and buried the talents. After our earthly lives, when we come face to face with God, what account will we have to give Him?

Q: The human body is so attractive. Our sexuality is beautiful and God made it that way! Do you think an encounter with beauty can be healing?

A: Absolutely! As I said earlier, if we have but eyes to see the world as God sees it, we can see His beauty. And, God's beauty compels us to move out of ourselves and reach out to Him and our neighbors.

A warning however: authentic beauty is from God. Anything, therefore, that may "seem" to be beautiful but causes a person to sin is not from God. That would be an illusion, a counterfeit and therefore harmful.

Q: Is ballet beautiful? How does it give life? How does an activity like dance (something positive with your body) contradict something like pornography?

A: Ballet is, most often, beautiful. I say "most often" because depending upon the choreographer, the movements themselves can be about something evil and therefore, frightening. When, however, the choreographer authentically expressed the mood or feeling of uplifting music, or tells a story of forgiveness or true love, the dance can transport the viewer. If you want to see some fine examples, take a look at the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet" by the English choreographer Kenneth McMillan

(YouTube has many fine clips from the English Royal Ballet). It perfectly reflects youth in love. And, to contrast, in the same ballet the horror of the death scene is more than heartbreaking due to the unnecessary tragedy of two youths taking their lives. Watching great performances such as these can move an individual to reflect upon life, relationships, and perhaps even one's own mortality and therefore one's relationship (or lack thereof) with the Lord.

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With regard to the second part of your question, the two cannot even be compared. Pornography is the complete opposite of something true and from God. Pornography abuses the people who make it and the people who watch it. It is not rooted in truth but expresses the ugliness of sin. That's because it is focused on a twisted view of the human person and human sexuality. (For an important resource on the harm of pornography see the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral response, "Create in Me a Clean Heart" at: <http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/clean-heart/#10>.)

Q: Why shouldn't we be afraid of our bodies, but embrace their true purpose? Some might be afraid of dancing or watching dance because it can seem immodest or because the world oversexualizes everything.

A: God made humanity male and female. God is the one who created men and women to be sexual. And, God is the one who designed sexual intercourse for the purpose of solidifying the marital union and bringing new people into the world. God is the one who said "it is good"—and He meant all of it as properly lived according to His design!

In this scheme, the virtue of chastity is central because it protects "the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in" men and woman. Chastity ensures "the unity of the person; it is opposed to any behavior that would impair it" (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2338). We need not fear our human sexuality, but we must properly understand its nature as made by God. And, we must realize that boundaries and self-restraint are essential to honoring the gifts that God has given us.

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With regard to the second part of your question, again, let me say that some choreography can be oversexualized. So, one does have to be on the alert.

Generally speaking, dancing is not sinful. It is like singing, acting, or painting—much depends upon the artist and what has been created to perform. Is the music uplifting or vulgar and degrading? Is the song expressing a truth or is it promoting something false? What about the book or the play? Or the movie script? Is the choreography of the dance appropriate to the story or music? Any of these mediums can uplift and express beauty or they can be misused. Unfortunately, since men and women are central players in this scenario, sin can enter the picture. That is also why it is important for a culture to be in line with God's plan for humanity. Art often reflects the culture from which it comes.

Q: How do we seek true beauty (not the counterfeit that's presented in pornography) in this life and the next? How is ballet a reflection of that for you?

A: True beauty leads a person to experience a sense of peace and joy. It moves the person to desire what is good. Often it inspires generosity and deep personal self-reflection. True beauty can lead a person to God.

Pornography Isn't What It Seems

If something is authentically beautiful, it will draw you to God. It will truly lift your spirits and make you desire what is good. It will inspire you to live generously where you seek God and reach out to your neighbors.

By now, you know that pornography draws you to the opposite of this. It's a counterfeit of what God made for us regarding the sexual union, which is the marital embrace. Pornography changes the way we think about sex and marriage and distracts us from the true origins and purpose of those gifts. Further, pornography harms both the people who make it, as well as those who view the images and videos. Again, while pornography may "seem" beautiful, you know it's not, because it causes a person to sin and it keeps us from God who is goodness and beauty itself.


To help us, Dr. Notare reminds us that we each need people in our lives to guide us as we seek and identify real beauty. Mentors and accountability partners can truly enable us to identify our strengths and weaknesses, and possibly even point out the ways we can share our gifts and talents with others. This can even aid in directing our gaze toward beauty by participating in its creation, and by offering this beauty to the next person. The person who in turn receives your gift of beauty could have the opportunity to encounter and experience beauty, possibly in a new way than they've ever experienced before. Maybe you too will share it through ballet!

Questions for Reflection

1. Name three ways you can see with the “eyes of God”:
2. Should you be afraid of your body? Why or why not?
3. When do you know it’s true beauty and not the counterfeit?

Action Steps

1. Do you have a mentor or ally as an accountability partner in your life? Could you be a mentor or ally for someone else? Identify one person and reach out to him or her.
2. Take five minutes right now to listen to Mozart’s “**Ave Verum Corpus**”. How would you describe this music? Do you agree with Dr. Notare that it captures a picture of Heaven? If not, what music would help you see Heaven on earth?



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the Human Body, God's Masterpiece

Our world is confused about the body.

Modernity is both obsessed with the body and suspicious of it. We idolize beautiful people, while simultaneously exalting the mind and reducing the body to an instrument to be manipulated. We glorify abstract facts and data, while simultaneously surrendering to every bodily passion.

As people of faith, we must reject this modern mind-body separation. Scripture tells us that God made our bodies good, and that in a very real way, we are our bodies. While our soul is separated from our body after death, this is not our natural state. Rather, we will always be bodily creatures, and our faith tells us that we should look forward to the resurrection of the body.





Yet in a porn-saturated culture, how are we to value our bodies without degrading them? How can we love the beauty of the human form without succumbing to lust? How can we discipline our bodies without hating them?

Jared Zimmerer is an author, speaker, media evangelist, and an amateur body builder. He is the founder of Strength for the Kingdom, a ministry promoting men's growth in virtue, faith, and the understanding of authentic masculinity through physical endeavors.

Q: You're a really big guy. I haven't measured, but your biceps are probably the size of my head. How did you get into body building? Do you compete?

A: I got into bodybuilding due to a knee injury I received in high school. The doctors suggested lifting weights to keep the muscles around my knee strong and I was "bit by the Iron bug," and have been lifting ever since. I've competed in bodybuilding and powerlifting in the past and hope to compete in the coming years again. My last competition was about two years ago. I still lift 4-5 days a week but don't have the time needed to devote for a competition right now.

**Q: Are there different kinds of body building?
What can body building teach us about beauty
and aesthetics?**

A: Bodybuilding teaches a person about beauty and aesthetics through hard work and the human body—God’s masterpiece in all of creation. Many of the artists of the past understood the beauty of the body without sexualizing it—the ability to appreciate the beauty of the human person without enticing lust. Modern bodybuilding and many fitness magazines have lost what bodybuilding was originally intended to do. It’s in large part about shock and awe today, but the original intent was to try and perfect the form of the body in its natural state in order to appreciate man’s ability to build himself—but I would argue, to also appreciate the true Creator of that body. When a person sees a beautiful sunset or a valley they are in utter awe

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of the creation and the Creator of it. I think bodybuilding and fitness take that to its best representative, the human person.

Q: We live in a culture that's rather obsessed with the body. Plastic surgery is commonplace and fitness programs are all the rage. All of this is in the name of beauty. As a result, some people react to this by claiming any emphasis on the body is vain and unhealthy spiritually. How would you respond to that? Are our bodies good or bad?

A: True Christianity is neither puritan nor pornographic. We appreciate and love the body, sexuality, and the human form, but we know and encourage modesty. The mentality that the body is bad comes from a puritanical, Platonic dualism, teaching that the soul is trapped in a fallen body. This is not a Christian mentality. The pornified culture is a direct response to the extreme other end, saying that the human body is good but it is a tool for me to play with. Both of these extremes are false, and both can lead towards a

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misguided vision of the human person. Mankind was given a gift in the human body and to take care of it is to take care of a gift from our Creator. The body is indeed good, in fact scripture says it's very good.

Q: Porn is a global problem that is only getting worse, yet God made our bodies to be beautiful. How can we learn to appreciate the beauty of the body in a pornified culture? What's the balance between admiration and objectification?

To admire the human body is to remember its purpose.

A: The best way to steer away from the pornified mentality is to see the human person in its fullest. Rather than seeing an object, or simply focusing on the flesh, we can elevate men and women above this problem of objectification when we start to see man in his fullest; mind, body, and soul. To admire the human body is to remember its purpose. We exist to know, love, and serve God our Creator. Therefore, the human body is meant to achieve those ends. By appreciating the beauty of the body both in ourselves and in others we can come to know God by way of beauty. We can personally serve him better through taking care of our bodies and having better health. We can love God through our bodies by taking care of them and not just using them for selfish gain. Objectification does just the opposite. People only love themselves when they objectify: they only know the flesh, and they only serve their selfish goals.

Q: Our culture doesn't seem to know what men are anymore. On the one hand, we see a growing feminization of men, with men expected to be more sensitive and even becoming more feminine in their appearance. On the other hand, we have the macho-man stereotype, where men feel they need to be Rambo to be real men. If these are distortions, what does true masculinity look like?

A: True masculinity looks like Christ crucified. I think one of the most important things men need to hear is that their life is not about them. These distortions exist because men have forgotten this. Oftentimes we see this push for a more feminine masculinity because of the lie that men are violent animals. Then, we see the pushback of this by men acting like violent animals. There's a long history of problematic masculinity, and I argue that this history stems from the push for secular relativism as the one truth to follow. In relativism, masculinity becomes malleable—it becomes subjective to each person's wants or needs. This is false. There are certain principles of masculinity and femininity that are objective and unchanging. The problem is that we've narrowed the vision of what that means.

Within the proper perspective of Christ crucified as our model for masculinity, we don't have to operate on this either/or mentality. It becomes a both/and. Both G.K. Chesterton and Ghandi were real men. Both Francis of Assisi and the great Knight Godfrey of Bouillon were real

men. Within that we see that personality and the individual human person still fit in the lens of manhood because they all seek to fulfill the objective vision of manhood: living a life of sacrifice for others. I firmly believe that in the image of Christ crucified we find the perfect model of manhood.

**Q: You talk frequently about the “New Asceticism.”
What do you mean by that?**

A: I like to use a very simple definition of asceticism: disciplining the body in order to train the will. When you tell the body “no” on a regular basis it becomes easier to tell the will to follow what the intellect knows is true. Just

***True masculinity looks like
Christ crucified.***

as scripture says in Matthew, some demons require prayer and fasting. Fasting is an ascetic practice to train the will by way of disciplining the diet. Asceticism has a very long history in Christianity. Some went into the desert, others ate only bread and water for months, still others practiced more extreme forms of self-chastisement.


I would argue the fitness world has offered Christians a new way to live out the principles of asceticism while living in the

world. It is tough to discipline your diet and stay away from our fast food culture. It hurts to go to the gym when you're tired. It hurts to say 'no' to some of life's little pleasures. If we take the self-discipline and apply it with humility and prayer, we can begin living an ascetic life. However, I call it new because in this type of asceticism we attempt to build the body rather than tearing it down. Making us better men and women, husbands and mothers, priests and pastors, and ultimately better disciples of Jesus Christ.

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Q: Not all of us will be body builders, but what are some practical ways we can learn to value and take care of our bodies?

A: I always recommend for people to choose two disciplinary acts, giving up one thing and taking on another, for thirty days. So, you could give up simple sugars and add a two-



mile post dinner walk. You could give up alcohol and take on a three day a week weights routine. What you do can be subjective depending on your goals but it's those little things that can make a big difference and help people enjoy the journey.

Q: You're interested in more than lifting weights, You're also a student of philosophy and theology. What can the beauty of created things tell us about God?

A: Beauty is one of the most fascinating of the transcendentals to me. The emotions and feelings that sprout in our hearts when we experience true beauty are near unexplainable. I love to go hiking in the mountains and there's nothing quite like seeing the range of mountains from the top. Or, when I read *The Lord of the Rings* for the first time, I couldn't really explain what it was that I experienced but I knew that it was different and profound. The same thing (only on a much larger scale) was experiencing the birth of my children, it's simply heart-wrenching beauty and joy. This beauty can tell us so much about who God is and how he operates. Our small little experiences of beauty in this world are sadly fleeting. Yet with the proper vision of what that beauty represents it can lend itself to great hope for what God has for us in the afterlife, a beauty which is inexhaustible and unrelenting.

Q: At the root of many of our distorted ideas about the body is a misunderstanding of what a human being actually is and what we were made for. What is the purpose of a human being, and what role, if any, do our bodies play in achieving that purpose?

A: The purpose of the human person is to know, love, and serve God and to be with him for all eternity. The body's role in that is to be the catalyst by which we follow His commands. If we desire to fulfill our purpose, God has

The purpose of the human person is to know, love, and serve God and to be with him for all eternity.

revealed the ways in which we come to do so. A person cannot show love to another without the human body, it is literally impossible. You need words and actions; you need a physical body. You can't come to know God without some semblance of the senses. You can't serve God unless you are able to do something. We live in a time where so much of our life is lived in the mind. We constantly have images and information thrown at us that pretty much stay in the head. I hope to reignite a passion to get people back in their bodies again because that is ultimately how we know we exist.

The Body as God Intended


True Christianity is neither puritan nor pornographic. Rather, we should see the body as God intended, as a visible manifestation of the soul and as a vehicle for knowing, loving, and serving God. Taking care of our bodies is not wrong, and in fact can help us mature spiritually by cultivating discipline and virtue. Asceticism need not be a merely negative punishment of the body, but can also involve sacrificing to build the body in strength and beauty.

Questions for Reflection

1. What does true masculinity look like?
2. Fasting can be a tool for growth in holiness. Name some of the benefits of fasting.
3. Name three ways we can overcome the pornified way of seeing the human person.

Action Steps

1. Try introducing a new ascetical practice on a penitential day or season, such as Fridays, during Advent, or during Lent. Then continue it. This can be giving up something, like a favorite food, or something that builds up the body, like doing push-ups.
2. Name three ways you can start taking better care of your body. They can be related to diet, exercise, or something else. Then put them into practice.



“ If
we desire
to fulfill our purpose,

God
has revealed the ways
in which we come
to do so.

Humanity's Great Destiny

Fr. Seraphim Rose once said, “Pornography is the devil’s iconography.” And it couldn’t be more true.

God has a great destiny in store for us, his creatures. He wants to grant us a share in his divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). What a great dignity! What an honor that we should be called the sons of God! True, transcendent beauty reveals this destiny to us.

But the devil hates humanity and wants to prevent us from achieving our divine destiny. He distorts and destroys all that is good, and pornography is his vision for humanity. It is his image of what the human person should be—a disposable object to be consumed and then discarded.

Through their insights, the artists we interviewed showed us that true beauty is the antidote to the devil’s lies. Yes, ugliness

is everywhere. In many ways, our culture glorifies what is ugly and profane. And yet, beauty is there too, often found in unlikely places.

By educating ourselves in what is truly beautiful, we can begin to see through the cheap substitutes offered by our spiritual enemy, and see the world with a purified vision.

These interviews and testimonies invite us to reflect on the way we see the created world, especially the human person. Pray and reflect on what you've read, and then seek concrete changes in your life that will point you to what is truly beautiful. Consider doing the following:

1. Seek out an ally, which will teach you to be vulnerable and to learn to trust.
2. Sign up for Covenant Eyes Screen Accountability. This service will help you guard your eyes and mind online.
3. Share this ebook with your friends and family on social media.

If we follow these steps and each take the insight and experience of these four people seriously, through our relationship with God founded in the Sacraments and prayer, we can be participants in changing culture through experiences of true beauty. And then, as the great writer Dostoyevsky put it, "Beauty will save the world."

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