

Everything Is Beautiful

by: *Ronald L. Dart*

Ten years from now, you'll be able to walk over to your bookshelf, pull down your trusty almanac, and look up the annual statistics for school shootings. It'll be just like today, where you can look up infant mortality, crime statistics, and murders. They'll have it all broken down for you by state, the gender of the shooters, the number of victims, and the age groups.

You know, I went all the way through grade school, junior high school, high school, and four years of college, and never heard of a school shooting. And we had two guns in the house, as did nearly everyone else I knew. Now, we have two or three school shootings a week, plus several threats, numerous rumors, and the police checking on kids who said they might shoot someone, sometime.

Most of the talking heads on TV and most of the editorial cartoonists want to know, "What are we going to do about the guns?" Now, I may have missed it, but I haven't heard anyone ask, "What are we going to do about the kids?" For every kid who takes a gun and shoots somebody, there may be hundreds who think about it, and don't do it. The youth of our country are descending into a spiral of violence and darkness that is frightening. It's in the movies they see, it's in the television they watch, it's in the music they hear. You would be shocked to pull the headphones off one of these kids in the mall and listen to what they are listening to.

I was reading Robert Bork's book, *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, and he mentioned a love song from the 1930's that went, *Oh, but you're lovely! With your smile so warm and your cheek so soft! There's nothing left for me but to love you just the way you look tonight.* Then he went on to contrast it with the lyrics of two songs from today's stuff that had lyrics so violent and obscene that I cannot bring myself to read them to you. I can't even read them with blanks for the bad words, because it is so obvious what the song is about.

I used to wonder about the decay of popular music in all of its forms. I used to wonder why no one was writing beautiful music any longer. When you hearken back to the 1930's, 1940s, and somewhat in the 1950s, you have music that is beautiful to listen to. It expresses warmth and love of a man for a woman and of a woman for a man. And I ask myself, "Where has it gone?" It was as though people had lost the ability to write good music.

But then, I read what Robert Bork said about the music, so called, in question. He said, "The obscenity of thought and word is staggering, but also notable is the deliberate rejection of any attempt to achieve artistic distinction or even mediocrity." Suddenly, it all became clear to me. It is not merely that they can no longer write music as such. It's not even that they will not. It is that they have come to hate beauty and to despise art. There is a spirit of pure hatred in what is called art and music today. From the obscenity in rap and hip-hop, to the excrement and urine that is now featured in art. It reflects a contempt for beauty and love which is awesome to behold.

For decades now, the artists and musicians have tried to shock the bourgeoisie with trash, only to find the bourgeoisie adapting its taste to trash. Now, we have become nearly unshockable. You see, the object is not to advance art through all these *avant-garde* art exhibits. It is to trash art; to make art ridiculous.

Where once we might have seen a picture of a Madonna and child, now we see a picture of Mary with elephant dung smeared on the picture. Where once we might have seen a sculpture like Michelangelo's *Pieta*, one of the most beautiful sculptures ever done by man. It's a statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus, holding the dead Jesus across her lap, having just been taken down off the stake, and looking upon him with an expression of such sadness and sorrow, so brokenhearted, that it will actually break your heart. Where once we looked upon sculptures like that, now the artist displays a crucifix in a jar of urine. I think that was actually part of an exhibition funded by the National Endowment for the Arts. Where once we might have been touched by a painting of a rose with a drop of moisture suspended on a petal, now the artist presents in his display a jar of his own feces for us to ponder, to admire, to think about, and to consider as art.

Not long ago, I had reason to ponder the incredible love of music that led a deaf Beethoven to continue to write music he could no longer hear. Then I watched a half-time show at a football game where some idiot using a phonograph record, put his finger on the record, with the needle in the groove, and used the phonograph record to create rhythm for a rock band. Now, I know that back in the old days, we made music with whatever we had to hand--a washboard, or spoons. But we did that at home.

Here, we have someone using make-shift music and trash music before 100,000 people at a football game. I wonder, who is the bigger fool? The fool who is making the music, or the fool who is applauding and paying for it? Somebody, somewhere, is laughing his head off as he watches people spending millions of dollars on total trash and calling it music or calling it art. When both artist and public have lost the ability to love.

When I pondered this, a terrible realization dawned on me. We are in the latter stages of a war for men's souls, and the battle is all but lost! It is a battle that started a very long time ago. Somewhere back in the dark recesses of time, probably before what you and I would call time even existed, God took in hand to create a marvelous and beautiful creature, whom we've heard of, called Lucifer. He's described in Ezekiel 28 in the type of the King of

Tyre. "Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus said the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was they covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created" (Ezekiel 28:12-13).

Now, here is one created by God and created perfect. He was not only beautiful; he was an artist, he was a musician. He was gifted to create beautiful music. It doesn't take a lot of imagination as to why god would create such a being as this, who was beautiful, gorgeous to look upon, and perfect in his musicianship, in what he could do. He says to him, "Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth" (Ezekiel 28:14). This can be nothing but an allusion to the two cherubim that covered the Ark of the Covenant, which suggests that this one was right at the very throne of God. "Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" (Ezekiel 28:14-15).

The iniquity was pride, among other things, and being lifted up with vanity at his own beauty. You know, Rollo May said, in his book, *Love and Will*, that when men lose the power to love, they often substitute power over, or dominance. I've had occasions in my lifetime to witness some clear examples of this happening to people.

When Lucifer lost his power to love, when his love turned inward upon himself, which is much the same thing, he also substituted power over. And everything that was beautiful he came to hate, to loathe, to despise. It doesn't take a vivid imagination to know what is going on when an artist wants to urinate on Christ, or to throw dung at the mother of Jesus. There is a hatred there of staggering dimensions. And it's hatred that is very old. A hatred that probably predates man's presence on the earth.

Whence comes this chaotic, destructive, hateful, violent, excrement-obsessed spirit? More important-where is it going? I'll tell you where it's going: it's going for your children. It's been after your children for hundreds of years. Generations of children have had to be civilized by their elders, lest they grow up as savages in this world.

There are those who believe that we lost, or began to lose, the battle to civilize the next generation of savages in the 1960's, when their sheer numbers overwhelmed the more mature generations, which, in times gone past, civilized these children, and made them acceptable. It may also be true that parents and schools gave up the fight. What also made a difference is the extreme affluence of those years and the idleness and boredom that went with it. And the indifference of parents, so caught up in those affluent times and what it took to maintain them, that they no longer paid attention to their children.

Children today have too much money, too much time, and too little adult attention. So, if you were the devil, and you wanted to destroy what God was doing, where would you start? Logically, you'd start with the children. So, if you were to plan to fight back, where should you start? Well, logically, you should start with the children.

There's nothing new in this problem. It's described many generations ago by King Solomon in the Book of Proverbs. In admonishing his own son, he warns his son in Proverbs 4:14-17, "Don't enter into the path of the wicked. Don't go in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass it by, turn from it, get away. "For these people don't sleep unless they have done mischief. Their sleep is taken away unless they can cause somebody to fall. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence."

What does that mean? In our language, we have a way of describing a person's total immersion in what he is doing. We say that someone, "eats, sleeps, and drinks" his work, his art, or his music-whatever it is that he is doing. We say he is immersed in it. What Solomon was saying is that these people are totally immersed in wickedness and violence.

What you may not realize is that kids today eat, sleep, and drink wickedness, mischief, and violence. They are totally immersed in it. It is in their music and their entertainment. And, lest at any time, they get too far away from it, it is literally plugged into their ears. You see kids everywhere with their headsets on. They are plugged into a violent, sex-obsessed, ugly world. Why should anyone be surprised that, with children totally immersed in an ugly, violent culture, it would burst out in a school shooting?

What worries and dismays me most is that so few parents seem prepared to fight back. They don't seem to realize that there is a battle there to be fought. Or, maybe they just think the battle is already lost. . . "The kid's gone, and there's not much I can do about it." There is a complacency in parents these days that is wondrous to behold. There is a war going on for the souls of your children! And parents and church leaders seem as apathetic as a bunch of Jews being herded onto a train bound for Auschwitz.

I find when I preach about this, that the usual response to the sermon is, "Boy! We sure need to pray for God's Kingdom to come!" We do, indeed, need to pray for God's Kingdom. But you know, if we expect to be in God's Kingdom, if we expect our children to be there, we're going to have to learn to fight and to win. I have said that God does not intend to spend eternity with a bunch of losers-that we were born to win, and that God expects us to stand up and fight.

Now, if I were the devil, I would start my war in the schools. Once God and the Bible have been banned from the schools, the battle is well joined and the field will be much easier to fight. It is much harder to fight it in the homes. The schools are better. You hit kids at their most vulnerable points in schools. Pre-puberty, the natural rebellion of the early teens. You hit them again in college, where you can destroy the last vestiges of any faith they may have had. You hit them from every possible angle: music, education, entertainment,

affluence, boredom. And then leave them to themselves as much as possible with no guidance.

It seems to me that the strategy to fight this war becomes fairly clear when you understand what the adversary is up to. In the first place, without God, without the Bible, without the absolute moral authority that depends upon them, you don't have a leg to stand on. So, before your children get exposed to the world, expose them to God. Persistently, systematically, intensely. Lay a groundwork of faith from the very earliest age, so that they cannot remember a time when they did not see themselves as children of God, that they did not know that they were loved by God. From the time they hit school, you have to realize that you are in a war for the mind and soul of your child and you will have to fight that war with intelligence, with subtlety, with discipline, with perseverance, knowledge, and any other weapon you can get your hands on.

You'll need support: support from other parents, support from your church, and from people like us at Christian Educational Ministries, who provide tools for teaching your children the Bible at home. Take help wherever you can find it. This is no time for fatalism. What will be will not necessarily be. No. Don't accept that.

One more thing you should understand that has been lost entirely in this whole discussion. I said that when one loses the power to love, commonly, one substitutes power over others. Our society has lost the power to love. Increasingly, sex has been substituted for love. It's easy to teach sex. It's not all that hard to teach the Bible, and its marvelous moral code. But the hardest thing of all to teach is that which was lost first: the ability to love. You don't teach love in a classroom. The schools are helpless to teach love. There is no *Agape* 101, no Principles of Romance, no Introduction to Affection on the curriculum. You learn love at your mother's knee and on your father's lap. You learn love by watching your dad hold your momma tight. You learn by seeing the fear in your dad's eyes when he picks you up when you've fallen out of a tree.

How as a parent can you teach your children the meaning of love? One, you marry someone you really love, not just someone you have the hots for who looks good in a convertible. Second, you enter what might be called a covenant marriage. A covenant marriage is one in which you absolutely commit, under the laws of the land. You cannot get a divorce easily where there is a waiting period and controls on it. What we find is that couples who enter into that kind of a relationship often, through the course of the waiting period and the requirements of it, solve their problems and go on to have very strong marriages. Third, you bring your children into the world when you are ready to give yourself to them and to love them. Fourth, shower them with affection while controlling their behavior with discipline. Fifth, introduce your children from the very start to the fountain of all love, to the Creator, to the Father, and to his Son, so that they will understand from the start that this is a family relationship. Sixth, teach your children the Law of God as a guide to life, a lamp to their feet, a guide to their path, as something to give them an edge in life. You don't teach the Law as shackles and chains, for the first impulse will be to rebel against

control. The Law, as a control on behavior, is not strong enough to hold with a teenager. Seventh, never let your attention to your children flag. You must love them as God loves you. That's a tall order, but nothing else will do.

Now, all of this is easy for me to say, since I have no children. Perhaps that's why it's left for me to say. It's too hard from someone else to say it. Whatever it is, it must be said, for the stakes are life itself. And the truth is, if your children cannot learn to love, nothing else much really matters. Not prophecy, not speaking in tongues, not knowledge, not even faith. Without love, all the works in the world go nowhere. But if your children can learn from you the meaning of love, the foundation has been laid for all of the great virtues.

This is a truth from the Bible that seems to be utterly lost among people: that it is love that is the foundation of all the virtues you want your children to grow up to have. What are they? Patience, kindness, humility, good behavior, confidence, hope, unselfishness, endurance. Now, if you're a Bible reader, you may already have tumbled to the source of all this. It all comes from that marvelous 13th chapter in 1 Corinthians, where love is described, where it tells you what love is like. The truth of the whole thing is, without love, none of these great virtues are possible. Your greatest temptation, both as a parent and as a church, is to let this great duty slide.

Many years ago, when my wife, Allie, and I realized we weren't likely to have any children, an opportunity came our way to adopt two lovely little children. I think their parents had been killed in an accident. It's so many years ago, now, that it's a little vague to me. For various reasons, we didn't adopt the children, and another couple in the church did. We went on, and we thought about adopting from time to time, but we never adopted children.

I know for a lot of families, not having children is a big problem for them. For us, it never was. We have ended up with a full and satisfactory life, without children. We have no regrets, except one. Having children would, no doubt, have made our lives a lot richer, but we can live with what we have. Our one regret is what our adoption of a couple of kids would have meant to the kids themselves. We're too old to do anything about it, now. But I honestly believe that we let a duty slide by us.

In any civilization, any culture, at any time, there are always unwanted children. Children in need of a home where there is both a mother and a father. Where there is someone to care about them, to care for them, to teach them, to teach them about God, to show them God and his ways, to introduce them to God as Father and as Son, and to the greatest family of all

It's an obligation, I fear, that is taken, oftentimes, far too lightly by parents who have their own children and by parents who could adopt, and have the children of others. What a difference we might be able to make in the life of a child!

Never forget. We're in a war. It is a battle for the souls of children. We face an unmerciful, implacable foe, who has come to hate everything that has anything to do with God. To hate his plan, to hate the beautiful things he created, and above all, to hate his children. God does not expect us to be doormats. He does not merely expect us to pray that his will, will be done, while we do nothing about his will. I don't know what you, personally, or your church, perhaps, should specifically do. But for the love of God, do something!

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