



RELIGIOUS SENSE AND ART

The human person's aspiration toward beauty: A yearning for the ideal

Speakers: Fr. **Thierry DE ROUCY**—Founder of Heart's Home
Mr. **Makoto FUJIMURA**—Painter, Founder of The International Arts Movement
Dr. **Francis GREENE**— Art Historian
Mr. **Etsuro SOTOO**—Sculptor at the Sagrada Familia, Barcelona

Preceded by a piano concert by Hisako HISEKI

Monday, March 8, 2010 at 6:30 pm - The American Bible Society, New York, NY

Crossroads: Welcome to all of you on behalf of Crossroads Cultural Center. A special thanks to Heart's Home and to the American Bible Society who, with us, are the organizers of this event, and we'd also like to thank our sponsors, Honda and Compagnia di Carla who have supported our efforts.

Before our panel discussion, we are fortunate to have with us a great pianist, Ms. Hisako Hiseki, who will perform some pieces by the Spanish composer Isaac Albeniz.

Ms. Hiseki was born in Japan and started taking piano lessons when she was five years old. While a student in primary school, she won the music competition for Pan-Japanese students. Ms. Hiseki continued studying under the supervision of Professor Takahiro Sonoda, and graduated with honors from the Kyoto University of Arts. Ms. Hiseki entered the European music scene by winning the Honorary Diploma at the Maria Canals International Music Competition and the Gold Award at the Piano 80 competition in Switzerland. She has taken various Masters and has offered various performances in Spain, Japan, Switzerland, Germany and France. She has also played as a soloist with well-known orchestras in performances that have aired on Spanish, Japanese and Swiss radio and television. Ms. Hiseki has been a member of the jury at the Xavier Montsalvatge XXth Century Piano Music Award and is a member of the jury at the Barcelona Young Musicians Festival. Ms. Hiseki is married to one of the panelists with us tonight, Mr. Etsuro Sotoo.

This evening, Ms. Hiseki will perform pieces by the Spanish composer Isaac Albeniz: 3 from the suite *Iberia: Malaga, Jerez and Eritana*; and 3 from *Suite Espanola: Granada, Sevilla and Asturias*. Please hold your applause until the end of each set of 3 pieces. Ladies and gentlemen, Ms. Hisako Hiseki...

[Ms. Hiseki plays]

Paredes: Good evening. My name is Mario Paredes. I am the Presidential Liaison of the American Bible Society for Catholic Ministry. My task tonight is very easy and I'm very happy to do what I was asked to do, which is simply to introduce the moderator of tonight's panel, but before I do that, I would like to first acknowledge the group that is co-sponsoring this event tonight with Crossroads Cultural Center, Heart's Home USA. They are a group committed to bringing compassion to the world and they are working in the United States and they are doing a remarkable work. So we welcome the founder who is here and will be a panelist tonight, and we also welcome the members of Crossroads Cultural Center for using our house. We are delighted to have them here. This Bible house has no other purpose but to simply promote the Word of God in the most

unimaginable expressions, and one of them is also through the arts, and so we are delighted that we have this opportunity to co-sponsor the event tonight. May I ask the panelists if they could be kind enough to move forward to the front table please.

Dr. Francis Greene will moderate the discussion and present our distinguished speakers. Dr. Greene has taught French literature, culture, and Fine Arts at St. Francis College since September 1968 and serves as Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Fine Arts where he holds the rank of Professor. He holds a Doctorate in French Literature from Rutgers University and a Master of Philosophy in Art and Architectural History from City University, New York. Frank Greene is also a member of the Crossroads Advisory Board.

Let us welcome Dr. Greene and our distinguished panel.

Greene: This evening it will be my pleasure and an honor to introduce our three speakers. By way of preface I would like to quote briefly from three authors whose knowledge of and engagement with the world of art are both well known and thoroughly documented. Each of the three authors from whom I will quote are relatively recent Popes. I offer their observations without comment since all three have written so clearly and precisely that any commentary would be superfluous.

Peter Hebblethwaite has called Pope Paul VI “the first modern Pope.” Paul VI’s knowledge of and love for modern art were legendary. It was under Pope Paul’s leadership that the stunningly modern and beautiful new Papal Audience Hall was designed by Luigi Nervi and opened in 1971. Pope Paul VI also created an extensive collection of 20th century art to expand and, in a sense, round out the collections of the Vatican Museum. In May 1964 Pope Paul held a historic meeting with artists and on December 8, 1965, at the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, he addressed these words to artists:

This world in which we live needs beauty in order not to sink into despair. It is beauty, like truth, which brings joy to the heart of man and is that precious fruit which resists the wear and tear of time, which unites generations...And all of this is through your hands...Remember that you are the guardians of beauty in the world.

In his 1999 Letter to Artists Pope John Paul II wrote:

Every genuine art form in its own way is a path to the inmost reality of man and the world....Artists are constantly in search of the hidden meaning of things and their torment is to succeed in expressing the world of the ineffable.... Humanity in every age, and even today, looks to works of art to shed light upon its path and destiny.

Pope Benedict XVI met with over 250 artists on November 20th last year, 2009. In his address to them Pope Benedict said:

What is capable of restoring enthusiasm and confidence, what can encourage the human spirit to rediscover its path, to raise its eyes to the horizon, to dream of a life worthy of its vocation –if not beauty?..... the experience of beauty does not remove us from reality; on the contrary, it leads to a direct encounter with the daily reality of our lives, liberating life from darkness, transfiguring it, making it radiant and beautiful.

Indeed, an essential function of genuine beauty, as emphasized by Plato, is that beauty gives man a healthy “shock”, it draws him out of himself, wrenches him away from resignation and from being content with the humdrum—it even makes him suffer, piercing him like an arrow, but in doing so it “reawakens” him.... Beauty pulls us up short, but in doing so it reminds us of our final destiny, it sets us back on our path, fills us with new hope, gives us the courage to live to the full the unique gift of life. The quest that I am describing here is clearly not about escaping into the irrational or into mere aestheticism.

If we acknowledge that beauty touches us, that it wounds us, that it opens our eyes, then we rediscover the joy of seeing, of being able to grasp the profound meaning of our existence...In this regard one may speak of a *via pulchritudinis*, a path of beauty which is at the same time an artistic and aesthetic journey, a journey of faith, of theological enquiry.

With Pope Benedict’s observations in mind I offer this concluding comment. Each of our speakers, that is to say, each of the artists here tonight, has long since journeyed on his own personal *via pulchritudinis*, on his own personal path of beauty. Each will share with us his experiences on the journey and some of the insights which he has gained along the way.

We begin this evening with Etsuro Sotoo, who was born in Fukuoka, Japan, in 1953. In 1977 he graduated from the Kyoto University of Fine Arts and worked as a teacher in Japan. In 1978 he started working in Barcelona as a sculptor in the Temple of the Sagrada Familia, designed by Antoni Gaudí. He has been a professor at the Escola Taller attached to the Temple since 1989. He has sculpted hundreds of pieces for the Temple, and in 2000 he completed, with the "15 Angels," the Nativity Facade of the Sagrada Familia which had been started by Gaudí over one hundred years earlier. Also in Barcelona, in 1991 he collaborated in the restoration of the Domenech i Muntaner di Canet de Mar Museum, and in 2004 he authored the monument to Luis Vitton in Barbera` del Valles. Sotoo has also created several works of art for his hometown, where he is a university professor. He is the author of several publications, and was awarded the Ars Spiritis Prize of Lladró in 2002 and the Fukuoka Prize for Culture in 2003. I present to you Etsuro Sotoo.

Sotoo: Good evening. First, I want to tell you two things that Gaudí said. Gaudí said, “Originality is to return to the origin.” And he said that he only collaborated with what God creates. These two things are very important for today.

The photos you are looking at show the work that I have been doing for the past 32 years. All I’ve been thinking during that time is: what was Gaudí trying to do? For instance, the plant you saw in the photo just now became this [in his architecture]. Gaudí always considered nature to be his friend.

Gaudí has only recently been recognized as a genius. But we still don’t understand the secret of his genius. And we don’t know where to place Gaudí in the history of architecture. Was Gaudí just an architectural genius, or was he a genius in a larger, different sense? We aren’t yet able to understand. What we can say with certainty at this point is that Gaudí was an architect who tried to build the future. I think he was a man who, through architecture, tried to discover what the happiness of mankind is, and found it.

What does it mean for people to be happy? We don’t really understand yet. Many great people have lived over the years, as mankind has entered the 21st century. For instance, we are only now able to understand what

Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci did 500 years ago. In the same way, Gaudí passed away in 1926, but I think he was the first person to enter the 21st century. Not only the 21st century, but perhaps he's even entered the 24th and 25th centuries. This is something I've thought inwardly, but with certainty, after my 32 years of work.

No one knows what the future will bring. But it's clear that Gaudí was headed in a direction completely different from the way mankind has progressed up to this point, and somewhat different from the way we are headed now. For example, buildings are built in opposition to the force of gravity. In New York today, people have built the most amazing buildings, but they're really built against gravity; they don't use the power of gravity.

Gaudí believed that the sun, the air, water, and even gravity, exist for us; that people are born from them. He believed that we and gravity are not enemies, but must be friends, and that this is the future. How long can we continue to fight against nature? Shouldn't we instead use the power of nature to its fullest, use it 100%? Isn't that the path people should take?

In order to not fight against gravity, Gaudí created his structures like an inverted suspended thread. In other words, by taking a formation designed by gravity and turning it upside down, he was able to use the power of design in his construction. By turning it upside down, gravity supports the structure. Can you understand this? It's difficult to visualize, but it's very simple. There are many people in the world who say they understand Gaudí. But he's so simple that he is difficult to understand. That is Gaudí.

This photo is a Gaudí exhibit that we were asked to do at the European Parliament. The European Union has been a work in progress for over 50 years. You could say that America has been a work in progress for over 200 years. The EU wanted to learn from what Gaudí has been building for the past 128 years. The European Union began simply from the beginning as a friendship. So did America. So what is at the root of things that happen all over the world? They don't progress from scientific discoveries or the development of new ideologies. They are born from what comes first: friendship between people, love, and the power of the family.

Gaudí believed in love. In his words, "First there is love, then technology." Aren't we completely dependent on technology? But the future is not in technology. If we were to proceed only with technology, how long would it be before mankind perished? What has brought us to this point has been friendship, the love of the family, love between people: because we value the heart. This is what has enabled us to live to this point. If we lose our hearts, if we choose to abandon love, then mankind will perish someday.

Today there are many specialists. There are too many specialists. There are only specialists. To Gaudí, analysis and specialization were important, but he tells us that the most important thing is to bring them together, to synthesize.

Well, we may have some doctors here tonight, but can any doctors tell us with certainty what it means to live, what makes a person alive? A doctor might know everything about a certain area of the left side of the liver, but few people know what it means to live. That is what we need now.

Gaudí was an architect. But what he really wanted to do was to make his clients, his customers, happy. His happiness was the happiness of the people who lived in his buildings. That was what he sought. Gaudí believed

that true happiness was to live within oneself. To that end, he learned from nature not only appearances, but how to use the power of nature. For example, having gravity dictate the design of the structure; to have light determine the design of the windows; to have the wind design the smokestacks.

Man does not decide everything on his own. When man tries to decide everything on his own, he ends up rushing ahead recklessly without an awareness of his limits. That is what is happening today. We are at the limits of human intelligence. But Gaudí is teaching us another kind of intelligence. That is, to take the wisdom of nature. Man cannot live only through human wisdom. In order to gain the wisdom of nature, we must always observe nature seriously. Many people think that intelligence is to try to fit the world and what happens in the world into one's head. But the truly wise person knows that he is standing before the world. So he does not forget to observe.

I only have a little time, but what I would like to say to you is that all work is a collaboration with God's creation. And to earnestly observe nature, like a child. Children are always earnest. Don't you think that children are always getting into trouble? But children are always observing earnestly. That is something we adults have forgotten. And children always need friends, friends without conditions. What we must do now is a very simple thing, to earnestly observe nature like Gaudí, to observe reality. And we need to have friends without conditions.

Gaudí died in 1926 when he was hit by a streetcar. That day, he was working hard on a certain lamp. The last thing he told his employees was, "It's getting dark, so come in early tomorrow. And tomorrow we'll make something better," he said as he left. What I'd like to tell you today is, let's make something better tomorrow. People have made many things over the years. But every work also creates the future. Just as what you eat today will make the you of tomorrow, the things we make today make the people of tomorrow. Please don't forget that. So let's create something better tomorrow. Let's live more tomorrow.

Greene: Etsuro, thank you for sharing with us your perceptions and experiences at the Sagrada Familia. One really struck me, having visited several times—your perception that for Gaudí first came love and then technology. It is an enormous help to me in better understanding his work. Thank you very much.

Our second presenter this evening is Makoto Fujimura. He was born in 1960 in Boston, Massachusetts. Educated as bicultural between the United States and Japan, he graduated from Bucknell University in 1983 and received the M.F.A. from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music as a National Scholar in Nihonga (Japanese-style painting) in 1989. His thesis painting was purchased by the university and he was invited to study in the Post-M.F.A. lineage program, a first for an outsider to this prestigious traditional program. During his years in the program, he experienced "a transfer of allegiance from art to Christ." His book *River Grace* traces his journey of mastering Nihonga technique, using carefully stone-ground minerals including azurite, malachite, and cinnabar, along with his deep wrestling with art and faith issues.

In 1992 he became the youngest artist ever to have had a piece acquired by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo. His works are found in museums such as: The Saint Louis Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, and the Time Warner / AOL / CNN building in Hong Kong. His paintings are represented by Dillon Gallery in New York and in Tokyo.

He was appointed to the National Council on the Arts, a six-year presidential appointment, in 2003. *WORLD* magazine honored him as its Daniel of the Year in 2005.

In 1990 Fujimura founded The International Arts Movement, an arts advocacy organization that wrestles with the deep questions of art, faith, and humanity. Fujimura has served as an elder at Redeemer Presbyterian Church as well as a founding elder at The Village Church, both Presbyterian Church in America congregations in New York City. His writings on art and faith issues have appeared in *Image Journal*, *Books and Culture*, *American Arts Quarterly*, and *WORLD* magazine.

Fujimura: I am really honored to be here and to speak after Etsuro Sotoo-san. Thank you for that journey of revealing God's beauty, and as Etsuro-san is dedicating his life to remembering to pursue his art as influenced by Gaudí, I feel I owe my gratitude to an artist named George Rouault with whose works I just had a show in New York at Dillon Gallery last December, so I'm going to speak to you about this exhibit.

There are so many parallels. In this book that we published for the exhibit called *Rouault-Fujimura: Soliloquies*, I wrote an essay called "George Rouault: The First Twenty-First Century Artist." Perhaps he too is caught in this mysterious labyrinth that his art is not able to find its home. Many critics and art historians try to categorize George Rouault. The Museum of Modern Art has twenty-some exquisite masterpieces that they never show because there is simply no category where George Rouault can fit, and yet as I have journeyed with him, first beginning in Japan, even before my transfer of allegiance to Christ, I felt drawn to his work. Oddly, Japan has the best collection of George Rouault. Early in the 20th Century the Japanese caught on to this extraordinary artist and his works through the intellectual movement called *Shirakaba* and they began to collect his paintings. So you can make a pilgrimage to Japan to find the best Rouault paintings.

I was a student at the time, a graduate student, studying this traditional curriculum in Nihonga to understand both the traditional Japanese-style painting, but also its practice in grinding up pigments, its use of gold and silver on to paper and silk, and at the same time I felt this draw to a particular artist like Rouault and like El Greco, as well as Japanese 16th Century painters, and I found myself in this extraordinary position to travel to Paris and to meet with the George Rouault estate which has allowed my gallery in New York, Dillon Gallery, to exhibit some of his work alongside mine.

These photos I took at the estate, which is closed to the public, but I was able to go in and spend about thirty minutes alone in his studio. I cannot tell you how much that meant to me. Rouault passed away in 1956 and his studio has not been moved since then.

Many of us know Rouault's work—the *Miserere* series, this dark torment of imagery coming out of post World Wars in Paris. He painted alongside Matisse who was a good friend of his. At the time he was working when Picasso was painting, Brancusi was sculpting, and yet he found himself painting dark images. And so in today's discussion, this idea of beauty... Rouault presents an interesting paradigm about what beauty can be defined as. Not necessarily as this cosmetic, superficial beauty, but a deep suffering of beauty.

Many of the works exhibited at the show begin in the early days—his homage of Millet, and they are even reminiscent of early Van Gogh drawings. As Rouault came into his own, he began this journey—padded colors that he grew up loving. As a teenager he was an apprentice in a stained glass window shop and he eventually

gravitated back toward those colors that he learned to use early on. And these portraits, very simple and yet very profound. There's a certain "gravitas" to them, as with the colors' weight—not superficial, but again heavy colors that penetrate the background and the figures.

One of the paintings that I found myself standing in front of for many hours—*Christ in the Outskirts* at the Bridgestone Museum in Tokyo. I have spoken to many Nihonga masters that I have studied under, and they all tell me that this is one of the masterpieces that the world should recognize as not only Rouault's gift to the world, but also when we look back at the 20th Century this surely, in their minds, stands out as one of the greatest paintings of our time. "Christ on the Outskirts" exiled. We all understand, the people on the margins, people who are left apart from society, exiled people. And therefore he painted them—prostitutes and clowns, people who were either ignored or avoided. And here is Christ on the outskirts of Paris amid dilapidated buildings, post-war structures that sit somewhat dark and empty, and yet there He is with children, guiding them toward the path of the unknown. It is an extremely moving image. This is not a good reproduction of it. And this is a work done at the end of his life to show you that Christ is still standing there, guiding people, but into a new world, a New Jerusalem, a new reality.

So my exhibit with Rouault, to place my works beside his masterpieces, I really could only respond with admiration, as I imagine Sotoo-san responding to Gaudí. Rouault to me is one of the greatest masters of the 20th Century, and what I have tried to do is to use this language of both 20th Century abstract expressionism and also from 16th Century Japan to create a hybrid of these two influences, and these paintings are called *Soliloquies*—an interesting title; it is the title of Rouault's diary and he was quoting Saint Augustine who wrote that if you seek truth, and I will add beauty, you will often find yourself alone, and yet what you think is a soliloquy, as it turns out, echoes throughout history and you're not alone. Your soliloquy becomes soliloquies, and as Rouault was painting he believed that. He was convinced that his paintings did not belong to his time. And I believe that, and listening to Sotoo-san speak about Gaudí, their works are soliloquies that resonate beyond time itself, and they speak into our present world, but also the condition of the world to be.

My paintings are semi-abstract. They will somehow navigate between representation and abstraction, and since I use ground minerals, they are layered and so it's very hard to translate this into flat, digital imagery here. So if you'd like to see my work, please go to Dillon Gallery at 555 West 25th Street. There's a group show up right now and some of these paintings are being displayed.

What I wanted to do with these paintings is provide a theatrical background for Rouault's drama, and so I wanted to sit back, create colors, resonant colors that refract light just as stained glass windows will transmit light because of colors imbedded in the glass. My paintings are layers of minerals that are pulverized, that are prismatic, imperfect, and so they speak of this reality of nature, reflecting light but also refracting light. So if you spend some time in front of my paintings, you find that your eyes, as they adjust, start to see multiple colors. Beauty is like that. You can't just pinpoint beauty to this one thing, or this experience, or this object.

Denis Donoghue, who wrote a magnificent book on beauty called *Speaking of Beauty*, notes that you must speak of beauty together with truth and goodness. You cannot isolate beauty or it becomes sentimentalized and trivialized, but beauty is part of our universe that God has created, that He has gifted us with to steward, and the way to appreciate that is as we did today, listening to music to be able to speak of beauty as an experience, to walk through Gaudí's building, and to enter into this conversation, dialogue, with those who have come in the

past who dare to create beauty, but also knowing that it is fleeting in and out of our lives, and we need to come to embrace the nature of that journey, that process. I think my effort to capture that is only a glimpse into perhaps a holistic way of understanding beauty. And my painting *Interior Castles*, which is about the size of the screen and has multiple layers of gold and cinnabar, which is Japanese red, Japanese vermillion, and I am speaking of St. Theresa of Avila who wrote that magnificent journal *Interior Castles*. The mystery of God, of prayer.

I want to close by reading a passage from *Isaiah 61*. Many years ago when I began to exhibit in New York, I started at Dillon Gallery. Valerie Dillon discovered me, and she allowed me to talk about these passages which were imbedded in the paintings written with gold. And *Isaiah 61* says:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,

and provide for those who grieve in Zion-
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.

I believe that's what Rouault was doing in the early 20th Century and this is the work that I am called to do here in the 21st Century.

Thank you very much.

Greene: Our third speaker and presenter this evening is Reverend Thierry de Roucy. Fr. Thierry is a member of the religious congregation of the Servants of Jesus and Mary located in France. He received his bachelor and master of Philosophy from the French Institute of Comparative Philosophy ("Institut de Philosophie Comparee") in Paris, and holds a Master of Theology from "the Angelicum," the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome. He was ordained a priest in 1983, and was the Superior General of his congregation from 1988 to 2001.

In 1990, he founded Heart's Home, and in 1995, he founded the Molokai Fraternity for permanent members of Heart's Home, priests and lay consecrated, and the Servants of God's Presence, a congregation of religious sisters affiliated with Heart's Home. Since 1990, he has worked as chairman of Heart's Home and established 35 Missionary houses and 2 Heart's Home villages in 20 countries.

Rev. Thierry de Roucy today shares his time between the International Center for a Culture of Compassion (ICCC), in Woodbourne, NY and his travel around the world to visit the Heart's Homes. As the author of numerous reflections and teachings, he also participates in conferences to introduce his work all around the world.

He is also a recipient of the French Légion d'Honneur.

It is my pleasure to introduce Fr. Thierry.

De Roucy: Good evening dear friends. It's a pleasure to be with you tonight and to speak about the humanization of the culture. We are all aware that, at least in its traditional features, the religious phenomenon has declined dramatically in past decades. New generations show very little interest in what they perceive to be a mere institution that is incapable of meeting their most pressing existential needs. On the contrary, it is striking that art is attracting and fascinating these same people more and more. Museums have never before recorded so many visitors. Art sales keep surpassing their own sky-high records, while young generations show a massive interest in art studies in its different forms. Such enthusiasm is all the more surprising because art, like religiosity, is at odds with our society's most accepted criteria. We value what is efficient and productive, whereas art is gratuitous. We value immediacy and automatism, whereas art takes a lot of patience and personal commitment. We value ease and comfort, whereas the artist's life is insecure and difficult.... Why ? Why does our society hold on with such passion to art ? We proclaimed the death of God and the "age of maturity" of humanity... Why do we remain so profoundly attached to such a useless and somehow enigmatic tradition?

Maybe the first hint of an answer to that question is: because art meets a desire. The Estonian composer Arvo Pärt is regarded by many - including many young musicians - as one of the most lively and creative protagonists of contemporary music. How does his music, besides being deeply religious and rooted in tradition, fascinate such a large audience ? In an interview, answering that question, Arvo Pärt said: "Both of us have an overwhelming desire. The artist who creates his work and the observer or the listener who comes to see or to listen to it. We come together with open hearts. Once we are there, perhaps we will find ourselves." True Art meets a desire. Art is an encounter that is made possible by a common language, a common desire. It is so true that someone who would lack nothing, want nothing, desire nothing, would show no existential interest in art. One has to be poor in some way to enter within a museum or a concert hall.

Someone once asked Alberto Giacometti how he knew a work was finished. He answered: "I don't finish anything, I just give up." Few artists in history were such restless seekers as Giacometti. Every morning he would destroy what he had made the day before and start it anew, unsatisfied. What was he looking for? The British Art Critic John Berger writes: "The extreme proposition on which Giacometti based all his mature work was that no reality could ever be shared - and he was concerned with nothing else but the contemplation of reality. This is why he believed it impossible for a work to be finished. This is why the content of any work is not the nature of the figure or head portrayed, but the incomplete history of his gazing at it. The act of looking was like a form of prayer to him - it became a way of approaching but never being able to grasp an absolute." The work of art is not the end, it is not the goal. It is a sign. It is an intimation of the absolute. A milestone on our way to absolute beauty.

A true work of art helps us "find ourselves", as Arvo Pärt says, precisely because it expresses, awakens and ignites our desire for absolute beauty. This desire is "overwhelming" because it is so deeply rooted in us that, no matter how much we try to discard it, it surfaces again and again. By "beauty" we certainly do not mean something that can be traced back to a rule or a style. It has to do with experience. Anyone who ever visited the Sagrada Familia and contemplated Antonio Gaudí's work and its continuation through Etsuro Sotou's hands, knows that beauty is like a church or a family: it is somewhere we belong. The experience of beauty has to do with the feeling of being "at home." Or at least with the nostalgia of a place called home. A home for our hearts... For the same reason, it makes so much sense that Makoto's experience of exile and quest for beauty would lead him to the foundation of the International Arts Movement, that is, of a place to belong, to experience the beauty of communion.

Art expresses the ideal and sometimes gives us a foretaste of it. Sometimes it just reopens the wound of its absence. Reading Shostakovitch's memoirs, we learn that apparently communists were great promoters of art. In reality, each of his compositions was submitted to approval by the regime. And there is one thing that would definitely have it officially banned from concert halls: the expression of sadness, and particularly the use of dissonance. It was banned because it opposed and resisted the claim of power to have achieved the ideal society. Art brings us back to the humility of our human condition. Maybe this is especially true for contemporary art. It is inhabited by a profound feeling of the limitedness of our condition. Whoever wandered about the art galleries in Chelsea or the corridors of MoMA knows how much contemporary art is pregnant with a sense of drama, if not of tragedy. Rothko spent his life looking for beauty. Yet the sense of tragedy is never absent from his canvases, even the brightest ones. It is always there, in the edges "blurred with sadness and mystery." He used to define his paintings as "spaces" or "stages." He too was striving towards a home, a place to belong. Yet he could not prevent the progressive dying away of his own light, overwhelmed by the sense of tragedy.

Now let's take a step further, looking at another great artist, Andrei Tarkovsky. A Russian filmmaker, he worked under the communist regime. For the reason already mentioned, he had a very hard time with the censors and only made seven movies in his lifetime. All along the way he suffered criticism and calumny. He was exiled from his beloved country which he would never see again. He died of cancer not long after completing what would be his last work: *The Sacrifice*. In his lifelong reflection on art and cinema, *Sculpting in Time*, he wrote: "An artist cannot express the moral ideal of his time if he does not touch its deepest wounds, if he does not live and suffer these wounds in his own flesh." At the very core of the work of the artist, there is compassion. A passion with and for his people. The same desire, the same passion. If we sometimes experience art as balm, it is because the work of art mediates the compassion of its maker. Tarkovsky states elsewhere that the artist is "the conscience of society, its most sensitive organ." Nowhere is the wound so open and profound. Nowhere is the yearning for the ideal so conscious and pressing. The heart of the artist, and therefore his work, is a crucible where the sense of tragedy meets the ideal, and becomes cry and prayer.

It is a great mission and a great responsibility to be an artist, especially in these times of profound confusion. Yet there are many obstacles to it. There are many ways to withdraw from that responsibility and to give up the quest for truth. There is of course the temptation to secure oneself a more stable position in the market. But we have to admit that our human nature is more inclined to comfortable and easy solutions than to difficult and lifelong achievements. During the time that is left to me, I would like to emphasize two features to which all artists should hold fast in order to not only remain faithful to their vocation but to allow themselves to grow, to

deepen their roots and to bear year after year more beautiful fruits. I want to talk about the relationship with a master, and about friendship.

By master I mean, of course, more than just someone who is able to teach me the techniques of art. The master is the one I look at to understand what art is about and what humanity is about. It is someone in whose life and work the longing for truth and beauty is clearer and deeper. Yehudi Menuhin describes his own masters with very touching words: "[They were] people [he says] who haven't lost the human touch and who are great in their compassion and who have extraordinary command of knowledge. But they're more humble and great at the same time than the knowledge they possess. I knew Enesco as great a human mind as ever I encountered - and Bartok. Two totally different people - the one from Romania, the other from Hungary. But they were both people who were concerned with the youth and the education of the youth. [...] They were concerned with the world." To find such a master should be the deepest desire of all artists, and he or she who found a master should hold on to him or her as to his most precious treasure. The French Sculptor Auguste Rodin has his beautiful way to put it: "The master [, he says,] is he who looks with his own eyes to what everybody can see, and he is able to perceive the beauty of these things that most people hold for common and unappealing." The master, we could comment, is the one who looks differently at the world, because he is not moved by mere curiosity, projects or selfish interest. He is moved by a deep and heartfelt longing for truth and beauty.

Is the master just someone I admire and imitate for a period of time, but that I have to leave in order to find my own personal way, so that the real journey would be a solitary one ? Is that dependance of being a disciple a threat to my originality ? The Irish painter Sean Scully is someone who has a very conscious and generous relationship to his influences, past and present. He was once asked to talk about his relationship with - and the words are those of the interviewer - "the fathers that a strong artist has to assassinate for his own work to fully emerge." His answer to that question is worth listening to: "My work is not a rejection of influences, nor an assassination of artistic parents, but rather an incorporation of whatever is of use to me. I have eaten them, and now I am them. This is what I mean by spirituality. It's an absorption and complete identification into another way. I have not advanced merely through a sense of competition." Building on Sean Scully's statement, we can propose that artists are not bound to either be solitary or in competition with one another. Art stems from a relationship where subjectivity is not alienated. On the contrary, masters engage and reveal the true subjectivity of their disciples. They save it from the subversive dictatorship of trends and ruling ideologies. They show us the way to our own hearts, to that longing deep inside us. Thus they empower our subjectivity to address and embrace the objectivity of the real and the quest for the ideal.

Now there is a second word which I deem essential to art. A word we are not used to connecting with the mission of the artist. This is the word friendship. Instead, another Irish painter, Guggi, states that, as an artist, he "needed friends more than others." Why so ? Because it is his friends whom he credits with inspiring him. "I wouldn't be painting at the standard I am now [says Guggi] without the friends I had and have. We were all blessed to have the gifts we had and we were blessed to end up on the same street. They made me dig deeper. When I see how deep they dig, I feel there's no way I'm going to let the side down. I might not be big in the sense they are, or a household name all over the world, or anywhere, but I want to be a great painter, which is what I've always wanted to be." Artists need friends, that is, they need to belong to a company of people who have the same passion, the same quest, the same commitment to art. Of course there is a solitude that is intrinsic to art. Solitude, because the ideal is personal and therefore the answer can only be personal. No proxy. Yet

genuine friendship is the only thing that can support this lifelong effort towards beauty. My friends encourage me. They remind me of the reason why I started the journey. They help me not to lose sight of the goal. They also inspire me, since the beauty of a true, committed and faithful friendship is maybe the most moving incarnation of that ideal we are striving for.

To conclude these very brief, schematic and incomplete reflections on art and beauty, I would like to say a word about this project that we started in upstate New York: the International Center for a Culture of Compassion. The mission of this place has to do with all that we heard and saw tonight. When I started Heart's Home twenty years ago, it was with the intuition that friendship and compassion is what human hearts need the most. Soon we found ourselves sending hundreds of volunteers to the slums of India, Brazil and Haiti where they gave nothing but their time and their friendship. Progressively we came to understand that not only the prisoners and the prostitutes were in dire need of a humane and compassionate presence, but that cities like Geneva, Paris and New York too were dying of loneliness and crying for compassion. And that culture too needed to be raised up and healed. Set in the Catskills, it is our wish that the International Center for a Culture of Compassion may become a home for the artists, among other culture builders, and a place of education through seminars and retreats. But even more a place where people can experience beauty, the beauty of nature, the beauty of silence and music, and most of all the beauty of friendship. A second house is currently under construction in order to increase our housing capacity, yet all of you are already welcome any time, especially on weekends. New York is an amazing city and center of the art world. Yet we all know how hard and dehumanizing this city can be at times. It is our hope that this humble endeavor of ours will contribute to a true rehumanization of culture.

Thank you.

Paredes: Dear friends, just a word of gratitude and appreciation to this distinguished panel. I'm sure that you all agree that tonight was an extremely enriching night, and a night that really goes to the heart of what is our human existence: the search for beauty, the search for love, the search for friendship. So let us express our appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Greene and the entire panel. A final word of gratitude is to our pianist, Ms. Hisako Hiseki who certainly delighted us tonight and she certainly is a wonderful pianist and a very, very compassionate person just to come here tonight and to entertain us. We are grateful to you and grateful for the talent that you have.

Crossroads: Thank you, Mario. A sincere thanks to all our speakers, to our pianist, to Heart's Home, and especially the American Bible Society for allowing us to be here tonight. And thank all of you for being here this evening. Also I want to thank our translator, Jim Cork.

Thank you very much and have a good evening.