

# Mozart, *Amadeus* and Barth

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In an article in *The Times*, published to coincide with the *première* of the film *Amadeus* early in 1985, the playwright Peter Shaffer said that his own apprehension of the divine was very largely aesthetic. What he meant is illustrated by a remark he quoted from his play *Amadeus*, on which the film was based: 'The God I acknowledge lives, for example, in bars 34 to 44 of Mozart's *Masonic Funeral Music*', and indeed by the whole of that play. Shaffer's statement and the view expressed in his work raise some profound theological questions, and provide an interesting point of comparison with a leading 20th-century theologian, Karl Barth, for whom Mozart ranked almost as a Father of the Church. I want to use the comparison between them to raise some questions about the role of the Holy Spirit in creation, particularly the Spirit's connection with beauty, both in nature and in art.

## *Shaffer and Barth*

Shaffer's theology is simple: for him Mozart was an instrument of the spirit of God. The remark which he quoted in his article is put into the mouth of Antonio Salieri, the Viennese court-composer, who is depicted by Shaffer as recognizing the spirit of God speaking through Mozart, but led by jealousy to attempt to block this spirit. Early on in *Amadeus* Salieri says 'Dimly the music sounded from the salon above ... It seemed to me I had heard a voice of God—and that it issued from a creature whose own voice I had also heard—and it was the voice of an obscene child' (p. 37). Salieri realizes his own mediocrity, and prays that God's voice will speak through himself, a devout and worthy man, rather than through the smutty-minded billiard-playing youngster, Mozart. But nothing changes. Hence Act I ends with Salieri denouncing God:

They say the spirit bloweth where it listeth: I tell you NO! It must list to virtue or not blow at all! What else is virtue for, but to fit us for Your incarnations?... *Dio Ingiusto!* (p. 68)

He swears enmity with God, and vows that to his last breath he will block Him on earth, as far as he can. Act II opens with Salieri saying that his enmity with God henceforth bound him to an obsession which gave his life continuous and thrilling purpose:

I mean, the blocking of God in one of his purest manifestations. God *needed* Mozart, do you see, to let himself into the world. And Mozart needed *me* to give him

worldly opportunities. And therein lay my enormous power  
... (p.69)

Hence by using his influence at court to do down Mozart, Salieri hopes to block God's voice on earth. By his machinations Salieri succeeds in deflecting patronage from Mozart. Eventually the latter's death ensues. But the death is not brought about by Salieri's poisoning him, as was later rumoured in Vienna (and depicted in Pushkin's dramatic sketch *Mozart and Salieri*): for, says Salieri, 'The cause of his death is simple. God blew—as He must—without cease. The pipe split in the mouth of his eternal need' (p. 116).

It is Salieri's realization that God's spirit speaks through Mozart that provides the basis of the drama of *Amadeus* (seen more clearly in the play than in the film). In theological terms, his coveting Mozart's gifts and his desire to earn God's favour reveal Salieri as a disappointed Pelagian (there are a lot of them around!), and lead him to sin against the spirit of God, by blocking one of his earthly instruments.

Barth's interest in Mozart is as striking as Shaffer's, in a very different sort of way. Mention of his favourite composer constantly recurs in his works. This, however, is more than an expression of personal devotion, for in his *Church Dogmatics* Barth gives Mozart a place in theology, in spite of the fact that he was not a Father of the Church, does not seem to have been a particularly active Christian, was a Freemason, and, even worse for Barth (at least at this time of writing, 1950) was a Roman Catholic (Vol. III. Pt. iii. p. 297). A few years later, in some essays on Mozart, Barth confessed that he had listened to Mozart's music the first thing every morning for years and years:

Only after this (not to mention reading the newspapers) have I given attention to my *Dogmatik*. I must further confess: If I ever go to heaven I would first of all inquire about Mozart, and only then about Augustine, Thomas, Luther, Calvin and Schleiermacher.<sup>2</sup>

He hazarded the guess that the angels play only Bach when they praise God, but he was sure that '*en famille* they play Mozart, and that then also God the Lord is especially delighted to listen to them' (Leibrecht, p. 64).

Barth's discussion of Mozart in his *Church Dogmatics* comes in the context of his treatment of the doctrine of Creation, and he says that Mozart's place in theology is with regard to that doctrine, and to eschatology. Mozart, he says 'knew something about creation in its total goodness' that neither the Church Fathers nor any other great musician knew (III. iii. p. 297). Without intending to convey a message or to make a personal confession, Mozart succeeded in preaching God and in conveying His peace, amidst all our woes: 'His music mirrored real life in its two-sidedness, but in spite of that against the background of God's good creation...' (Leibrecht, pp. 68f.). By the music of this Catholic and

Freemason, the evangelical Christian and theologian, Barth, is 'led to the threshold of a world which is good and well ordered', and given parables of the kingdom of heaven (Leibrecht, pp. 63, 77). Mozart, and indeed from the other composers of his century, there gushed out 'a whole stream of natural joy in life in the strength of which we still live today', a joy which praises God the Creator and echoes the glad tidings of the Gospel (*C.D.* III. i. p. 404). It would seem that for him the composer's relation to creation is twofold (though he does not clearly make this distinction): Mozart both reflected the beauty of the world and praised God for it, and himself acted as an agent of God's continuing creation. Moreover, Mozart's peace of mind in the face of his sufferings has an eschatological significance for Barth: 'He had heard, and causes those who have ears to hear, even today, what we shall not see until the end of time—the whole context of providence' (*C.D.* III. iii. p. 297).

Barth's theological discussion of Mozart's significance is, not surprisingly, much richer than the hints thrown out by Shaffer. It also makes a striking contrast with *Either/Or*, in which Kierkegaard, concentrating mainly on *Don Giovanni*, sees Mozart's significance in terms of what he calls the 'sensuous erotic'. But there is one important omission in Barth's treatment: the Holy Spirit is never mentioned. This omission is at first sight surprising, for, like Shaffer, Barth sees Mozart as God's instrument: he says that 'We must assume that God had a special access to this human being' (Leibrecht, p. 64), and that 'He simply offered himself as the agent by which little bits of horn, metal and catgut could serve as the voices of creation' (*C.D.* III. iii. p. 297). Moreover, Barth's connection of Mozart with the doctrines of Creation and eschatology would have provided a good occasion for considering the role of the Holy Spirit, since Christian tradition has assigned the Spirit a place in both these doctrines.

### *The Holy Spirit and Creation*

Barth's omission to give due acknowledgement to the role of the Holy Spirit here perhaps stems from the common tendencies, manifested in Western theology (both Catholic and Protestant) over the last few centuries, to consider pneumatology mainly in the context of ecclesiology or else to restrict the Holy Spirit to subjective experience. The role of the Holy Spirit in Creation is of course duly acknowledged with reference to Gen. i. 2 and ii. 7, but it is seldom discussed much further by Western theologians.<sup>3</sup> The Holy Spirit's role in nature, art and culture is likewise often passed over almost in silence—note how little of Yves Congar's magnificent trilogy *I believe in the Holy Spirit* deals with these topics.<sup>4</sup> Barth himself perhaps saw this weakness, for towards the end of his life he said that if he could begin all over again, he would take pneumatology as his point of departure.

Christian tradition depicts the Holy Spirit as playing a role in Creation in general, but also as having a particular connection with beauty. The Spirit's role in Creation in general simply follows from the doctrines that Creation is the work of God and that the Holy Spirit is God, and from the claim, made by both Augustine and the Cappadocian Fathers, that the external works of the Trinity are undivided (this claim, I take it, may allow for our having a special relation with each of the three Persons *within* their single work, as perhaps Romans viii. 14–17 suggests). Later theologians have made more particular connections: for instance recently Walter Kasper, adopting the Western tradition stemming from St. Augustine which sees the Spirit as the bond of love between Father and Son, has stated that since the Spirit is divine love in person the Spirit is the source of Creation, for Creation is the outflow of God's love and a participation in God's being.<sup>5</sup>

The particular connection of the Holy Spirit with beauty is less easy to trace and to justify theologically, despite its recurrence in Jewish and Christian tradition. The first Christian theologian to make the connection is, as far as I know, St. Irenaeus: he identifies the Word with the Son, and Wisdom with the Spirit, and says that God made all things by the former and adorned them by the latter (*Adv. Haer.* IV. xx. 1–2; in his *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, Ch. 5, he says, with reference to Ps. 33:6, that the Word establishes the reality of being and the Spirit gives order and form to the diversity of the powers). Scriptural witness is scanty, but one may cite Ex. 35:31, which attributes the skill, perception and knowledge of the craftsman Bezalel to his being filled with the spirit of God; and perhaps Gen. 1:2, if this is interpreted as saying that God's spirit brought order out of the formless void.

At this point we need to make a distinction which I have touched on in my discussion of Barth, between natural beauty and the beauty of a work of art. Clearly Irenaeus was thinking of the former, whilst Shaffer and others who claim that the Holy Spirit inspires artists appeal to the latter. But in both cases God is seen as the creator of beauty: the creation of natural beauty is regarded as a direct exercise of His own creativity in the world, whilst artistic inspiration is seen as His working through human instruments or what St. Thomas Aquinas calls 'secondary causes'. If this view is correct, then artistic inspiration may be seen as a way in which God lets us participate in His creativity (Eric Gill talked of 'co-creating'), for, by His acting through us, He enables us to imitate His own creation of beauty. Thus artistic creation is analogous to marriage, in which, according to the Second Vatican Council, parents are enabled to co-operate with the love of God the Creator (*Gaudium et Spes*, §50).

A further connection between artistic creation and God's creative activity is hinted at by Barth, in his comments about Mozart's eschatological significance. For him, the beauty of art anticipates the

restoration of the wholeness of creation. Again, Barth does not specifically appeal to the Holy Spirit. But Christian tradition often refers to the Holy Spirit as the ‘perfecter’<sup>6</sup>. Such perfection or finishing is more commonly seen in terms of sanctification, another way in which God recreates His likeness in fallen creation. But Kasper, for one, links together art, eschatology and the Holy Spirit when he describes a work of art as ‘a foretaste of that which Christian faith looks to with hope as to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit; the transfiguration of reality.’<sup>7</sup> For me, Gluck’s ‘Dance of the Blessed Spirits’ in his opera *Orpheus and Eurydice* serves as an example of this: it conveys a yearning for an everlasting peace, for a kingdom beyond suffering and disharmony.

### *The Holy Spirit and Beauty*

So far, however, I have not provided any rationale for my claims, and the question insistently presses itself: why link beauty with the Holy Spirit? This is really two questions, depending on where one puts the emphasis: why single out the characteristic of *beauty* and associate it with the work of the Holy Spirit? And why associate it particularly with the *Holy Spirit’s* action and not, say, with that of the Word? Of course, I have given some answers in terms of Christian tradition: the Holy Spirit is the ‘perfecter’, and beauty is a type of perfection; the Holy Spirit is also the inspirer, and artistic beauty is the result of inspiration. Moreover, other similar ideas suggest themselves: joy is one of the fruits of the Spirit listed by St. Paul (Gal. 5:22), and beauty is a source of joy. But none of this provides the rationale for which we are searching.

Here again Barth provides some illuminating suggestions and takes us part of the way in an earlier part of the *Dogmatics*, in his treatment of the divine glory (*C.D.* II, i. §31)—but only part of the way, for his lack of a developed pneumatology again restricts him. There he describes the glory of God as being of the whole Trinity, including the Holy Spirit. The particular role of the Spirit is to be the unity of the Father and Son in the eternal life of the Godhead, and in God’s activity in this world to be the divine reality whereby ‘the creature has its heart opened to God and is made able and willing to receive Him’ (p. 669). By the Holy Spirit the creature is baptized, and born again and called and gathered and enlightened and sanctified and kept close to Jesus Christ in time and genuine faith. There is no glorification of God by the creature that does not come about through this work of the Holy Spirit. (p. 670)

Such a transfigured human existence can be a creaturely testimony of God’s existence; moreover, ‘If we remember that the being of this new creature is in Jesus Christ, we can also say with confidence that it becomes an image, the image of God’ (p. 673). Thus God is reflected in creation, and the children of God become ‘creaturely reflections of the

divine glory and therefore of the divine being' (p. 673).

Barth then here envisages our recreation as a reflection of God's glory, and he describes the Holy Spirit as playing a part in this glorification. But there are two things missing from this section of the *Dogmatics*: a discussion of the relationship between earthly beauty and the glory of God, and a specific linking of the Holy Spirit with the idea of our likeness to God. The first of these omissions is perhaps caused by the fact that Barth is anxious to distinguish the concept of beauty implied by the notion of divine glory from any creaturely concept of beauty (p. 656; he does, however, admit that God is the basis and standard of everything that is beautiful and of all ideas of the beautiful); and by the fact that his Christological concerns lead him to concentrate on the soteriological import of the glory of God shining through Jesus Christ. Hence the role of the Holy Spirit is discussed here in terms of faith, regeneration and sanctification. Barth concludes the section by discussing how creatures, in being glorified, become images of God, but by now the Holy Spirit has dropped out of consideration. This omission is surprising here, for Christian tradition has tended to give the Holy Spirit a specific role in creating and restoring the likeness of creatures to God. St Irenaeus, for example, follows up the claim already mentioned, that the Spirit adorns all things, by saying that the Spirit fashions humans into the likeness of God (*Demonstration*, Ch. 5). Later theologians developed this claim by drawing out the likeness between the Holy Spirit and the Father and the Son, and by arguing that the Holy Spirit is the seal imprinted on the soul whose operations consist in sanctifying and uniting us—we are sanctified and united to the Spirit so as to be made partakers of the divine nature.<sup>8</sup> These later theologians also developed specifically Christian aspects of the argument, both in terms of Trinitarian theology and by expanding on the claim of Heb. i. 3, that Christ is the radiant light of God's glory and the perfect image of His being (I mention this fact, because so far there is little that is specifically Christian in the argument.<sup>9</sup>)

If, then, we fill in the gaps in Barth's discussion of God's glory we end up with the following argument: the Holy Spirit is the power and love of God, making and restoring the likeness between God and creation; now God, in virtue of His glory, is beautiful, so one of the Spirit's functions is to adorn creation in the likeness of God's beauty. A similar form of argument can be applied to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit: God is holy, and the power of His spirit permeates human hearts and thereby sanctifies us in His likeness—a likeness which will be fully realized only in the life to come.<sup>10</sup>

The form of the arguments is similar because, as I have indicated earlier, both beautifying and sanctifying may be seen as ways in which the Spirit perfects creation. Of course, there are some obvious differences between the two processes: sanctity is a perfection only of

rational beings, whereas beauty can be possessed by inanimate nature and by human artefacts. But in both cases we are appealing to a sacramental view of reality, which regards the sensible as a sign of God's presence and activity.

The reasoning which I have just summarized seems to fall in the area of Christian Dogmatics. I have sought to draw out the logical form of an argument which seeks to relate the ideas of beauty, creation, the Holy Spirit and the glory of God. Even if the form of this argument is now clear, however, it may well strike many people as a strange one. The view of beauty which it enshrines is, of course, alien to most contemporary philosophical aesthetics. It is also, for that matter, unfamiliar to most contemporary theology, for God's beauty is, as von Balthasar has remarked, his least discussed attribute.<sup>11</sup> The argument too has some disturbing practical consequences: those who destroy the beauty of God's creation or create ugliness may be sinning against the Holy Spirit (a conclusion which Eric Gill would have accepted).

Despite its formal character and its remoteness from most philosophical aesthetics and theology, however, I believe that the argument does touch down in the kind of experience which Peter Shaffer mentions. Perhaps we can begin to see from this why people are drawn to such a view of beauty: for there are occasions when we are moved beyond ourselves by art or by the beauty of creation and feel that, as it were, the heavens have opened. Barth realized this, and so does Shaffer; and the latter has succeeded in conveying the experience in a dramatic form. Shaffer has also presented us with an uncomfortable fact: although the perception of God's reflected glory may serve for some people as a divine summons to change one's life, as von Balthasar remarks (*Word and Revelation*, p. 138), in others it may evoke resistance, and indeed lead them to evil and destructive deeds. But then this is also true of two other transcendentals, goodness and truth: there are, alas, many ways of sinning against the light.

- 1 *The Times*, 16th January, 1985. The remark was omitted from the stage version of the play and from the film script. It occurs on p. 119 of the play (London, 1980), from which I shall quote.
- 2 'Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart', in W. Leibrecht (ed.) *Religion and Culture: Essays in Honour of Paul Tillich* (New York, 1959), p. 63.
- 3 This tendency is noted, for instance, by Wolfhart Pannenberg, 'The Doctrine of the Spirit and the Task of a Theology of Nature' (*Theology* Vol. 75, 1972, pp. 8—21) and by Kilian McDonnell, 'The Determinative Doctrine of the Holy Spirit' (*Theology Today*, Vol. 39, 1982, pp. 142—61). Barth briefly discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in creation in a number of places in his *Church Dogmatics*. He says that the Spirit is not the Creator, but is the necessary condition of the creation and preservation of the creature, and that the Spirit's special role in creation is to make the creature such that it is destined to serve God's greater glory (III. i. pp. 57—9; cf. I. i. p. 539).

- 4 Paris, 1979—80; E.T. London, 1983. Pp. 218—28 of Vol. II are most relevant here.
- 5 *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. M.J. O'Connell (London, 1984), p. 227.
- 6 See, for instance, St. Gregory Nazienzen *Or.* 34:8; and Congar, *op. cit.* Vol. III, p. 153, note 28, for further references.
- 7 *op. cit.* p. 200. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord* Vol. I, trans. E. Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 320f. for the eschatological character of beauty.
- 8 See, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a. 35.2 and St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogue on the Holy Spirit* (P.G. 75:1144) and *Thesaurus on the Holy and Undivided Trinity* 34 (P.G. 75:597). St Irenaeus anticipated such developments in *Adv. Haer.* IV. vii. 4, V. vi. 1 and V. viii. 1.
- 9 In our own times Hans Urs von Balthasar, following Barth, has developed an avowedly Christological theological aesthetics (*op. cit.* above).
- 10 See my *Spirit, Saints and Immortality* (London, 1984), for a development of this argument.
- 11 *Word and Revelation* (New York, 1964), p. 162.

## Reviews

**THE LOGIC OF DETERRENCE** by Anthony Kenny, *Firethorn Press, London, 1985*, p. x + 103, £4.95.

It seems likely that everything that could be said about the ethics of nuclear deterrence has by now been said many times over. In fact, most of the really important things were said by 1965, and with greater clarity than is now usually achieved. While many of us are suffering from chronic mental fatigue after six years of continually refined and very repetitious argument, Anthony Kenny—who was a major contributor to the earlier debate—has lost nothing of his appetite for the topic and writes with all his former moral passion and logical precision.

The first half of this short book is an admirable summary of the moral debate as it now stands, worked out live with David Fisher of the Defence Ministry, whose own book, *Morality and the Bomb* is an instructive contrast in lengthy obfuscation. The very conclusiveness of Kenny's moral arguments against nuclear deterrence are enough to make us wonder why nothing, however rational and morally compelling, ever seems to make any difference to those who implement or support nuclear policies. One of the reasons is—as Kenny implies—that some of the main principles of Western moral tradition are no longer shared by them. It is no longer the case, for instance, that everyone—even among Catholic moral theologians—accepts the Socratic principle that it is better to suffer evil than to do it. This makes it impossible for them to distinguish between what may *happen* and what we may *do* in a future nuclear war. Likewise, St Paul's principle that it is wrong to do evil that good may come is also no longer accepted by those who think that the often reasonable course of choosing the lesser evil is a matter of doing something wicked in case someone else does something even worse. Both these positions are implied by support for nuclear deterrence.

Kenny is on safe ground with his critical arguments, despite their historical