

PULCHRUM: *The Power of Beauty*

UNIV Forum 2012



“Man can live without science, he can live without bread, but without beauty he could no longer live, because there would no longer be anything to do to the world.” This striking quotation from Dostoevsky sums up the thoughts of all those who, throughout history, have known how to perceive the transcendent meaning of life and the world. Indeed, the search for beauty is one of the strongest motivations for the transformation of the world: “Beauty is to enthuse us for work, and work is to raise us up” (Cyprian Norwid).

In Paul VI’s words, beauty “unites generations and enables them to be one in admiration”. The intuition of beauty is in fact a divine experience. It is to understand in a single detail the unity of the world; that, as Anaxagoras taught, “everything is connected with everything”: the small and the great, the divine and the human. It is the fruit of a look that is attentive and intense, profound and loving. And it is—and this is perhaps the most notable point—an experience that we can live on a daily basis. In the Classical period no distinction was made between *artist*, *technician*, and *artisan*: all were concerned with *techné* or *ars*, and all were concerned with beauty.

The ancients saw five ways of looking at everything that exists, based on five realities present in all things. Because of this omnipresence, they called them ‘transcendentals’. In different periods of history, one transcendental has seemed more relevant than another: *unity*, or *truth*, or *goodness*... In our modern culture, which prefers feeling to argument, *beauty* seems to occupy a special place.

Paradoxically, however, we find ourselves—just when it is most needed—in a crisis of *education in aesthetics*, which can degenerate into a shapeless and aimless emotionalism. It is necessary to learn how to discover beauty, a discovery that is possible in every field of activity and research, from the world of fashion to the most abstract sciences.

At the same time, it seems timely to reflect upon the *language of beauty* and upon beauty as a *communicator* of truth and goodness, to which it remains closely linked. As Joseph Ratzinger noted in connection with the year 2000, Christianity’s best answer to a relativistic mentality is to be found precisely in Christian life.

UNIV Forum 2012 wishes to contribute to reflection on beauty, on its **power to transform** and **inspire** (in art, in science, in the life of peoples), on its power of **attraction** (in the media, for instance), on the possibility of **learning** to recognize beauty and on **distinguishing true beauty** from mere surface appearance.

The topic of the 45th International University Forum UNIV 2012 is

Pulchrum: The Power of Beauty

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