

ARRAY THYSELF WITH GLORY AND BEAUTY

(Job 40: 10)

By Lyle E. Shamo

I would like to thank this glorious institution for the honor of being chosen as the "Honored Alumni" of this year 1995 for the College of Fine Arts and Communication. But, in all honesty, I must say that I do not deserve such honors. You see, I have always felt that what we are is a composite of the influence of others and the result of the kind blessings of a gracious Father in Heaven.

May I express, in that light, my deep appreciation for this institution, and pay honor to those mentors who have had such a profound effect on my life.

I came to BYU to study speech. I loved debate and public speaking. Just about the time I arrived, the college introduced some curriculum changes which forced me, against my will, to take drama classes. I had stage dance and movement from Dee Winterton, make-up from Charles Whitman, stage craft from Roy Walker, acting from Max Golightly and Charles Metten. Marion Bentley even tried to change my Southern Utah accent, but, unfortunately, as you can tell, he failed. These were classes which, admittedly, I did not want to take. But in retrospect, I can see how the hand of the Lord worked in my behalf to provide skills and knowledge essential in my present field of labor.

In addition, I am grateful for the required religion classes and teachers such as the late Gary Anderson who taught me the meaning of life and gave me a sense of eternal perspective. I am also grateful for Bill Card and Gardner Snow, former members of the College of Education who instructed me in the practicality of putting all the pieces together through instructional media and design. Some of these wonderful individuals I have just named are still associated with Brigham Young University, some are now retired, and others have already passed beyond to an even more glorious institution of higher learning.

The reason I give honor to these great teachers and to the countless others whom I have had the privilege of working with then and now, is because they have provided the substance to the work which I have now been asked to perform. They not only gave me an education but they filled me with a cause—they put fire in the belly and passion for the work in which I am now engaged. My only regret is that I did not pay more attention, and that I did not master quite all the skills they could have passed on to me. You students take note, for one day, you may stand where I do now. For here at BYU, we know with surety, that our Heavenly Father's

eternal plan of happiness should affect all we do and each and every one of us has a divine mission and purpose to our mortal existence. Our few moments on the stage of life can affect the world for good or evil, and what we do while we are here will be all that is left when we have gone.

Since the time I studied here, the world has greatly changed. Technology bursts at lightning speed, ever advancing at such dizzy rates that poor mortals can barely keep ahead of its thrust. Everything we do is changed by technological advances. Computers have changed the way we write and the way we compose music. Digital compression in broadcasts, editing films, and recording has increased the velocity of how we do things. But with all the changes, we sometimes forget that even though technology has changed forever the manner in which we create, it cannot change the development of the message—no machine will replace or supersede God's greatest creation—MAN. You provide, in so many creative ways, messages for the world to take heed of. There is no substitute for substance in a message. Yet, so many of the creations of the world sadly lack any substantive message. In movie making, for example, a field I am most familiar with, the lack of any lasting message is masked by more action—a car chase or a glitzy special effect, for example.

The Lord offered special direction to us as well as to Job when he challenged:

"Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him? Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and **array thyself with glory and beauty.**" (Job 40:9-10)

Such a lofty goal, but how is it attained? The answer is to look deep within ourselves. As Christopher Morley observed: "In every man's heart there is a secret nerve which answers to the vibrations of beauty." (*Correct Quotes*, Career Publishing Incorporated, 1969, 1972)

There are elements and characteristics from which true artists create beauty. Let's review some of them.

I have prepared a list of principles which I believe great artists must possess. It is, in no way, meant to be a complete list. It is up to you to provide whatever is missing. Perhaps the list may seem trivial or simple, but these principles are true and, if applied, can help us to be more disciplined than we ever imagined. Let us commit to "Deck [ourselves] now with majesty and excellency; and **array [ourselves] with glory and beauty.**"

1. The first principle to array ourselves with glory and beauty is the principle of light.

There are many ways to display beauty in art through the use of light. To the author, words are the light of the soul. To the composer the melody is the light of emotion. The painter with the shades of the spectrum of light, known as colors, expresses his view of life. Film making can be described as "painting with light."

It does not matter what medium you work through, so long as light provides the core from which you work. Light can most succinctly be defined by the words of God.

To understand light, in its divine setting, let us go back to the very beginning. In the beginning there was a division of darkness and light.

"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And **God saw the light, that it was good** and God divided the light from the darkness." (Genesis 1: 3-4)

Jesus taught:

"...light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For **every one that doeth evil hateth the light**, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But **he that doeth truth cometh to the light**, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3: 20-21)

Satan is referred to as the "prince of darkness" because "that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth..." (D&C 93:39.) Darkness is the absence of light and color—think what a world devoid of light and color would do to an artist!

History refers to one prolonged period of time as the dark ages—a period of time when there was no light from heaven. During such a time, devoid of the revelations of God, art was almost nonexistent.

But listen to the words of the restoration...

"And when the times of the Gentiles is come in, a **light shall break forth** among them that sit in darkness, and it shall be the fullness of my gospel. (D&C 45:28)

The promise of the Savior clarifies the principle.

"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12)

It is the spirit of Christ which enlightens men:

"And the Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that harkeneth to the voice of the Spirit." (D&C 84: 45-47)

What happens if we are in harmony with the spirit of Christ?

"And if your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be **filled with light**, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light **comprehendeth all things.**" (D&C 88:67)
Another grand and glorious promise.

"That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, **receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter** until the perfect day." (D&C 50:24)

There is a direct relationship with living according to God's commandments and having the light that is essential in the creative process. I really believe that. But that is not all, we then have a responsibility to do something about it. We are told not to hide our light, but set it upon a hill where all may benefit from its glorious display. So I repeat to you the admonition of the Lord "...**array thyself with glory and beauty!**"

The majesty of the gospel of Christ is the light which forms our beacon to all the world. A few weeks ago, I was privileged to lunch with Michael Medved, co-host of Sneak Previews on PBS. He posed the question, "Why don't you tell the story of your Church to the world?" His challenge was similar to one offered us by John Heymen, a world renowned producer and, many times over, Academy Award winner: "Don't be afraid to tell your story before someone else tells it for you."

I toss that challenge to you.

2. In addition to understanding light, to array us with glory and beauty, a true artist must become a disciple of other great artists.

No individual has cornered the market on art. We learn from building upon the foundation laid before us. Each generation has an obligation to master the knowledge of the past and improve upon the accomplishments of those who came before us. I am indebted to Charles Metten for teaching me the three rules by which art must be judged—rules established by the German author, Goethe. Goethe asked us to evaluate art by asking three questions: What is the artist trying to do? How well did he do it? And finally, and perhaps most importantly, Was it worth the doing?

For some in this room, your mission will not only be to create art, but to teach the creative process to succeeding generations. Through your efforts beauty will always perpetuate in the world.

3. Furthermore to array us with glory and beauty, an artist must be disciplined.

There is a process of refinement we must all endure. Greatness demands that we must do it. Diamonds do not just happen, they evolve over centuries of intense heat and pressure. Art demands a similar sacrifice.

There must be an unending desire to reach the highest quality possible. Every person has a different level of what I'll refer to as the "Good-enough quotient." When is it good enough? When should I leave it alone and go on to something else? Is perfection always beyond our reach? In the movie "The Agony and the Ecstasy" Michelangelo works for years on his back high above the floor of the Sistine Chapel, suspended on scaffolding, in the most grueling and painstaking work of painting a masterpiece on the great Sistine Ceiling. Again and again he is interrupted by the impatient Pope Julius. "When will you make an end?" he bellows. "When I am finished," replies Michelangelo. Time and the ability to push beyond our natural abilities will determine whether we are capable of creating anything of lasting value.

4. To array ourselves in glory is to understand the price of inspiration.

A few years ago I had the privilege of providing visuals for a talk given at a seminar just before general conference by a general authority. Every night he would hand me a new draft of his talk and I would set out to find the visuals for it. We worked together for many long weeks. By the time he was finished, he had composed twenty-one drafts of his speech. In amazement I observed to him, "I did not realize until now the price you must pay for revelation." "Yes," came the reply, "and some people think all you need do is stand at the pulpit and it just comes flowing out."

Persistence is the key to success. Charles Carlson developed the process of photocopying back in 1938, but had to persevere for twenty-one years before the first Xerox copier rolled off the manufacturing line. (*Think & Grow Rich Newsletter*)

Chuck Yeager, on his first flight as a passenger in a speeding aircraft, threw up all over the back seat. He vowed he would never fly again. But pain and persistence lead him to ultimately become the first man to break the sound barrier. (*Think & Grow*)

A woman once said to the great violinist Fritz Kreisler after a recital, "I'd give my life to play as beautifully as you!" "Madam," Kreisler replied, "I have." (*Think & Grow*)

5. To be arrayed in glory and beauty is to understand failure and its purpose.

Artists are not afraid they will fail, they expect it and pick up to start again. And along with failure, understand that adversity plays a part in the refining process.

Johann von Schiller wrote, "Truth exists for the wise, beauty for the feeling heart."
(*Correct Quotes*)

We often complain about pain and adversity, not realizing that it is our greatest friend. Philip Yancey in his book, "Where is God When it Hurts?" explains the purpose of pain in a very unusual way. He offers no simplistic explanation, but by the close of the book you cry out to God, "Thank you for pain." You see, Yancey states his case for the need to feel pain by describing the agony endured by those who suffer from Leprosy—a disease which takes away the ability to feel pain.

The ulcers and rotting flesh of a leper result from the inability to feel pain and to take action which saves permanent damage to the body. A leper might reach into a charcoal fire and severely burn his hand without even knowing. He might work all day gripping a shovel with a protruding nail without even feeling it. A rat may chew off a finger during the night while the victim sleeps undisturbed. Without the irritation that causes us to blink our eyes, a leper stares until tears dry up and so do the eyes, or he might innocently wash his face with scalding water and end up permanently disfigured.

Pain can be our greatest ally in teaching us the things of God. Pain and adversity plunge us to the depths of the greatest human emotions and contribute to the empathy which enables the Saint "to mourn with those that mourn."

Theodore Dreiser understood this principle when he stated: "Art is the stored honey of the human soul, gathered on wings of misery and travail." To touch the heart you must identify with emotion and feeling. Don't be afraid to walk with fear, hate, anger, and sadness as well as with joy. The Lord expected us to feel—that is why he refers to those who are spiritually dead as "past feeling" or "without natural affection." (*Correct Quotes*)

My wife and I recently had the privilege of "experiencing" a film. I say "experiencing" because so often my encounters with film are an exercise in analysis of camera angles, acting, and sound mix. But this was a film where technique was lost and the viewer was thrust deep into the recesses of his own soul. The film I refer to is "Shadowlands" the story of the great British author and teacher, C. S. Lewis.

Lewis long touted the divine benefits of suffering, but it was not until he had experienced and duly suffered the pain of personal loss, that the words which formed the basis of his religious conviction, became his living creed. If you have not yet seen this film, I recommend it to you.

Emerson taught: "In art the hand can never execute anything higher than the heart can inspire." (*Correct Quotes*)

6. To array ourselves in glory and beauty we must humbly appreciate and recognize the source of all great art—the divine help from someone greater than us all.

Añdre Gide said, "Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does the better." (*Correct Quotes*)

I believe there is a direct relationship between our subconscious minds and our pre-mortal beginnings. However strong the pull, in us all there is this homesickness for eternal things.

Johannes Brahms understood this principle well. Describing his own creative process, he said:

"I immediately feel vibrations that thrill my whole being. These are the Spirit illuminating the soul power within, and in this exalted state, I see clearly what is obscure in my ordinary moods; then I feel capable of drawing inspiration from above, as Beethoven did....Straight-way the ideas flow in upon me, directly from God, and not only do I see distinct themes in my mind's eye, but they are clothed in the right forms, harmonies and orchestration." (Arthur M. Abell, Talks with Great Composers (New York: The Philosophical Library of New York, 1954), pages 5-6)

God gave us a beautiful earth. God's creation should serve as the pattern of our own creations. Nothing God has done can be matched by mere mortals—but we can approach it, if we allow Him to instruct us from on high.

7. To array ourselves in glory and beauty a true artist understands the power of individualism without being eccentric.

President Kimball said: "It has been said that many of the great artists were perverts or moral degenerates. In spite of their immorality, they became great and celebrated artists. What could be the result if discovery were made of equal talent in men who were clean and free from the vices, and thus entitled to revelations? " (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, Chapter 14)

An interesting and very humble confession was given by Pablo Picasso about his own work:

"From the moment that art ceases to be the food that feeds the best minds, the artist can use his talent to perform all the tricks of the intellectual charlatan. The refined, the rich, the professional do-nothings, desire only the peculiar, the sensational, the eccentric, the scandalous in today's art. And I myself, since the advent of cubism, have fed these fellows what they wanted and satisfied these critics with all the ridiculous ideas that have passed through my head.

The less they understood them, the more they admired me! I became celebrated, and very rapidly. For a painter, celebrity means sales and consequent affluence. Today, as you know, I am celebrated. I am rich. But when I am alone, I do not have the affrontery to consider myself an artist at all, not in the grand old meaning of the word. I am only a public clown.

I have understood my time and exploited the imbecility, the vanity, the greed of my contemporaries. It is a bitter confession of mine, more painful than it may seem, but it, at least, and at last, does have the merit of being honest." (As quoted word for word by Giovanni Papini, "Libro Nero")
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If a great artist, like Picasso, questions his motives, should we? We are not only encouraged, but commanded: "If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy, we seek after these things." (Thirteenth Article of Faith)

I am not suggesting that all artists be the same, but each one must find his or her niche and find individual peace. The angry artist always worries me. I am concerned with his stability. He is on a self-destructive course and has the capability of flattening others in a steam-rolled push to get ahead. It is easier to dismiss someone like that quietly and work with someone else. Though there are exceptions, the greatest artists I have worked with are gentle and congenial; they are not prima donnas.

8. To array ourselves in glory and beauty we must recognize criticism—heed it when it is correct, ignore it when it is not based upon truth.

We live in a world where critics are more powerful than the artists themselves. We always wait to see what the critics have to say, before we decide what to like or not to like. It is comfortable to stay in line with the critics, it makes us look good. But critics are not always right. Sometimes we must have the courage to, as Thoreau said, "march to a different drummer." Let me give you an example.

When I was a bishop, in Idaho, I had a young man in my ward who was an artist. He was called on a mission. At that time, I enjoyed photography and it had developed into quite a hobby for me. Every year I entered my pictures in the Eastern Idaho State Fair in Blackfoot. Lest you ascribe to me talents beyond my ability, let me just say that the Eastern Idaho Fair was about as keen a competition as I was capable of.

About this time, the young man's mother came to me and asked if I would enter one of this young missionary's paintings in the Fair when I entered my photos. I agreed. When I handed the painting to the head of the art exhibit, he took one look at it,

screwed up his nose and replied, quite nastily, "If I had my way I wouldn't hang that painting in this gallery at all. But I will take it and I will display it on the back row where no one will be bothered by it." Now there was a special ribbon which was awarded at the end of Fair time. It was a prize for "Best of Show." To win this most coveted of all the prizes, an exhibit was selected by the fair-goers by ballot. I'll bet you can guess the rest of the story. Even though the missionary's painting hung on the back row, it had been admired by every passerby and it was overwhelmingly voted the "Best of Show."

Later, I had the privilege of introducing this fine young man and his work to the graphics department of the Church. He was told, "You have talent, but not enough to work here." The young man sadly walked away, it had been his dream to draw for the Church one day. But Greg Olsen had the fortitude to endure and to continue to paint as he dared. The other day I was in Park City and saw one of Greg's paintings on sale for over \$25,000. I am sure that he has sometimes received even more than that. You have seen Greg's paintings in the Ensign, in the temples, and perhaps you have even hung a few in your own home. He is one of the finest artists in the Church today.

Listen to, but, don't be dissuaded by critics.

9. To array ourselves with glory and beauty we must maintain our high moral character.

We have a responsibility to the human family. Bing Crosby in his last published article observed some very disturbing trends.

"It became apparent to me, that very slowly and very subtly writers and producers are working nudity, permissiveness, irresponsibility, profanity, scenes of semi-explicit sex, provocative dialogue, smutty innuendoes and situations into their shows. Moral responsibility is almost indiscernible . . . I voiced my sentiments to a TV executive and he said, "We are only depicting life as it is." "I fear," Mr. Crosby goes on, "that they are depicting life as it is going to be if they are not diverted." (*Persuasion At Work*, Vol. IV, Nos. 2 & 3, February-March 1981)

There is a certain ethics in the business of imitating reality. We had better have a pretty good grasp on what reality is or what we want to make reality, because the world is so full of copycats. Let me explain. Let's say a film is made that is both morally depraved and inhumanly violent. Of course, we all know that the film is nothing more than pretend, but it looks so exciting. All the tools of getting attention are used to make the film. Good and stirring music, stars for actors, excitement, nice cars, etc. "It is just a piece of art," you might protest, "certainly something no one would think of duplicating." But last year such a film was made—Oliver Stone's thriller, "Natural Born Killers." It struck a nerve in a young boy, who lockered next to my daughter at Bingham High School. All his friends said, he was a good boy, a quiet boy, not

known to be particularly rebellious. But no one knew or could guess the deep recesses of this young boy's mind and the thoughts triggered by this movie. He went to see it again and again. He was obsessed by it. He bought the music from it and listened to it over and over again. Then one morning, very early, he walked into the bedrooms of his step-mother and his sister, and he shot them to death. He ran, and while on the run, eerily remarked to a friend, "It wasn't at all like the movie." The movie wasn't supposed to influence anyone to do something so inhumanly violent, but it did.

Oliver Stone, without knowing it, has had a great impact on the small community of South Jordan, Utah, and has disrupted the lives of many families forever.

We could stop going to such movies, we could turn such trash off our televisions, but they pervade our society. Even without seeing them, we see the previews, we know the story lines, we have friends or acquaintances who have seen them. They become the subject of conversation, a part of our pop culture, whether we view them or not and they become intrinsically enmeshed with our lives and the lives of those around us.

In a TV interview, Buck Henry, the screenwriter of a new movie called "To Die For," remarked, "Good taste is the enemy of art." (*Talk Back*, CNN October 1995) Have we become so stupid as to believe such nonsense?

Elder Russell M. Ballard recently said, "Great art touches the soul in a unique and uncommon way. Inspired art speaks in the language of eternity, teaching things to the heart that the eyes and ears can never understand." (Mormon Arts Symposium 1995, 8 April 1995)

I agree with Pres. John F. Kennedy who said, "We must never forget that art is not a form of propaganda, it is a form of truth." (*Correct Quotes*)

10. To be arrayed with glory and beauty we need to discover what real value is.

I fear that the inflated egos and demanded fees of film makers are starting to force good film making aside. Movie studios are closing their doors and television is resorting to talk shows and tabloid trash. How true was the bumper sticker I saw the other day: "The road to Hell is paved with TV talk shows." Such shows are cheap, their production values are weak, and they can be quickly inserted when lack of good programming is available. How will some future generation judge us and the value of our art? True art endures the test of time.

It is our responsibility to leave a legacy and a lasting heritage. We will be judged by the most ruthless judge of all—time. Will such films as "Pulp Fiction" or "Show Girls" survive the ravages of time? How will such films be considered in 10 years, 25 years and 100 years. Will time be a kind judge—I think not.

"Supreme art," wrote William Butler Yeats, "is a traditional statement of certain heroic and religious truth, passed on from age to age, modified by individual genius, but never abandoned." (*Career Quotes*)

11. To array ourselves in glory and beauty we need to be committed to a personal best.

My son runs on a High School Cross-Country team that is currently rated number one in the nation. His coach has an interesting way of motivating his team. Instead of emphasizing winning, he asks his runners to compete foremost against themselves. He speaks in terms of "Personal Records." When a young man or a young woman runs their very best and establishes a personal record, the whole team cheers and congratulates them, even if they are the last person to finish that race.

Art can also be measured in terms of personal records. No one can ever say "I have arrived." That's not the way it works. We are only as good as our next film, our next painting, our next musical score or our next performance. Audiences are unrelenting and even cruel. They demand more and better results. Our work is a proving and reproving process that never ends—it demands time and grueling commitment. Mediocrity is unacceptable. You must have that fire in your belly and a passion for the cause, and it must be a cause worth fighting for.

12. Which brings us to the last principle in arraying ourselves in beauty...—Recognize what we do with our life has eternal consequences.

If we want to be remembered then we should do something worth remembering. Robert Seidenberg, editor for American Film wrote: "Our acts of creativity—when we write, when we make films—should give direction, should be a map of the soul to betterment, a **good** map that gets people to their destination intact." (*American Film*, January 1990)

What is our value as an artist? Those involved in the entertainment industry—and I lump professional athletes in this same category—keep pushing for bigger and bigger multi-million dollar contracts. One professional athlete moaned just recently, "They just won't pay me what I'm worth!" Yet this same man already makes millions in salary and product endorsements each year. Who determines a person's REAL worth? No one can determine self worth. Time and the impact on people's lives separates that which is significant from that which is superfluous.

Francis Boyer was a sound engineer for BYU for many years. After he retired he was called on a Church Service Mission to continue his engineering work. The work he performed was donated work—he was not paid. Yet despite this, Francis drove his Volkswagen from Provo to Salt Lake week after week, month after month, year after year. He drove through storm and sunny days, but he was there whenever he was

needed to make audio recordings for the blind, to assist in the engineering of equipment for the broadcast of general conference or the Spoken Word, and countless other tasks he was asked to do. His two year mission stretched to eleven years. He considered his work a labor of love for those who truly needed his talent. On more than one occasion he came to my office with a request—could we please give him a blessing so that he could overcome his physical hardships, associated with his age, so that he might continue in his work. In time, his physical ailments and the pain associated with them were as great as the job he was called to do. Toward the end of his life, he required electrical impulses to his legs to reduce his pain and allow his muscles to relax enough to walk, but still his commitment to his work continued. At last, he was diagnosed with a pancreatic tumor the size of a cantaloupe, his sugar diabetes required kidney dialysis twice a week. But Francis Boyer pushed on, until his body just wore completely out and God allowed him to move on to new and better commitments in the building of His Kingdom.

Compare Francis Boyer's influence to that of the professional athlete. Who has had the greatest impact on mankind?

You see, we all, ultimately, have the same purpose to our pursuit of the fine arts here at BYU and in the world-at-large. It is an eternal purpose and its glory is the "Glory of God . . ."

"Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him? Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty." For you whom God has blessed with the ability to do many unusual things well let this be a motto and a rallying cry. You must think higher and reach further. Your words, your music, your paintings, your sculptures—all that you do will light a beacon of hope to an increasingly dim world. You are the most blessed people on the face of the earth—you are God's army in the Latter-day. Wherever life takes you, whatever it is you pursue as your profession, "deck [yourself] with majesty and excellency and array [yourself] with glory and beauty," and may God bless you as he has so graciously blessed me, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.