

Many will say, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” Where did this come from? Is this true? Does it express Catholic ideals? What is beauty? Can beauty be defined at all?

“Union in distinction makes order; order produces agreement; and proportion and agreement, in complete and finished things, make beauty” (St. Francois de Sales, Treatise on the Love of God).

So yes, beauty can be defined. Beauty is...

- ... well organised and proportionate to nature
- ... appealing in an intuitive way, i.e. something that can immediately be recognised
- ... perfection in Creation – being the way God made it, unaffected by sin, HOLY!



For example, Mary, Mother of God, is the most beautiful creature ever made because she is unblemished by sin and fully aligned with God's will. Unlike us, she was born and remains unaffected by sin, reflecting the fullness of God's grace. Her beauty, both physical and spiritual, points entirely to God's glory.

**So, no, Beauty is NOT necessarily in the eye of the beholder, unless that beholder is GOD himself!**

This is not to negate the fact that individuals can experience and respond to beauty in deeply personal ways, but to emphasise that there is a difference between beauty, and appeal. Appeal describes the quality of being attractive or interesting and could be used to describe our individual experiences of beauty. So, you could say, “appeal is in the eye of the beholder,” because what may be appealing to us is influenced by our experiences, with what we've been taught, the society we live in, our worldviews, even the experiences we've had of God. So, do beauty and appeal sometimes or even oftentimes line up? Absolutely! Especially for those who are in a state of grace and are more fully at union with God's will. It's easier for them to experience appeal and beauty simultaneously. But the point is, they are not the same.

Why is that distinction important? When we look at art, particularly at Sacred Art, that is, art for the purpose of the glorification of God and the building up of his kingdom, we cannot rely simply on what is appealing to us. We must be aware that we are fallen, and that what is appealing to us may not always be appealing to God. This is not to diminish the power that personal experiences of beauty can have in leading us to God, but we must be humble and truth-seeking when we wish to offer God art in worship, whether that be in building a church, painting images of holy people or events from the Bible, writing music for use during Mass or Adoration, or making vestments for sacred ministers to wear. If, indeed, Mass is the source and summit of our faith, then it must be a testament to goodness, beauty, and truth. Those aspects that are “artistic,” must be objectively beautiful, not just appealing.

Things that are **SACRED** must also be **BEAUTIFUL**.

## How do we apply this to music?

Music that is **GOOD**...

- ... is beneficial to mankind in their attainment of holiness
- ... is objectively beautiful
- ... does not encourage sinful behaviour or spiritual disorder
- ... does not teach against or claim truths that are different from those of Jesus Christ

Examples include:

- praise and worship music consistent with Catholic teachings
- songs that express the human condition in a light that does not ultimately offend God or discredit Jesus Christ or his Church, ultimately bringing people closer to God
- instrumental music that doesn't point towards disorder or sin, or unpleasant dissonance for the sake of being interesting or appealing on its own
- Music that does not garner attention for being absurd or grotesque
- Music that "points upwards," or that is uplifting to the soul

Music that is **SACRED**... (according to Church sources, especially Vatican II)

- ... belongs to the Church
- ... improves our ability to be moved by the Sacraments and to receive the fruits they bear
- ... is suitable for the liturgy in which it is placed (e.g. God's Temple, Eucharist)
- ... is authentic, it doesn't imitate popular music for the sake of being appealing
- ... is art, is crafted by experts, and is objectively beautiful
- ... reflect God's glory and point to his perfection, not the glory or "perfection" of man
- ... is subservient to the flow of the liturgy and the greater meaning therein
- ... is well-prepared and appropriate to all people
- ... is Gregorian Chant when possible, or a simpler version of chant
- ... is music that strives to resemble the sacred nature of Gregorian chant
- ... is obedient to the Church's teachings on music throughout time
- ... is ALSO good music

Examples include:

- Gregorian Chant, hymns, and choral music of the Church
- Liturgical chanting like that used during Mass
- Instrumental music that is not overly showy or boisterous in such a way that it is distracting