

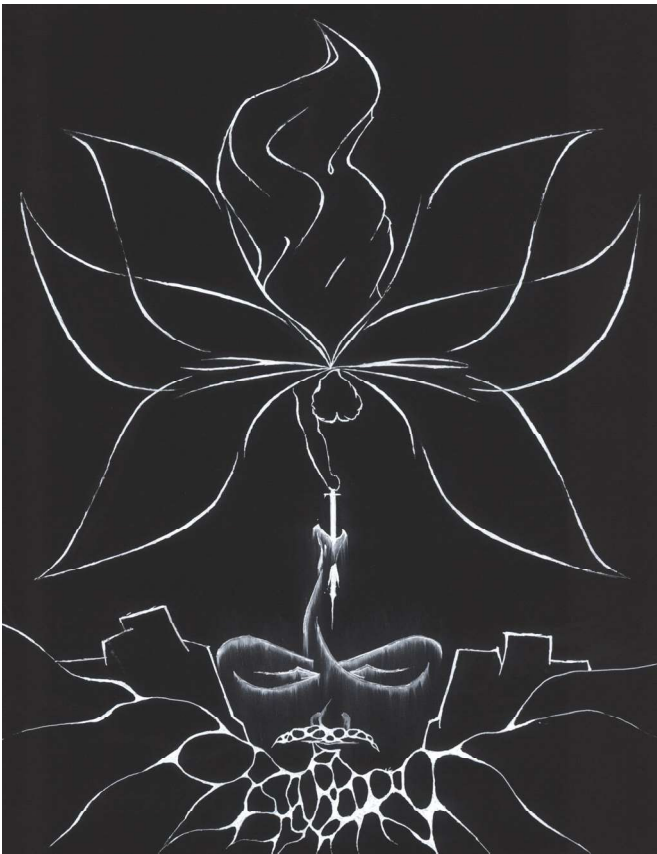
ART & THEOLOGY: My Ruminations on the Good, the True, and the Beautiful

By, Rev. Jay Suero

Something is "beautiful only because the delight that it arouses in us is founded upon the fact that, in it, the truth and goodness of the depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed, and this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and inexhaustibly valuable and fascinating."
(Hans Urs von Balthasar)

True beauty draws us out of ourselves toward the transcendent. The more beautiful an encounter is, the more the divine presence is made manifest to us. Thus, there is none more beautiful than that of the Incarnation of Christ. My hope with my drawings is to point to that fundamental importance of beauty as a vehicle to journey into the mind of God.

Every month I will share an art piece of mine along with a description of the theological reflection that went into it so as to hopefully provoke theological reflection of our own.



A Meditation on Nature

In this drawing, I wanted to take a different approach to the typical imagery St. Michael the Archangel. He is often depicted in battle armor wielding a sword and slaying Satan in reference to Revelations 12:7-9, "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."

St. Michael is referred to as an archangel because he is the chief of all angels and of the army of God. Archangel is also a name for one of the nine ranking choirs of Angels. In this sense, some tradition, such as from the writings of St. Bonaventure or St. Basil, refer to St. Michael as the prince of the Seraphim, the highest rank of Angels. Seraphim are described in scripture as having "six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew." (Isaiah 6:2) I used to this seraphic interpretation as a different approach to St. Michael.

Another source of inspiration was the image of the Leviathan from scripture particularly Isaiah 26:1, "In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea." The Leviathan here can be a symbol of evil, a demon, or even Satan. The sea in the Old Testament is also often a symbol of chaos and disorder such as the formless water at the beginning of creation as described in Gen 1. More personally, I thought of the Leviathan because the deep sea brings me a sense of dread because of the isolation and helplessness amidst the mysterious creatures around you.

Bringing these elements together I've put together a few double images in this drawing. From a distance it is meant to resemble a lotus flower, but upon closer look it is St. Michael coming down with his sword upon Satan or the Leviathan coming out of the water. Taking another inspection, the twisting body of the dragon forms an image of closed eyes and a nose and from the foams of the water forms a flowing beard constructing the image of a face in meditation. These images to us tell a story of one meditating on their fears as represented by the water. These fears can often have our mind and spirit wrapped up and constricted as represented by the serpent who appears to be clouding the mind. However, in meditation and surrender to God these fears are abated as illustrated by St. Michael slaying the dragon. This in turn leads to a purification of the mind and back to where we began with the image of the lotus flower which can be a symbol of purity.