



*This Religion column is a regular feature written for the Gallup Independent by Gallup area residents, representing different faith communities, who share their ideas about bringing a spiritual perspective into our daily lives and community issues. For information about contributing a guest column, contact Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola at The Independent: (505) 863-6811 ext. 218 or lizreligion01@yahoo.com.*

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### **Honoring the Artist but Abusing the Art**

One of the marvels of our region is the number of great artists who live and work here. A trip to any store that features Native American art will reveal stunning jewelry, rugs, or pottery. Don't we all stand in awe of a Navajo rug weaver who without sketch or measure can produce a tapestry of perfect symmetry?

Imagine the folly of bringing together for a great banquet some of our leading artists, analyzing, honoring, paying tribute to them, and then on the way out smashing, ripping, degrading the art pieces that we have been praising. Such behavior would be unimaginable.

In fact what happens is that we place on our walls or display for all to see the glorious work of the hands of a great artist. We save up to buy and then protect and insure these masterpieces. And well we should!

There has been one artist who has been at work for hundreds, thousands, millions of years, but is all too often unrecognized. His name is God. We would do well to get to know him better. Don't we all enjoy being in the presence of a great artist so we can ask questions and try to figure out his technique?

When we want to get to know someone, we usually ask them about their line of work. Have you ever wondered what God does for a living? Among others things, he is an artist. He is creating all the time—designing landscapes, painting sunsets, carving canyons. Our great local artists are merely trying to imitate God.

Some of us go to churches where we give considerable time and money to honor the Great Artist. We sing to the Artist and at least pay lip service to the work of his hands. We make melody about “all things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small.” We sing “praise to the Lord, the almighty, the king of creation.” We shout “Ah, Lord God, you have made the heavens and the earth, by your great power.”

I suspect that often God is less than impressed. Why? Because after we leave church, we proceed to ignore the beauty and creativity of the world in which we live. Worse, we degrade, pollute, abuse these great works of art that come from the Creator.

Some of my fellow Christians get more of a thrill from debating how old the earth is than from spending time appreciating and caring for the creation. It is like parents who keep



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watching the video of the birth of their child, and then neglect to love and nurture their precious gift.

Others are so fixated on one aspect of God's work that they never see the big picture. Their focus is on "fire insurance," all the while forgetting the fullness of what it means to be a follower and fan of the Great Artist. Anglican John Stott has said that some Christians have a fully developed doctrine of redemption, but an underdeveloped doctrine of creation.

I have never had the privilege of an "Art Appreciation" course. Surely it would help me see so much more in great works of art. So too, I regret that I was not a better science student. My colleague, Cal Feddes, has so much more mental material with which to praise the Great Artist. Cal, a science teacher at Rehoboth, understands the design and technique behind the creation. We Christians ought to become great scientists to give substance to our singing to the "Lord of Harvest."

While I would hope to bring balance to Christians so as to honor and respect both the Artist and the Art, the Creator and the Creation, I fret even more about those who seem to worship the art, but don't give a rip for the Artist. This is strange behavior!

I cannot imagine buying an expensive work of art, celebrating its beauty, and not trying to get to know something about the One who created it. Oddly, much of our world today is in that boat—worshipping the Creation rather than the Creator. I want to know the one who *made* "mother earth" and "father sky."

The Bible has a wonderful way of putting us in our place. For those inclined to discount or disregard, to defile or abuse either the Art or the Artist, Creation or the Creator, Job 12 teaches:

*But ask the animals, and they will teach you,  
Or the birds of the air, and they will tell you;  
Or speak to the earth, and it will instruct you,  
Or let the fish of the sea inform you.  
Which of these does not know  
That the hand of the Lord has done this?  
In his hand is the life of every creature,  
And the breath of all mankind.*

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