

**RELIGION AND ART,  
AND OTHER  
ESSAYS, PP. 1-233**

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Religion and Art, and Other Essays, pp. 1-233 by J. L. Spalding

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## RELIGION AND ART

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# RELIGION AND ART

AND OTHER ESSAYS

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*J. L. Spalding*

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Bishop of Georgia



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# RELIGION AND ART

## I

### RELIGION AND ART

*"Science, O man! thou sharest with higher spirits,  
But Art thou hast alone."*

**G**OD is revealed to all the faculties of the soul. He is truth; he is goodness; he is beauty. He is known; he is loved; he is adored. He is the first and final principle of all knowledge; he is the ideal of every art; he is the type of all high and holy living.

Art is the expression of ideal beauty; the resplendence of mind in matter, of the archetype in nature. It does not copy, but creates; never rests in the seen, but is transcendental; looks beyond, through nature, up to God. Whatever it sees, it sees to be unsatisfactory, and whatever it does, it straightway wishes undone, because the work is eternally below the thought. Like the soul, it is imprisoned in matter, which it half loathes and half adores; is drawn to earth by its form, to rise above which is the hope and

despair of all its endeavor. Its aim is impossible, but the highest and most glorious. What God cannot do it would accomplish, — give to the divine and infinite beauty a sensible form and local dwelling which will reveal and not obscure its immortal splendor. Hence the real never satisfies the artist, not even real art. In the presence of some work of creative power he shouts, he is rapt, he is borne upward into other worlds; thinks not of form or color or time; his soul has caught sight of the immortal and all-beautiful, and is ecstatic.

Art disenchant; and this is a great merit. It teaches how little of what might be, is; how far beneath our capabilities we ourselves are content to remain. It is a reproach, and makes us feel our unworthiness; it is a revelation from a higher world in whose presence we condemn ourselves for resting satisfied with this. It is a gleam from the face of God seen through the veil of time and space, — the eternal allurements and eternal disenchantment of the noblest souls. It elevates, purifies, and refines. It is the most perfect expression of the truest thoughts, the purest loves, the noblest virtues; and when it is turned to base ends, it veils its face and hides its celestial beauty: the form remains, but the soul, like that of the virgin martyr, is borne away by the hands of angels. Even in nature it is art

that is beautiful, — the thought, the idea, symbolizing the unseen and uncreated, reflected from the blue heavens, the starry sky, from azure mountains or green isles.

When, in the spring, we seat ourselves on the border of a lake in whose pure waters the waving woods and laughing fields, with trees, plants, and flowers, are mirrored; into whose bosom the rippling rills and rivulets are flowing, like joyous children that run to meet their quiet mother, while the gentle zephyrs whisper to one another from leaf to leaf, as if afraid to frighten the genius of the place, — the soul, free from all distracting thoughts, escapes from earth and lifts itself on the wings of contemplation to the throne of God. Seated on the border of this enchanted lake, we grow sad and pensive; a sweet melancholy takes hold of us; we have caught a glimpse of home, but are still exiles.

“Hence in a season of calm weather,  
Though inland far we be,  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither —  
Can in a moment travel thither,  
And see the children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.”

There is a religious power, too, in the grand and awful scenes of nature. The ocean, the desert, high mountains and great rivers, storm