

O Beauty Ever Ancient

for Bob Leiweke, S.J.

Assembly, SAB Choir, Descant, Keyboard, Guitar, Violin, and Cello

Based on a prayer from
The Confessions of St. Augustine

Roc O'Connor, S.J.
Arranged by Tony Ward

INTRO (♩ = ca. 88)

Keyboard

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VERSES

Descant

4. I had wan - dered far, per - ceiv - ing that I walked my road a -

Soprano

Alto

mp 1. Oh, late have I loved you, oh, late have I
mp 2. My un - love - li - ness I ran from, turned to seek you in all
mf 3. This cre - at - ed world is glo - rious, yet I could not see with -
mp 4. I had wan - dered far, per - ceiv - ing that I walked my road a -
mf 5. In your love - li - ness you made me in your god - ly im - age

Baritone

C G C Am7 Em

4. lone. Yet you called, you shone, you sum-moned, and you drew my spir - it home.

1. turned; turned from seek - ing you in crea - ture flee - ing grief and pain with - in.
 2. things, things you fash - ioned as a path - way; yet I lost my - self in them.
 3. in, see your love - li - ness be - hind all find the Giv - er in the gift.
 4. lone. Yet you called, you shone, you sum-moned, and you drew my spir - it home.
 5. true; by your grace you have re - newed me; let me live my life in you!

C Am7 G C Am7 D Em C G

REFRAIN

O Beau - ty, ev - er an - cient, O Beau - ty, ev - er new: you, the

Em Am G/B Am/C Am

mir - ror of my life re - newed, let me find my life in

G Bm Em C F F/C Em C

you!

D.S. (Fine)

G Em C G C G *D.S. (Fine)*

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(Guitar/Vocal)

Based on a prayer from
The Confessions of St. Augustine

Roc O'Connor, S.J.

INTRO (♩ = ca. 88)

(Keyboard)

VERSE 1

mp 1. Oh, late have I loved you, oh, late have I
mp 2. My un - love - li - ness I turned to seek you in all
mf 3. This cre - at - ed world is glo - rious, yet I could not see with -
mp 4. I had wan - dered far, per - ceiv - ing that I walked my road a -
mf 5. In your love - li - ness you in your god - ly im - age

1. turned; turned from seek - ing you in - ing grief and pain with - in.
 2. things, things you fash - ioned as a path - way; yet I lost my - self in them.
 3. in, see your love - li - ness be - hind all, find the Giv - er in the gift.
 4. lone. Yet you called, you shone, you sum - moned and you drew my spir - it home.
 5. true; by your grace you have re - newed let me live my life in you!

REFRAIN

O Beau - ty, ev - er an - cient, Beau - ty, ev - er new: you, the
 mir - ror of my life re - newed, let me find my life in

you!

D.S.
(Fine)

O Beauty, Ever Ancient

Roc O'Connor, S.J.

Arranged by Adam LaMotte

VIOLIN (FIDDLE*)

INTRO (♩ = ca. 88)

INTRO (♩ = ca. 88)

VERSE 2: *tacet* 8

REFRAIN 5

find my life in *p*

VERSE 4 8

REFRAIN 5

Let me find my *mp*

VERSE 5

FINAL REFRAIN

mf

*A fiddle is a violin outfitted with steel strings and a flatter bridge.

O Beauty, Ever Ancient

CELLO

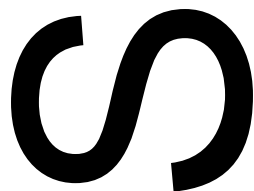
Roc O'Connor, S.J.

INTRO (♩ = ca. 88) 7 VERSE 1-3
VERSE 2: Tacet

REFRAIN (Tacet 2nd time)

VERSE 4 8 REFRAIN

VERSE 5



Performance Notes

Imagery/Meaning

I based this song on the much-loved prayer by Saint Augustine (354–430) that comes from his *Confessions* (ca. 400) and sums up his journey toward conversion to Christ: “Late have I loved thee, O Beauty, ever ancient, O Beauty, ever new; late have I loved thee....” It is a profound recognition of the person’s quest to encounter God.

In some ways, it is a prayer that can only be truly uttered by people who have lived long enough, suffered enough, and come to understand that conversion to Christ is a long and arduous process of attraction and aversion. Yet its appeal seems to go far beyond veterans of the spiritual life.

Highlights

Depending on the liturgical situation, the song may be interpreted in a number of ways. It could reflect halting recognition and petition for God’s guidance, joyful acceptance of one’s path toward God, or repentance and deeper acceptance of the Gospel. Any of these could serve as authentic interpretation of the piece.

The liturgical use will determine whether the piece is a solo, a communal song or some other variation. I recommend including assembly singing, at least on the refrains, after the final verses.

Verses one and two center upon the experience of the one praying, saying, “I have been caught up in the attractions and distractions of life. I lost myself in them because I fled pain and suffering.” Here, the one praying offers a hopeful recognition of God with a petition that God reveal the truth and meaning of life. Still, the person’s focus remains on personal experience.

Verse three begins to become more relational as the one praying addresses God from the experience of being lost in the glorious world: “I could not recognize you as the giver of all wonder. I was so enamored of it all!” The refrain becomes more poignant as the one praying reaches out, straining to find life in God.

Verse four takes this all a step further and acknowledges that God has been active within the person’s wanderings. Much like the prodigal son coming to his senses, the one praying discovers that amid the longing for home and wholeness, God was present all the time. Here, the refrain begins to take on a character of praise and joyful acknowledgment of the divine reality.

Verse five is a hymn of praise to the creator and redeemer, the one who saved and sanctified the life of the ones praying. In the same way, the refrain appears as a refrain of praise that leads to the recognition of one’s continued dependence on the guiding grace of God.

Performance Suggestions

The whole piece should build throughout. A soloist for verse one might join a small group of singers for verse two. Verses three and four might be divided between men and women singers. Verse five should shine with joyful singing by all.

Liturgical Usage

The liturgical usage could determine when or if the assembly sings. Just because the song is the reflection of a single soul should not limit its use to a soloist’s rendering of the song. Certainly an assembly could (and should) be welcomed to join on the refrains, possibly even the last verses.

This song would serve well as a Communion reflection piece, at the beginning of a retreat or day of recollection, communal reconciliation service, Lenten liturgies and anniversaries of marriage and religious vows. Also, the worshipping community might connect with themes of intimacy, growth, conversion and maturation by using this song.

—Roc O’Connor, S.J.

Assembly Edition

O BEAUTY, EVER ANCIENT

Roc O'Connor, S.J.

Verses

1. Oh, _____ late _____ have I _____ loved you, oh, _____
 2. My un - love - _____ ran from, turned to
 3. This cre - at - _____ ed world is glo - rious, yet I
 4. I had wan - dered far, per - ceiv - ing that I
 5. In your love - li - ness you made me, in your

1. late _____ have I _____ seek - ing you in
 2. seek you in all things, things you fash - ioned as a
 3. could not see with - in, see your love - li - ness be -
 4. walked my road a - lone, let you called, you shone, you
 5. god - ly im - age _____ your grace you have re -

1. crea - tures, flee - ing _____ with - in.
 2. path - way; yet I _____ in them.
 3. hind all, find the Giv - er in the gift.
 4. sum - moned, and you drew _____ my spir - it home.
 5. newed me; let me _____ in you!

Refrain

O Beau - ty, ev - er _____, O Beau - ty, ev - er

new: you, the mir - ror of my life re - newed, let me
 2

find my life in you

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