

17 Feb 17

to Gathering 4 Gardner  
2885 Sanford Ave SW #39552  
Grandville MI 49418

Overleaf is a copy of a page where I refer to what  
(in my mind) is one of Ray Smullyan's greatest masterpieces.

One can still go to  
<http://www-cs-faculty.stanford.edu/~knuth/smullyan.html>  
to read it, and I believe that page still has many hits.

I was unable to contribute this remark via your online form,  
because I don't have an email address.

But if you agree with me that it's a good idea to highlight  
'Planet Without Laughter' as part of your tribute to Smullyan's  
memory, I hope you can find a suitable way to do so.

Sincerely, don knuth [Prof Emeritus of The Art of Computer Program, Stanford]

**A:** That's true, but it was a commission that they were given. For example, in Tim Botts's other books, like *Doorposts*, he chose his own favorite Bible verses and decided to illustrate exactly how those verses made him feel. But in this case, I gave him a prescribed text. I was his client; the concept wasn't his own idea.

It's like taking a required course in college. I prefer not to teach such courses, because students have a different attitude when they don't elect a class for themselves. The verses I presented to the artists were not famous or extra special, except in a very few cases. Yet when the artists finished their assignments, they made it appear as if each 3:16 was a favorite verse. I was trying to shine a light on the words and illuminate them; the artists made them great. Thus they each solved a really tough problem.

**Q:** Do you think that beauty is just a subjective notion, or does it have some basis in objective reality?

**A:** I don't know how to write a computer program that will tell me if an image is beautiful or not. But I know when something affects me and when it doesn't. There's a famous saying, "It's pretty, but is it Art?" Sometimes I'm quite sure that, to me, I'm looking at an object of art. But don't ask me to quantify it, like Birkhoff tried to do, and don't ask me to give you an algorithm to test it. As far as I know, art belongs to the spirit realm.

Thank you all again for your questions and responses. Now I'd like to give you some homework for next time: I put on the Web a wonderful short story by Raymond Smullyan. Go to my home page and change the location from `index.html` to `smullyan.html`; then you can look at this story called "Planet Without Laughter." It's a marvelous parable on many levels, about the limits of rationality. You can read it to get insight about all religions, and about the question of form over substance in religion. You could even read it as a metaphor about the drug culture, or in a variety of other ways; in any case, I think you'll find it thought-provoking. And if you read it, you'll be better able to understand a few of the points that I plan to make in the remaining lectures.