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BEHOLDING THE GLORY



Incarnation Through the Arts
EDITED BY JEREMY BEGBIE

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From Baker Academic : Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Beholding the Glory: Incarnation through the Arts:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Very Helpful Collection of EssaysBy Mark BeuvingThis is a compilation, edited by Jeremy Begbie, focusing on how the concept of Incarnation relates to the arts. First, the concept

of incarnation (of God taking on flesh in Jesus) is explained and compared to the process of incarnating through the arts—taking a concept and then giving it "flesh" through paint, sound, words, etc. This is an essential concept for the arts, and for the Christian life in general, and Beholding the Glory does an excellent job of explaining its significance. Subsequent chapters explain how incarnation works in specific art forms: poetry, music, dance, sculpture, icons, etc. As with any compilation, some chapters are better than others, but I found this book helpful and insightful overall. For my brief review on this book and most of the books out there on Christianity and the arts, see: theologyforreallife.com/artsbooks

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I liked 'Voicing Creations Praise' very much and this book is ...By Helen Keenan-DunneI liked 'Voicing Creations Praise' very much and this book is very helpful too. Generally I dislike highlighting a lot and this book is highlighted by last owner but it does help me see what someone else found important so that is OK.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. This will draw you in!By AndrewEdited by Begbie this unique book presents eight different aspects of art and our understanding of the incarnation. The first is by Trevor Hart who examines hearing, seeing and touching truth through art. His premise is that God became flesh so caution and wisdom is needed when art represents this. Without doubt, art creates a sense of thought and joy but is often relegated to a lower importance than politics, economy, science or religion. David Hume is quoted as saying that poets are 'liars by profession' and a potential source of idolatry. But art brings together our imagination and incarnation. It does cast light on the narrative of scripture by shaping the unfamiliar with the familiar. Hart asks the question concerning art, 'are we receivers of stolen goods?' He qualifies this question by referring to the Greek myth of Prometheus who claimed humanity stole fire from the god's thereby sparking imaginative creativity. He goes on to say that symbolism is a key component to our worldview. This ability to 'imagine' goes beyond the day-to-day sensory engagement of the world to an added value of revealing something greater. He cites Plato and his warning that art is cosmic burglary. With his dogmatic view of the divine realm or 'forms', Plato presents a concern for how art is appreciated. If art is about color, shape, sound, texture, manipulation of wet clay, smearing of oil on canvas or pushing air through metal tubes; is it a true representation of 'forms' that are far more real than the physical world we live in? What we see in the physical world is already a pale reflection of 'forms' so a further representation is making a pale reflection even paler! Collingwood is cited that real art is in the imagination of the artist and the imagination of the one who is appreciating the work. The physical realm is not the real work of art. Is art located somewhere between both imaginations? Hart concludes 'yes' and 'no' because appreciation of art is not passive but active. Both the artist and the appreciating person have a role to play. Kant takes this thought further and isolates how we appreciate art separate from how we see the world. This makes it highly subjective. Hart then takes us to two extremes of Schoenberg's music and Kandinsky's painting. Both are abstract and concern spirituality or the 'soul' of our humanity in how we appreciate the art. It is a dualism between matter and spirit. It is a higher level of abstraction as the music does not fit a particular harmony and the canvas looks nothing like an exact representation of the world we see. How this relates to incarnation, Hart brings into focus by quoting Paul's words to the Galatian churches. God is no longer abstract and distant from the world but in the world and its history. He is no longer a divine idea but a personable reality. Hart continues that we have struggled with the humanity of Jesus and therefore deify him through art whereas the incarnation humanized God. Therefore the incarnation itself has huge meaning and art must represent this.

The second is by Malcolm Guite who examines Christ and redemption through language. His premise is that the Word became flesh therefore was a word-user. How he unpacks this is unique. He cautions preachers to be wise with words as the unbeliever needs to hear the mystery of God without explaining it away. Also, the divine baby must not be thrown out with the cultural bathwater. The Word became flesh not just words. He was like us and had to learn how to use words. As an infant he would be wordless. Andrewes is quoted in his astonishing statement 'the Word without a word.' Guite calls this his greatest weakness as the oldest English term for a human being is to be a 'word-bearer.' The mystery of spoken language was given to the human race. The incarnation becomes profound in that the creator of mankind has to learn how to speak and use words himself. Guite adds that with the fall of the human race came the corruption of language and how it is used. An extreme example is used in how Nazi Germany looked at Jewish culture as 'pest control' demeaning humanity to nothing more than a rodent that needs to be 'exterminated' from the human race. The incarnation includes the redemption of language. This is seen in Luke's record of Jesus. Following this record, Jesus visited the temple many times but three of them were significant to following how the Word became authoritative with words. The first was his dedication by Simeon where the old sage spoke words of prophecy over the infant that he would be a light of the Gentiles, although a mere infant at the time without many intelligent words. The second was as a pre-teen who asked questions but spoke with authority. The third was in cleansing the temple of its corruption speaking with astonishing authority that no-one would question him. Guite's conclusion is that literature and language helps us journey from the incarnation to the cross.

Andrew Rumsey looks at poetry and its particularity. He states that this is a key word because details drive our lives and become crystallization. His example is the creative narrative where waters 'teemed' with life. He suggests particularity is in crisis within our culture because we cannot decide between Christ and Krishna or between the varieties of brands offering the same product in the supermarket. Everything is somehow grey and without particularity. Drawing upon the thoughts of Plato and the Enlightenment period, Rumsey states that particulars are like

the tenants and 'forms' (Plato) are the landlords. He cites the incarnation as the 'word that was from the beginning' who had particularity. He then looks at several aspects of particularity. Firstly, attention, like a poet driven by what is before him. He wants meaning to it. Rumsey concludes brilliantly that the guitar strings of Jimmy Hendrix are not just guitar string but they must have a greater meaning to a poet. Secondly, presence, in the poets mind is the absence of presence, not seeing what is before them. Thirdly, resonance, that brings context to meaning. His example is salvation itself. Not that we are forgiven of our sins but that the Son of Man should do so. Metaphors are vital for the poet to gain meaning and the choice of words. Again, waters 'teem' with life. This brings it full circle to particularity. Sara Savage expanded my thinking about dance, being fully human and fully alive. She suggests that it brings back more of ourselves and more of Christ. This statement was carefully unpacked in her dialogue. We tend to isolate intellect in our culture but this can affect how we see Jesus. The result is twofold: Jesus is divine or Jesus is human but not both. The cognitive approach to Jesus in 'knowing' him can be inadequate so more has to be engaged in addition to the mind. Savage suggests this is the body. She correctly states that before we could use words we came to know ourselves as we interacted with those around us physically. But the church has historically seen this as carnal and a stumbling block. For instance, when the Holy Spirit 'moves' we are frozen and stand still. This is only partially true. For every time scripture records immobility it also records a movement. The message of incarnation is powerfully about the 'body' that Jesus took. It was human just like ours therefore encountering him must also incorporate the body. Savage suggests this is in the dance. Jim Forest examines the incarnation through icons. Both ancient and modern controversy has argued that icons are a powerful testimony to the incarnation. His premise is logos and eikon. Jesus the Word is also Jesus the image. Forest opens up a concise history of icons explaining the benefit and controversy. His conclusion to this chapter is nothing short of brilliant saying that our culture is filled with noise and words and needs silent icons to speak for themselves revealing the wonder of incarnation. Lynn Aldrich examines sculpture in the question, 'what's the matter with matter?' Her premise is that engaging with material of any kind invites us to think creatively about the incarnation. She suggests there is tension in the questions, 'who is God?' and 'who for God's sake is Jesus?' After touching on some insightful thoughts about the physical realm, similar to Savage, she poses an interesting question about religion, that all other religions claim that the 'after life' is an altered state of the physical world whereas Christianity claims that we will have a new body, similar to our own but glorified. Her conclusion is that 'stuff' is not stuff but essential in the full redemption of the physical world. Genesis is cited as an obvious and often ignored fact, about understanding the incarnation through sculptures. God created man from the dust of the ground like a potter on a wheel. Therefore God is a great artist! She raises an interesting point in her own profession that when an artist feels the project is failed, it will be pushed aside. Her reasoning is that the artist has gone 'against the grain' of the material and malformed what was intended. Although she was not explicit, I think she was driving at the incarnation endorsing humanity as the created and that God has not pushed us aside as a failed project. Graham Cray attempts to explain the incarnation, and temptation of Jesus, through popular music. He creates a tension by stating the incarnation of Jesus cannot be fully understood unless we also understand his temptation. The extraordinary way of explaining this through popular music is through the life of the late soul singer Marvin Gaye. He correctly states that the saving power of Jesus cannot be real unless his temptation was real. From this he cites the two contrasting albums of Gaye 'What's going on' with 'Let's get it on.' Through brief history Cray explains that the West African culture was changed through two great awakenings. Slaves were converted to Christianity and with it came a new sound for expressing the gospel. He swings it back to Gaye and states that his own personal tension was between God and sex, as the two albums reveal. On one level he is looking for sexual pleasure (temptation) but on the other it is a deeper narrative of a man falling to temptation (unlike Jesus). Cray goes on to contrast Gaye and the incarnation / temptation of Jesus in a disappointing dialogue. I would have expected more from the most popular form of art - popular music. Thankfully, Begbie expands Cray's thoughts into music as a general form of art. His premise is that music we listen to has mixed sounds and notes combined to make sense to us. He carefully unpacks this thought concerning the Trinity and incarnation. His final chapter could have been a book in itself. By Andrew Fox author of Change Through Challenge

"A fine collection of probing and imaginative discussions on the relation between the Incarnation and the arts." -- Nicholas Wolterstorff, Yale Divinity School

From the Back Cover "A splendid contribution to a white-hot theological topic: the relationship between theology and the arts. In this book, a multi-faceted illumination is achieved by the distinguished contributors, who shine their spotlights not only on God's truth as revealed in Jesus Christ, but upon the dynamic creativity of artists as they explore this truth in so many striking and stimulating ways. This is a compulsive read, richly rewarding, which made me realize the enormous importance of doing theology through the arts." -Susan Howatch, best-selling author of the Starbridge series "A fine collection of probing and imaginative discussions of the relation between the incarnation and the arts. It's like a kaleidoscope: one turns the page to a new chapter and yet a different view appears." -Nicholas Wolterstorff, Yale Divinity School "Artists do theology with their feet and their hands, even with their eyes and ears.

These essays are beautiful reflections on these other ways of doing theology. They will benefit everyone who loves the arts and seeks to follow Christ, especially perhaps those who 'study' theology primarily with their minds!" -William A. Dyrness, Fuller Theological Seminary "Jeremy Begbie and his team engage with two lively intensities, incarnation and the arts, and give a fresh sense of each." -David F. Ford, University of Cambridge "A lively corrective to common ways of thinking about the arts." -Roger Lundin, Wheaton College Beholding the Glory demonstrates the indispensable role the arts play in disclosing God's wisdom to us. Writing from different Christian traditions, practicing artists, theologians, and professors-all well-versed in the relationship between imagination and theology-focus on the incarnation and draw out a wealth of meaning in the belief that God entered our world as one of us. About the Author Jeremy Begbie (Ph. D., University of Aberdeen) is vice principal of Ridley Hall and director of Theology Through the Arts, a research project at the Center for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies, University of Cambridge. A professionally trained musician and frequent lecturer, he is the author or editor of four books.