



Modern Art and the Life of a Culture: The Religious Impulses of Modernism

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Bringing Together Art and Theology

With the release of *Modern Art and the Life of Culture*, IVP Academic launches their new Studies in Theology and the Arts (STA) series. Seeking to enable Christians to reflect more deeply upon the relationship between their faith and humanity's artistic and cultural expressions, this series encourages thoughtful engagement with and critical discernment of the full variety of artistic media to inform Christian thinking.

"The Studies in Theology and the Arts series provides Christian scholars, artists and church leaders with an opportunity to shape our theological perspective on the arts in light of the creative realities of our Maker God," says Makoto Fujimura, renowned artist and director of the Brehm Center for Worship, Theology and the Arts at Fuller Theological Seminary.

"These resources can help by extending the salvific narrative into broader creation and new creation narratives, enriching our grasp of the gospel, and revealing how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."

By drawing upon the insights of both academic theologians and artistic practitioners, this series brings together two competing worlds to give a more holistic look on different aspects of their faith. *Modern Art and the Life of Culture* is written by two such authors, Jonathan Anderson, an artist, art critic and professor of art at Biola University, and William Dyrness, a professor of theology and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary.

"I suppose we may appear to be a wonderfully unlikely duo," writes Anderson. "Happily, I am an artist who is deeply interested in and invested in theology, and Bill is a theologian deeply interested in and invested in the arts. In other words, we have both been actively reaching across the disciplinary boundaries that separate us, which creates a mutuality that is very important for a project like this to work. I think this kind of collaboration is extremely valuable for creating more meaningful and mutually enriching dialogue about and between art and theology, and I hope we have modeled something that others will also pick up and run with."

Dyrness adds, "I think our different styles and inclinations made the approach richer. Jonathan's work on art history and theory led him to see in those discussions theological questions that are mostly overlooked or even actively suppressed; my interest in the development of theology inclined me to see a similar generative process taking place in the interaction of religion and art. So we came often from different directions, but we were seeing and trying to explain the same phenomena."

Their book responds to the Hans Rookmaaker volume *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (1970). Anderson and Dyrness bring their different backgrounds together to argue that modernist art is underwritten by deeply religious concerns. They assert that there were

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actually strong religious impulses that positively shaped modern visual art. Instead of affirming a pattern of decline and growing antipathy towards faith, the authors contend that theological engagement and inquiry can be perceived across a wide range of modern art and through particular works by artists such as Gauguin, Picasso, David Jones, Caspar David Friedrich, van Gogh, Kandinsky, Warhol and many others.

“This series is an exciting and critically important development in the burgeoning theology and arts field,” says Jeremy Begbie, professor of theology at Duke Divinity School. “It promises to advance the discussion in fresh and highly fruitful ways.”