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# Interpreting Christian art: reflections on Christian art

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treatment on theology and ethics, indicating how bad theology can become the unholy ally of church strife. An excursus or appendix could have accommodated such a statement.

Notwithstanding this mild criticism I heartily recommend this book for wide use and much benefit.

Marlin Aadland, Bishop-Retired,  
Burnaby, British Columbia

### **Interpreting Christian Art: Reflections on Christian Art**

Edited by Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons.

Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004.

256 pages, \$48 Hardcover

*Interpreting Christian Art* is a collection of essays originally presented as part of the Pruitt Symposium on “Interpreting Christian Art,” held at Baylor University in Waco, Texas in October 2000. The symposium brought together researchers, clergy, and laity interested in the question of how religious art can contribute to the life of the contemporary Christian church. The resulting essays provide an interdisciplinary exploration of Christian art, with contributions from art historians, theologians, and biblical scholars. Essayists include Margaret Miles, Robin M. Jensen, Graydon F. Snyder, Charles Barber, Anthony Cutler, William M. Jensen, Paolo Berdini, John W. Cook, and the editors, Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons.

The essays vary in length and complexity. A number would be of interest primarily to art historians or students of art. They present close analyses of specific examples of art works from particular historical periods, with a focus on the early Christian, Byzantine, Renaissance, and Baroque eras, or trace the development of certain artistic themes over time.

The framing essays, by Margaret Miles (“Achieving the Christian Body: Visual Incentives to Imitation of Christ in the Christian West”) and John Cook (“What is Christian About Christian Art?”), offer the most useful insights into the contemporary relevance of the visual arts from theological and pastoral perspectives. Miles raises questions which are particularly important in the face of our modern

visually-oriented culture. She asks whether the present-day spiritual hunger in North America relates to a lack of religious images capable of inspiring imitation, and whether contemporary Christians have a range of images that can effectively remind them of their calling. Cook provides an outline of the way in which art has historically reflected the major theological concerns of its time, and notes that the present age seems bereft of broadly-accepted art forms that shape belief and behavior. He then identifies the challenge facing contemporary Christian artists: they must find ways of speaking through the arts in an age of radical individuality, when there are varying and often conflicting trends in theological thinking.

*Interpreting Christian Art* is well illustrated, with eighty-two black and white reproductions of works under discussion. While there is no bibliography, each chapter is extensively documented. The page layout, which places notes in the side margins, makes cross-referencing easy to follow.

Mikeal C. Parsons is a professor of religion at Baylor University, and is the author of *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts* and co-editor of *Rethinking the Unity of Luke and Acts*. Heidi J. Hornik is an associate professor of art history at Baylor University, and the co-editor, with Mikeal Parsons, of *Illuminating Luke: The Infancy Narrative in Italian Renaissance Painting*.

Diane E. Peters

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## **The Imaginative World of the Reformation**

Peter Matheson

Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001

168 pages, \$20 Paperback

This book by Peter Matheson, Principal of the Theological Hall of the Uniting Church in Melbourne (Australia), breaks new ground in the area of Reformation studies in Germany. Whereas so many of the important works in the field have split between a kind of disembodied “history of ideas” approach and a detailed, materialist “social history” approach, Matheson explores the ways in which