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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.Supp29.Foreword>

ISSN: 1015-8758 (Print)

ISSN: 2309-9089 (Online)

Acta Theologica 2020
Supp 29:1-1

Date published:
30 November 2020

FOREWORD

There are many books about justice, and many about art and beauty. Rare is the book that is both about justice and about art and beauty. This collection of essays is one of those rare books. The writers are stepping out into almost virgin territory.

But it is not a book about justice and *also* about art and beauty. It is a book in which these are brought together and thought together. The question hovering over the entire collection is: What does justice have to do with art and beauty? and, conversely: What do art and beauty have to do with justice?

A constant presence, unspoken in the title, is theology, often in the foreground, sometimes in the background, always there. At times, that theological presence takes the form of theological reflections on justice, or theological reflections on art and beauty, or theological reflections on justice together with art and beauty. At other times, to quote one of the writers, it takes the form of reflecting on “how the arts are sources of theological expression which can play an active role in stimulating, challenging, and expanding theological insight”. Yet, at other times, it takes the form of a theological critique of ways of engaging art and beauty that fail to do them justice or, alternatively, that over-prize them.

In short, one of the most impressive features of this volume is the way in which aspects that are ordinarily kept separate are brought together and thought together in this book: justice with art and beauty, theology with both. It was not always easy. Now and then, there are signs of struggle – which is to be expected, given that this is almost virgin territory.



Published by the UFS
<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at>

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What should also be noted is that the explicit context of nearly all the articles is recent and present-day South Africa. This is not to say that the approaches taken and the conclusions drawn do not have application beyond South Africa; most definitely, they do. But they do not attempt or pretend to adopt “a view from nowhere”. It is from the location of the writers in South Africa that the interconnections among theology, justice, art and beauty are viewed.

As I was reading through the essays, I was reminded of a kaleidoscope that I had when I was a child. Look into it, and you would see a pattern formed by glass chips; turn the part holding the chips, and the pattern would change; turn it again, and the pattern would change again; and so forth. Reading these essays was like that. Theology, justice, art and beauty are the glass chips. In one essay, they are configured in one way; in the next, they are configured differently; in the next, yet differently; and so forth. Eleven different configurations of the same items.

Several of the writers make the point that both theology and art require imagination – as does the struggle to oppose injustice. Given its kaleidoscopic character, the collection is an invitation and stimulus to readers themselves to imagine what theology, justice, art and beauty have to do with each other. Some books leave no loose ends; everything is tied up. One can then accept, reject, or set the package aside. This collection is as far from that as could be. Eleven different “takes” on theology, justice, art and beauty, eleven different “prompts” to imagination.