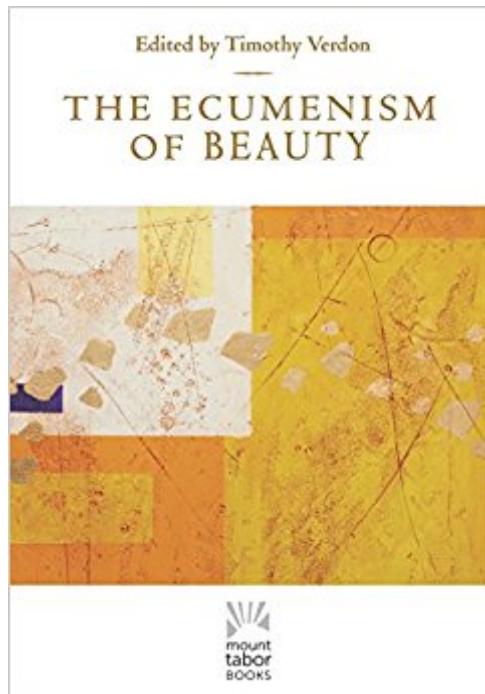


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# The Ecumenism Of Beauty (Mount Tabor Books)



## Synopsis

A landmark book on the role of visual arts, beauty and aesthetics in ecumenical exchange. For the 500th Commemoration Year of the Reformation In a visual age, this book shares the belief that beauty and art can bridge differences. Essays from catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant artists, scholars, clergy and theologians explore beauty as a means to unify the body of Christ. The occasion of the Reformation commemoration year offers a time to reflect on the rich artistic heritage shared by all Christians and an opportunity to learn from other traditions. "The Ecumenism of Beauty is a call to the church to again embrace the arts in service to its liturgy and mission."   
 "Sandra Bowden, Collector, Curator and Past President of Christians in the Visual Arts Essays include Calvin and the Visual Arts: The Aesthetics of Soli Deo Gloria, The Artist as Contemplative, and Art and the Liturgy. Contributors to this book include: Timothy Verdon, Editor " Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Director (Florence, Italy) William Dyrness " Fuller Theological Seminary, Professor of Theology Jérôme Cottin " University of Strasbourg, Professor of Practical Theology Susan S. Kanaga Filippo Rossi Martin Shannon Released during the 500th commemoration year of the Reformation, this publication is part of a larger symposium in 2017, The Arts and Ecumenism " What Theology Risks in Artistic Creation, with academic presentations in Paris, Strasbourg, and Florence, and an art exhibit at Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence, Italy. The symposium also includes panel discussions and sessions at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music in New Haven and in Orleans, MA. The symposium is promoted by Catholic and Protestant schools of theology together with Mount Tabor Centre for Art and Spirituality, Barga, Italy and Orleans, MA. The authors of this book are Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant artists, scholars, and clergy who will take part in this symposium. The work of contributors Susan S. Kanaga and Filippo Rossi is currently on display at the Grande Museo del Duomo in Florence, Italy. For more information visit [artsandecumenism.org](http://artsandecumenism.org).

## Book Information

Series: Mount Tabor Books

Hardcover: 128 pages

Publisher: Paraclete Press (April 25, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 161261924X

ISBN-13: 978-1612619248

Product Dimensions: 6.3 x 0.7 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #452,316 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #171 in Books > Arts & Photography > History & Criticism > Themes > Religious #655 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Faith #721 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Worship & Devotion > Faith

## Customer Reviews

The occasion of the Reformation commemoration year offers a time to reflect on the rich artistic heritage shared by all Christians and an opportunity to learn from other traditions. Impressively informative and inherently thoughtful and thought-provoking, *The Ecumenism of Beauty* is an extraordinary volume that is very highly recommended for the church, community, and academic library Ecumenical Christian collections, and supplemental studies lists. —Midwest Book Review, June 2017

As a priest as well as a lover of art, Verdon recognizes that prayer and art are natural allies — that spirituality, at heart, is not merely a quest for truth and goodness, but also for authentic beauty as well. Christians in the east, with their rich tradition of icons, have done a better job at retaining beauty as an integral part of the faith experience. So I truly admire Msgr. Verdon's efforts to reclaim a rich and authentic spirituality of art. It's a truly gorgeous book, filled with full color illustrations, that is as much a feast for the eyes as for the mind. —Carl McColman, patheos.com

The word “ecumenism” puts me to sleep: it only conjures up well-intentioned theological commissions and bland inter-faith celebrations. But I still believe in ecumenism. The only place in my life where I've experienced it in a vivid, tangible way is through the arts. Art provides something of an open space for encounter —helpful when there are contentious theologies facing one another —because it is concrete rather than abstract. Enter *The Ecumenism of Beauty*, edited by the revered art historian Timothy Verdon: the book, published this year to coincide with the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's 95 theses, brings together artists and thinkers from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant traditions. Each essay, beautifully illustrated with color plates, wrestles with some aspect of the historic Christian tension between art as icon...or idol. The writing here is substantial but not scholarly: in a word, accessible. As we reflect on the Reformation this year, the arts can help us gain a deeper sense of what separates —and unites —the body of Christ.

—Gregory Wolfe, Image Journal, Editor

As this book focuses on the relationship between beauty and ecclesiology as I read I kept thinking of what historical theologians call the Medieval transcendentals: the true, the beautiful and the good. In an earlier time, these were all held in

tension, as each reflecting something important about God. Evangelicals of the protestant tradition, my tribe, were suspicious of beauty as ephemeral and idolatrous, but we emphasized truth and goodness (and two out of three ain't bad). However, we are in the midst of a recovery of Protestant theological aesthetics and religious art. This book extends the dialogue between Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants, while honoring the differences and contributions of each tradition. Appropriately this book is also beautiful, with full-color images on glossy pages. I think Rossi and Kanaga's chapters were my favorite contributions, not only because they showcased their beautiful artwork, but because they reflected on their spiritual experience as artists. I give this five stars and recommend it to anyone concerned about art and the church. "James Matichuk, thoughtssongsandprayers.comIn what is truly a work of ecumenism, contributors from across denominations (Orthodox, Anglican, Protestant, and Catholic) offer essays on the intersection of faith and art in a spirit that illuminates theological aesthetics. Few would argue with Msgr. Verdon (director, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence), who notes that church images have the power and potential to touch the innermost reality of a person's life. Quoting Pope John Paul II, Verdon further observes that Orthodox iconic images also have the ability to teach the faithful the language of beauty in service to faith. The role of sacred art from ecumenical perspectives has rarely been attempted with such simplicity and quality. Gorgeous pictures accompany the essays, which feature perceptions on writing icons, art and liturgy, the artist as contemplative, and the role of theological aesthetics in the Protestant experience. A fascinating chapter offers a reappraisal of reformer John Calvin, who is credited with a dour aesthetic sensibility that continues in Protestantism to this day. VERDICT: A breath of fresh air on theological art.

"Sandra Collins, Library Journal, June 2017

"Since its formation, God's people have struggled to embrace the rich and comprehensive reality of Christ's Church. It is, therefore, a pleasure to have theologians and artists from Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions gather--as they do in this volume--to consider afresh the vital place of images, art, and beauty, not only within the Church, but also beyond her doors as she invites a world that is hungry for meaning and transcendence to feast on God's good gifts." Cameron J. Anderson Author of The Faithful Artist: A Vision for Evangelicalism and the Arts and the Executive Director of CIVA| Christians in the Visual Arts. "This book signals what surely needs to be central to any future engagement of faith and the arts - an ecumenical spirit that can take differences seriously while constantly trying to find ways in which Christians can more fully live into their inheritance in Christ." Jeremy Begbie Thomas A. Langford Research Professor

of Theology, Duke Divinity School, Director of Duke Initiatives in Theology and the ARts "Jesus calls his followers to be united as one, yet our theological and ecclesial differences often divide us. This brief collection of essays by Christians from a variety of traditions appeals to beauty - in particular, beauty as experienced in and through the arts - as a means to unify the body of Christ. However we might interpret Dostoevsky's words, spoken by Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*, that "beauty will save the world," I expect that Christians of all backgrounds will be enriched by these reflections and encouraged to seek unity in Christ." Rev. Dr. David McNutt guest professor of theology and philosophy, Wheaton College and essayist for International Journal of Systematic Theology, Religion and the Arts and Theology. "The Ecumenism of Beauty is a call to the church to again embrace the arts in service to its liturgy and mission. As so eloquently outlined in this book by theologians, art historians and artists from a wide range of traditions, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation offers us a time for reflection on the vital importance of recovering our rich artistic heritage." Sandra Bowden artist, collector/curator and past president of Christians in Visual Arts

Over the last few years, there has been a flowering of Christians of all stripes engaged in the visual arts. This has been a vehicle for shared communion between Christians of different ecclesial traditions—Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. The Ecumenism of Beauty reflects the deepening and mutual dialogue across denominational lines. Each tradition brings their own peculiar emphasis and theological understanding to the arts. I'll note my brief criticism from the outset: this book is missing a page with contributor bios. Maybe I am an odd duck, but when I pick up a multi-author volume, I always turn to the contributor page first. Often this only has where they were educated and their current position, but it helps me place their perspective, tradition and what each brings to a topic. Luckily a few of these names were familiar to me and a few paragraphs into each chapter, I knew, in general, what discipline and tradition each author were writing from. There was Timothy Verdon, the book's editor and eminent historian of Christian, religious art, Jérôme McCullin and William Dyrness, both active in the theology of arts and culture, Vasileios Marinis, an expert in Byzantine iconography, artists Susan Kanaga and Filippo Rossi and Martin Shannon, an ordained Episcopal pastor and devotional author. Verdon's introduction sets the stage. He describes the difference between the classical Catholic and Protestant aesthetic, as depicted two 16th century paintings. Pieter Neefs the Elder painted Antwerp Cathedral full of ornate iconography, priests and parishioners and sacramental flourish. Pieter Jansz's painting of the interior of St. Odulphuskerk reveals an austere sanctuary where the pulpit alone looks grand. Verdon comments on how the interior of these two churches reflect the beliefs and practices of both

Catholics and Protestants—Catholic belief in salvation through ecclesial signs and the solo Scriptura of Lutheranism (ix). Protestant and especially Calvinists (enthusiastic iconoclasts that they were) are faulted for their lack of religious aesthetic. See, for example, Andrew Greeley's Catholic Imagination (which in memory argued that everything beautiful created by Christians came from Catholics, whereas Protestants were just good at analyzing stuff). However the first two chapters of this volume expose how much this is a gross oversimplification. Cottin points out that Calvin had no problem with images, only images used as props for devotion (@) and he points to accomplished Western artists influenced by Calvinist culture (i.e Jacob van Ruysdael, Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch, Vincent Van Gogh) (9). Dyrness's points out that Calvin's concern about idolatry caused him to put a moratorium on religious imagery, but he asks "Why after 500 years, when Protestants are learning again from medieval practices—praying the labyrinth, practicing lectio divina, and embracing Ignatian spiritual practices and retreats—are their worship spaces, and their corporate prayer, so often devoid of visual beauty?" (19) He argues that the time is ripe for an aesthetical recovery. Kanaga, one of the artist contributors describes her life as part of the Community of Jesus, and her commission (along with sculptor Regis Damange) to design elements of the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, MA and discuss her art and practice. Kanaga sees abstract sacred art as the perfect vehicle to communicate the indefinite and the ineffable (31-32). Marinis's chapter opens up the spirituality of Byzantine iconography with insights from Fotis Kontoglou 1895-1965) Rossi describes how visual art is an act of contemplation, especially for the artist in the creative process. Shannon's chapter describes the physical space of the Church of the Transfiguration and the way beauty draws the ecumenical, Benedictine community into worship. Verdon's closing chapter reflects on the interplay between Art and liturgy. As this book focuses on the relationship between beauty and ecclesiology as I read I kept thinking of what historical theologians call the Medieval transcendentals: the true, the beautiful and the good. In an earlier time, these were all held in tension, as each reflecting something important about God. Evangelicals of the protestant tradition, my tribe, were suspicious of beauty as ephemeral and idolatrous, but we emphasized truth and goodness (and two out of three ain't bad). However, we are in the midst of a recovery of Protestant theological aesthetics and religious art. This book extends the dialogue between Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants, while honoring the differences and contributions of each tradition. Appropriately this book is also beautiful, with full-color images on glossy pages. I think Rossi and Kanaga's chapters were my favorite contributions, not only because they showcased their beautiful artwork, but because they reflected on their spiritual experience as artists. I give this five stars and recommend it to anyone concerned about art and the

church. . . . .

This book includes essays from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant artists, scholars, and clergy, in an effort to bring further unity among Christian churches or denominations through increased understanding. This book opened my eyes to why Christian traditions use (or don't use) varying styles of architecture, icons and other decor in their houses of worship. Admittedly, there are several other factors to consider when investing in church structures and artwork. Still, I'm thankful for the conversations emerging about how beauty aids us in worship. This book is a great resource for those conversations.

With the rich glossy pictures of art, this is such a gorgeous book to have on your table for guests to flip through--especially because its slim size makes it easy to pick up and read just one essay whenever you think of it. I know that's hardly the biggest reason to buy a book, but I had to mention it. As far as content, it pairs really nicely with Verdon's own book *Art and Beauty* for those who want a view of Christian art that steps outside of Catholicism. The tone varies with the diversity of the authors represented, and through this diversity the essays succeed in providing a window into what sacred art might look like from Calvin to Kontoglou, from a modern day artist in an Abbey using abstract work, to the quite objective forms of Eastern Orthodox's icons. With a taste of history, introspection, and artistic criticism, this collection actually says a lot and was both informative and worship-inspiring.

I have always loved sacred art. There is such beauty in icons, in the structure and architecture of churches and cathedrals, in the stained glass, and even the way the sacristy is designed. All great art should direct us towards the holy, towards the divine mystery. When we enter our sacred spaces, our hearts, minds and souls should all be focused on God, on making us aware of the eternal. When one sits in the silence and stillness of any church, one is drawn inward and heavenward. The elements around a parishioner should instill a sense of awe and wonder. Timothy Verdon has edited a book that reminds me of the visual arts in different ecclesiastical traditions: Protestant, Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox. In the preface to the book he quotes Pope Paul VI's words reminding the artist that "this world in which we live needs beauty if it would not fall into despair. Beauty like truth, puts joy in men's hearts and is a precious fruit able to resist the wear of time, able to unite one generation with another, helping them communicate in shared admiration." Throughout the centuries, artists have done this. Whether it's Andrei Rublev painting his

glorious icons or Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel or the stained glass of Matisse. All of their work makes us remember the visible holiness of the Word becoming Flesh, God in man, through Christ Jesus. This book is filled with beauty and wisdom. It reminds the reader of not only the artistry, but how each Christian tradition brings its own creative vision in representing the tenets of our faith. The language and liturgy of our branches may vary, but at the root and heart of our belief is the Trinity. Filled with beautiful photographs that capture everything from iconography to modern art, I found myself awestruck by how architects, painters, and sculptors used their craft to glorify God, understanding that their talents were first and foremost a gift from Him to be used to glorify Him. Along with the beautiful photographs are essays by Verdon and others that remind us on the relationship throughout history of how beauty and ecclesiology have gone together: how the art reflects the theological perspectives of everyone from Calvin to Kontoglou or from churches to abbeys. This really shows the rich artistic heritage that our faith shares and makes me grateful that Timothy Verdon assembled this book as a way of reminding us that art can indeed offer us epiphany, wonder and a desire to worship.

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