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Christ for All People: Celebrating a World of Christian Art

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Christ For All People: Celebrating A World of Christian Art

Ron O'Grady, ed.

Toronto: Novalis, 2001

159 pages, \$39.95 Hardcover

To the end of the Renaissance, virtually all art produced in the Western world could be described as "Christian art". However, from the 17th century onwards, secular values began to supplant traditional religious beliefs, and artists turned increasingly to more worldly sources of inspiration. Most texts on contemporary art include few examples of works based on Christian themes.

This does not mean that there is no Christian art today. Editor Ron O'Grady reminds us in his jacket notes for *Christ For All People* that Christianity is a living religion and that the Jesus story continues to move artists to offer images that speak in the context of today's world.

O'Grady's book brings together a collection of artworks from more than 60 countries. Over 100 illustrations are included, all reproduced in colour and most with brief commentary or meditations. The introductory chapter briefly surveys Christian art from the catacombs to the beginnings of the modern era. Subsequent chapters trace the course of Jesus' life from the annunciation through the crucifixion and final triumph, as portrayed by twentieth-century Christian artists.

Seeing Christ through the eyes of others provides provocative insights into our own faith journeys. An Indonesian Jesus wears shorts and sunglasses and talks to fishermen wearing baseball caps, underlining God's solidarity with the common people of the world. A Sri Lankan Jesus, his lowered eyelids drawn from Buddhist iconography, conveys the sense of compassion, self-renunciation, and tranquillity that result from full communion with God. An Australian *Last Supper* portrays Jesus as a shadowy figure in the foreground, seen from the back; we cannot discern his face, but the reflection of his presence is evident in the rapt faces of his followers, which include men, women with babies, and young children. Images of Jesus as African or Latin American or East Asian remind us of the diversity of the Christian family.

As Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, notes in the book's introductory comments: "Communication through art transcends national and linguistic boundaries. It unites people around the world beyond the differences of denominations or even ideologies. It invites people to respond to the prayers of Christ 'that all may be one'."

Christ For All People, simultaneously published in New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and Switzerland, was produced under the auspices of the World Council of Churches. It was inspired by the success of *The Bible Through Asian Eyes*, published in 1991 by the Asian Christian Art Association. A few of the images in *Christ For All People* appeared in the earlier WCC publication, but most are new. The editor, Rev. Ron O'Grady, is a former Associate General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia and one of the founders of the Asian Christian Art Association.

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The Dictionary of Historical Theology

Trevor A. Hart, Ed.
Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000
619 pages, \$77.00 Hardcover

The Dictionary of Historical Theology intends to serve “as a ready reference to scholars, students, ministers of religion and informed lay people alike,” by “drawing together the best of contemporary scholarship on the key figures, movements and texts in the story of Christian theology from the early church to the present day.” (xix) Assessing the success of such a massive undertaking entails no mean feat and this reviewer is most certainly *not* in the position to play judge. I can assure the reader, however, that in this dictionary I have found a resource that I am certain I will use for years to come. The articles (ranging from 500 to 15,000 words) are, by and large, engaging and concise treatments that also provide helpful suggestions for further reading.

In order to review this dictionary, I gave myself the task of reading it from cover to cover. I realize, of course, that few readers would approach a dictionary in like manner. I am now convinced that there is a great benefit to be gained in such an exercise. The task of reading through this dictionary has proven serendipitous. My mind has been stretched, in a helpful way, by sequentially reading, for example, the entries “Leontius