

Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology

Volume 21 | Number 1


Article 5

5-30-2019

Cecilia González-Andrieu. Bridge to Wonder: Art as Gospel of Beauty

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Recommended Citation

Crowley, Eileen D. "Cecilia González-Andrieu. Bridge to Wonder: Art as Gospel of Beauty," *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology*. Vol. 21 : No. 1 , Article 5. (2019) :109
Available at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt/vol21/iss1/5>

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Cecilia González-Andrieu. *Bridge to Wonder: Art as Gospel of Beauty*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012. 242 pages. \$29.95 Hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-60258-351-1.

Imagine the Golden Gate Bridge: a span striking in shape, color, and line; a structure held up by multiple strands of braided steel wire. Keep this image in mind, because it is key to understanding Cecilia González-Andrieu's *Bridge to Wonder: Art as Gospel of Beauty*. The author uses the Golden Gate Bridge as a recurring metaphor in this work of theological aesthetics, in which she demonstrates "interlacing," her method of engagement with the theological and the artistic.

The theological question at the heart of this book is not "What is art?" but "How do we know God?" Art-making and art-receiving invite participants into theological and aesthetic contemplation of "revelatory symbols," a category the author borrows from theologian Avery Dulles. Dulles, González-Andrieu notes, turned to writing about art and artists because artists have "expressed experiences of revelation beyond the confines of theological categories" (14). González-Andrieu joins Dulles in wanting to break through those confines to invite deep dialogue with diverse communities.

González-Andrieu, a Cuban-American scholar in the fields of both art and religion and systematic theology, offers an intercultural, interdisciplinary approach to theological aesthetics, a field that has been developing since the mid-1980s. One of the tasks of art, she writes, is to "create a bridge to revelatory wonder" by enabling deep experiences of *asombrado*, wonder mediated through human creativity (15). Because, the author writes, "the revelatory power of art is best understood by the way it works" (27), she advances her project evocatively through story-telling and careful analysis of art-

making and art-receiving experiences. These aesthetic experiences can spark wonder that opens the eyes of the heart to see beauty and truth, God's glory and justice, and "enticing mystery enveloping us" (26). "What is beautiful," Gonzalez-Andrieu states, "is always pointing to the source of all beauty; we just need to be willing to look" (165).

Two of González-Andrieu's four extended examples of how art works function in U.S. Latina contexts. In an opening example of the powerful and complex ways in which the sacred and the artistic can converge, González-Andrieu describes her experience of wonder during a bilingual Nativity play, *La Pastorela*, performed by California farmworkers in the nave of a mission church. In the particularity of this multi-arts experience in a liturgical space, with Latina men and women as both actors and audience, the culturally and religiously charged symbols combined so that the play became "a luminous dream" the participants envisaged together (30). In a closing example, González-Andrieu illustrates how beauty and justice imaginatively interwoven and encountered can create powerful works of art that ask a question about community, "Who is my neighbor?" She introduces the prophetic work of Chicago artist Sergio Gomez and demonstrates how one of his works, "Last Supper," provides the key to interpreting the theology embedded in his other works—works that represent human vulnerability, especially that of immigrants. While González-Andrieu writes about these two examples from her own experience, the central chapters of the book probe two cases known to her only through research. One deals with the complexities involved in curating religious art exhibitions in a Western secular context. The other involves the commissioning of modern art for the French Chapel of Assy in the years after World War II and the aesthetic clashes that ensued between the commissioning clergy and the

praying community. In her description and analysis of these European cases, González-Andrieu explores broad questions related to art, religion, community, and context. Throughout, she provides insights from Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians, historical and contemporary. From the beginning, she presents evidence for “where art can be helpful to the work of theology... in its role as witness and producer of revelatory symbols” (18). González-Andrieu closes with a call to theologians to make theological reflection accessible to particular communities through engagement with their own community’s arts.

González-Andrieu’s book provides a concrete, lively example of how theological aesthetics can be done today. While certain sections will be particularly apt for students and teachers of U.S. Latinoa theology, the book as a whole will be a welcome addition to courses that deal with theology or religion and the arts and, of course, theological aesthetics.

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