

Begbie Jeremy S. 2023.

Abundantly more. The Theological Promise of the Arts in a Reductionist World.

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Abundantly More is far more than another monograph on theology and the arts, or a dummy's guide to theological aesthetics. It is a Christian *apologia* in the classical sense – a carefully reasoned and theologically astute response to a world struggling for abundant life but seduced by the reductionist consequences of secularism and scientism. But, argues Begbie, “there is more to the world than we will ever be able to account for, more than could ever be fully discovered, thought, or spoken.” This “more” is beyond philosophical proof; it is discerned by the theological insight that it arises “from the sustaining presence of the infinitely living God”, that is “from the world’s being upheld by a limitless plenitude of meaning and significance.” (p. 177)

Science and technology are necessary and remarkable servants of the common good, and critical reason is necessary to keep us honest, but none of them can give us life in its fullness. Indeed, once we have lost our ability to acknowledge the world as the “theatre of God’s glory” and adore the ultimate mystery of creation in silence and song it becomes a theatre of the absurd however rational its claims. In short, the ultimate end of reductionism is nihilism. By contrast, the *promise* of the creative arts is their ability to stir the imagination and help us recover our ability to see and hear things differently, and their *theological* promise is their ability to become a means of grace that awakens the childlike faith that perceives the reign of God within the world and is enthralled by Jesus’ offer of life in its fullness.

In developing his thesis, Begbie takes us on an interdisciplinary journey in which he unpacks the ways in which reductionism has shaped the modern worldview. He is not only up-to-the task of exploring its dimensions and evaluating their significance,

but also of responding to their challenge. He may be faulted by some for his extensive references to contemporary resources in unpacking the complex pathology of reductionism, but his discussion is well-structured, interesting, and to the point. That direction is informed at critical junctures by a series of biblical reflections that regularly remind us of the faith-perspective that informs Begbie's approach to the arts and, in so doing break open fresh theological insight and understanding. The result is a journey of well-reasoned faith that is appropriately imaginative, informed by biblical scholarship, as well as a theological rigor whose *cantus firmus* is the mystery of the crucified and risen Christ at the heart of the triune God.

If anyone still seriously doubts the importance of theological aesthetics as a discipline essential to the witness of the church in the modern world, this should persuade them otherwise. But more than that, it is a convincing case for the encouragement of the arts in the life of the church which carries weight because its author, who is both cognisant of the character of the modern world and theologically perceptive, is also deeply involved in and committed to theological formation and Christian witness. Yes, indeed, *Abundantly More* is Christian apologia in the classical sense.