**Cultivating the Relationship between Theology and the Arts: Confrontation, Dialogue or Integration? A Conversation with William Dyrness and John D. Witvliet**

**Confrontation.** Immersed in the agenda of modernity, we are confronted with highly specialized areas of study and practice that often appear opaque to outsiders. The worlds of Theology and of the Arts are no exceptions to this general rule. As a result, the attempts to begin conversations between these highly specialized practices encounters difficulty: specialized language is difficult to translate; institutional gate-keepers jealously guard their turf; and reified traditions set the agenda. Accordingly, some Christian artists argue that one needs to respect these boundaries and play by the rules of the various games.

**Dialogue.** Many Christians find this separation unsatisfying. The gifts of creativity, they believe, must be part of God’s creation purposes These theologians have been able to find biblical warrant for seeing the visual arts and drama (and not just music) in the larger purposes of God and as sites for opening up conversation with experts in these areas. Artists and art critics, for their part, have recently begun to recognize that spiritual (if not directly theological) substance is present in artistic practice. Such insights from thoughtful practitioners and scholars can sometimes be illuminating for Christian reflection, even if, as Paul Fiddes insists, these disciplines are still parallel tracks that do not intersect.

**Integration.** Some Christians want to go further: such conversations they insist, while important, do not satisfy the need to see all these gifts as bestowed by God, and underwritten by the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. What if the goal of growing up in Christ in all things (Eph. 4) includes artistic practices and appreciation? What if bringing every thought captive to Christ also includes a thoughtful and prayerful practice of artmaking? This is clearly a goal that Christians pursue in other areas of life, why not in the arts? Even if this goal will only be fully met when, as John saw on Patmos, all the gifts of the nations will be brought into the heavenly kingdom (Rev. 21), still, for this day we wait and pray, and toward this goal we work.

**Curated list of books by William Dyrness on theology, culture and the arts.**

*Rouault: A Vision of Suffering and Salvation.* Grand Rapids, Eerdmans (1971).

*Christian Art in Asia.* Amsterdam, Rodopi (1979).

*The Earth is God’s: A Theology of American Culture.* Orbis Books (1997).

*Visual Faith: Art, Theology and Worship in Dialogue*. Baker (2001). \

*Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards.* Cambridge University Press (2004).

*A Primer on Christian Worship.* Eerdmans (2009).

*Senses of the Soul:* *Worship and the Visual in Christian Worship.* Cascade Books (2008).

*Poetic Theology: God and the Poetics of Everyday Life.* Eerdmans (2011).

*The Senses of Devotion:* *Interfaith Aesthetics in Buddhist and Muslim Communities.* Cascade Books (2012).

*Modern Art and the Life of a Culture,* InterVarsity Press (2016). Co-author with Jonathan Anderson.

*The Origins of a Protestant Aesthetic in the Early Modern Period: Calvin’s Reformation Poetics.* Cambridge University Press, 2019.