

THE MACLAURIN INSTITUTE
Theology and Arts Reading Group
TOPIC: John W. De Gruchy's, *Christianity, Art and Transformation*

Often those at the forefront of social transformation are primarily concerned with themes of truth and goodness. Does the ideal of beauty have a place within this same struggle for social transformation and renewal? What is the connection between ugliness and oppression, between beauty and redemption?

While the arts do have a redemptive capacity, throughout history Christianity has had more than an uneasy dialogue with aesthetics in the public sphere. How can the Christian tradition recover and live out an aesthetic existence and more importantly, what is the benefit of doing so?

In *Christianity, Art and Transformation*, John W. De Gruchy argues that, while not the only means to do so, the arts help us to “live creatively in the tension between the ‘mystical’ and the ‘prophetic’ in the struggle for human transformation.” As we journey through De Gruchy’s work, we will look at the following:

Week 1 – Introduction and Discussion: *Historical Trajectories*

The power of sacred images and *The beautiful, the ugly and the holy*.

- ❖ A brief overview of the history of Christianity and aesthetics, touching upon the power of sacred images and iconoclasm.
- ❖ A philosophical sampling of the seemingly subjective qualifiers within art.

Week 2 – Discussion: *Theological Reflection*

The redemptive power of beauty and *Restoring broken themes of praise*.

- ❖ The relationship between truth, goodness and beauty, while considering various perspectives of beauty.
- ❖ What it means to live an aesthetic existence and how doing so can bring coherence to life amidst the struggle for justice.

Week 3 – Discussion: *Aesthetic Praxis*

Art in the public square and *Art in the life of the church*.

- ❖ The transformative nature of art within post-apartheid South Africa as well as its place in the life of the church.

Week 4 – Discussion and Wrap-up

- ❖ In light of De Gruchy’s work, we will talk in the context of our own aesthetic existence as artists at the University of Minnesota and in the Twin Cities area.

Annotated Bibliography

Each week we will also highlight one to two other works from a comprehensive bibliography that will add to our overall discussion. Authors will include Balthasar, Fujimura, Seervold, Ryken, L’Engle, Scurry, Viladesau and Turner.

John W. De Gruchy is Professor Emeritus of Christian Studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. His published works, among others, include *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (1979), *Christianity and Democracy* (1995), *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice* (2002) and *Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (2006).

WHEN & WHERE:

March 25th, April 8th, 15th and 22nd from 2:00-3:30pm. Location: MacLaurin Institute.
To Join, please email Ruth Pszwaro: pszwaro.ruth@gmail.com