
The collection of essays, *Reluctant Partners: Art and Religion in Dialogue*, was intended as a "reference and methods" volume. The authors are all involved, in various capacities, in shaping the current discourse on Judeo-Christian art and religion. They were brought together in a three-year research project organized by The Gallery at the American Bible Society (now the Museum of Biblical Art); sponsored by the Henry Luce Foundation, it was titled *New Directions in the Study of Art and Religion*. The purpose of the project was an attempt to define the parameters—past, present and future—of scholarly and public dialogue on the interrelation of art and religion. In our symposia we set out to explore basic questions about the field, such as these: Has our discourse about religion, and in particular religious art, changed in recent years (or even historically)? How do we conduct this discourse in classrooms and museums today? What are the limitations of the current approaches? Finally, how do we see the future: how would we like, in an ideal world, to see the relationship between art and religion being explored, exhibited, and taught? What changes in research and teaching, what new partnerships and collaborations, what new tools would be necessary or useful? As we delved into these questions, a need for a written assessment of the state of the field and the current methodologies employed by scholars, museum professionals, and educators working in different disciplines became evident.

*Reluctant Partners* was devised to fill that need. All the essays included in the section *Art and Religion: Facets of Dialogue* are derived from presentations given at the symposia. Each of them illustrates a different method of connecting art and religion. Robert Nelson discusses the historical course of academic discourse on the relationships—including indifference, antagonism, and conflict—of art, architecture, and art history with religion, starting in the mid-nineteenth century. My essay tracks the evolution of the dialogue proposed by museums, pointing to recent developments that indicate a new interest in exploring the religious in art. Vivian Mann proposes a revision of the common yet misguided belief that, in accordance with the Second Commandment, there is no Jewish art. Doug Adams offers a good example of borrowing other disciplines' methods to expand and refine our understanding of religious art, applying the literary-and-biblical-studies method of intertextuality to an analysis of Rembrandt's "The Return of the Prodigal Son." Marcus Burke also addresses other fields of study by looking at issues surrounding religion and the arts from a theological perspective.

Together these essays show that the tone of the discourse, and the specific research methods
employed, vary according to a number of factors. Primary among them is the intended audience. An art history lecture given at a secular university will have a different approach from one intended for students at a theological seminary. Presenting sacred art to a museum audience requires a different emphasis than discussing it with a religious congregation. Yet different groups can and should learn from each other. The disciplines of theology, art history, and museology put their distinctive stamp on these studies; read together, they illustrate the variety of possible roads to take when investigating the religion in art, or the artistic components of religion.

The two essays in the section Art and Religion: The State of the Field, by David Morgan and S. Brent Plate, were commissioned specifically for this volume. They respond to the need, expressed by students and scholars alike, for a systematic historiography, and for a vision of the future of the field. These essays act as bookends to the others by creating a larger context for art and religion as a field of study at this particular time. Or, to be more exact, they try to answer the question, posed by Morgan, of whether "there is, in fact, a history of art and religion as a field of study." Morgan's study answers that question with a nuanced yes, and traces its first systematic historiography, accompanied by comprehensive bibliographic notes. Plate's essay turns to the future by outlining a number of theories and themes currently at the forefront of religion-and-the-arts scholarship. While these themes propose possible future directions of inquiry, we hope that they can also be considered a starting point for a discussion about other, equally possible, avenues of investigation.

Reluctant Partners was conceived primarily as a tool to be used in the classroom, and I am happy to report that this past year it was one of four textbooks for the required first-year course on Art and Religion at Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. We hope that the combination of theoretical essays and test-cases offers a useful framework for students and scholars alike. At the same time, we hope that the volume may act as a springboard for further research. By sketching the historiography and the current landscape of our discourse on art and religion this effort may offer a starting point for a more engaged dialogue between scholars of different disciplines, who represent different types of institutions. Ultimately it may contribute to the coalescing of an integrated community of scholars, practitioners, students, and an interested general public.

As Sally Promey has aptly noted, our field continues to be characterized by a "historical absence of interdisciplinary collaboration between those invested in the academic study of art and religion—and especially the disinclination of art historians to come to scholarly terms with religion." We hope that Reluctant Partners, by bringing together the descriptive approach of historians and the prescriptive method of theologians, has laid the foundations for creative, constructive dialogue in the future.

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ENDNOTES

(Valparaiso, Ind.: Brauer Museum of Art, 2000), 5.