

BOOK

Art and Faith: A Theology of Making

AUTHOR

Makoto Fujimura

PUBLISHER

Yale University Press

PUBLICATION DATE

January 2021

SYNOPSIS [From the publisher]

Conceived over thirty years of painting and creating in his studio, this book is Makoto Fujimura's broad and deep exploration of creativity and the spiritual aspects of "making." What he does in the studio is theological work as much as it is aesthetic work. In between pouring precious, pulverized minerals onto handmade paper to create the prismatic, refractive surfaces of his art, he comes into the quiet space in the studio, in a discipline of awareness, waiting, prayer, and praise.

"I would be introduced to Christianity later in my life. The journey started like a trickle of water falling from a faucet; drip by drip, through literature and art, through important relationships, and by creating and making, I felt I was honoring the source of beauty and poetry in the world. It took me a while to connect what I was experiencing to the message of Christianity. It's actually amazing that it took that long, now that I think about the core message of the Bible."

"In the slow process of preparing the pigments and glue, which one must learn to do with the handmade paint that I use, I realized I was practicing a devotional liturgy of sorts."

"When I explain to strangers this sacred dimension of creating art, sometimes non-Christians have an easier time grasping it. Christians have many presuppositions about what Christianity is that are often based upon an analytical approach to understanding truth as a set of propositional beliefs, such that understanding and explaining take dominance over experiencing and intuiting."

"This is precisely why artists can open new doors of theological illumination in sharing what Christians call the Good News of the gospel to a world that has only a dim idea, if any, of what is so good about. Simply by spreading our wings of art to take flight, we 'prove' that gravity, or God, exists. When we make, we are taking that flight into the New. Artists, whether theists or atheists, know this truth deeply, and wrestle with this reality, inside as they create. When we make, we invite the abundance of God's world into the reality of scarcity all about us. What endures will require risk and dying to ourselves."

"My identity is rooted in the origin of Creation, and in that loving gaze of the Creator, who sees in us a 'greater love' before we are even aware: the creative impulse to shape the future."

"To create anything seems to assume that there is a beginning: a blank canvas or page, an empty theater. The impulse toward Making seems embedded in us from 'the beginning.' Such an impulse imbeds our vision in actual earthly materials. So our journey to 'know' God requires not just ideas and information, but actual making, to translate our ideas into real objects and physical movements."

"God's design in Eden, even before the Fall, was to sing Creation into being and invites God's creatures to sing with God, to co-create into the Creation."

"To be effective messengers of hope we must trust our inner voice, our intuition that speaks into the vast wastelands of our time. In this way we can train our imagination to see beyond tribal norms so we can take in the vista of the wider pastures of culture."

"While the impetus is noble, we must start from the correct biblical understanding of God's self-sufficiency. God does not need any of our institutions to exist, period; but God's exuberant love invites us, broken vessels of God's choosing, to co-create into the New Creation through Jesus."

"The Bible is a 'creative book' in that creativity plays a central role in advancing God's plan, but it is not to be interpreted 'creatively'; we are not to read the Bible to make it fit our own desires."

"The sacred role of creativity and a theology that is cast toward, and through, the New Creation in us can provide a path toward restoring imagination, as based in the sanctified realm of the Holy Spirit and as made possible by Christ's sacrifice and the Holy Spirit's gift as an invitation to co-create into the future of God."

"The path of creativity gives wings. The essential question is not whether we are religious, but whether we are making something. When we stop making, we become enslaved to market culture as mere consumers."

"All art points to the voice of abundance speaking into our parched souls in the desert of our industrial wilderness."

"God does not just mend, repair, and restore; God renews and generates, transcending our expectations of even what we desire, beyond what we dare to ask or imagine."

"At the heart of our journey toward the New is the resurrection vision of God. Every art recognizes that the work must be broken to be made new again. Minerals must be pulverized. Characters of a play must be tested beyond bearing. 'To be or not to be, that is the question,' we cry with Hamlet in desperation. A dancer's body will be broken over and over again for that one miraculous leap. In that journey of brokenness, we experience something that transcends the brokenness. In that signature oft the New given birth through the darkness, we recognize a mark of greatness given to enduring art worthy of all our attention. "

"God, for some mysterious reason, waits upon human making and chose to use our ability to make bread and wine to reveal Jesus's resurrected presence known at the table of the Eucharist. Imagine that! The resurrected Christ waits until we create, until the soil we cultivate is harvested, and until we make, to reveal himself to us . . . the making of both the bread and wine cannot be done casually or without much training . . . indeed, if one is to prepare bread and wine for God's feast, one better be the best at it . . . The Eucharist is a critical element in bridging the Creation and is a redemptive element that acts as a bridge to the New Creation narrative."

"God is ontologically and theologically the center of all things; therefore, we do not have to defend the center. No debate between a theist and a new atheist is going to change the center. The more that theists put themselves on the stage to defend God's existence, the more we fall into a false dichotomy that assumes God can exist or not, depending on our mindset. If God is the center, then that act in itself has no consequence in proving or disproving that existence. Instead of debating, Christians ought to be involved in Making. That experience is not to 'prove' God's existence, but to affirm the source of creativity and

imagination, thereby affirming the center. We then focus on what it means to become creatures of the New."

"God's 'discovery zone' for human thriving is an environment in which we can exercise creativity and discover our needs. God intends to affirm what we create there, to give us dominion over our own creation."

"This creative process illuminates how Christian faith is not a dogma to assent to but an experiential reality that marks our personal journey with Christ's journey of suffering and resurrection as a historical reality."

"After Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an artist had to question fundamentally why we create. Our creativity created atomic weapons, the most destructive power to destroy ourselves over and over. What Rothko was after was the profundity of the modern condition, this looking into the abyss and not finding hope."

"Our call is to see through the disfigurement and tragedy. Beauty is not cosmetic. Cosmetic beauty will not result in lasting happiness. We need to love even more through our wrinkled faces. People like Mother Teresa prove that love is the most beautiful gift. In her wrinkles, we see God's love. It is through this path of gaining wrinkles earned by loving people that we will see creativity that not only restores but redeems."