

Research projects

Theology Through the Arts

Since 1997, Bible Society has been supporting *Theology Through the Arts* (TTA), a research project within the Centre for Advanced Religious and Theological Studies in the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. It has been directed by the Revd Dr Jeremy Begbie, Associate Principal of Ridley Hall, with project managers Fiona Bond and Ally Barrett.

Phase 1 (1997–2000)

The project has sought to find ways in which various contemporary art forms can enrich the process of discovering and exploring the Christian faith. We have engaged in four main activities:

“Pod” groups

We commissioned four “pod” groups, each containing both theologians and artists, to work intensively together. The groups were designed to offer an opportunity for people at the cutting edge of different disciplines to engage with a theological subject, theme or text. Each group produced an art work for the *Sounding the Depths* festival (see below). In addition, each will be producing written reflections for a book which will give an account of the process of conversation and spell out the implications of this

kind of collaboration for the way theology is done in the future. The groups have included notable figures such as James MacMillan, Rowan Williams, Tom Wright, Catherine Pickstock, David Ford, and the Riding Lights Theatre Company.

Courses

Various multi-media courses in “theology through the arts” have been taught by Jeremy Begbie, in the UK, USA, Canada and South Africa.

Publications

Jeremy Begbie’s book, *Theology, Music and Time* (CUP) was launched at the Festival. It aims to show the potential of music for deepening our understanding of God and God’s action in the world. DLT (London) and Baker Books (Michigan) have published *Beholding the Glory* – a collection of essays exploring the incarnation through seven different art-forms. Edited by Jeremy Begbie, this is for a mid-level readership and was launched at the Festival to a large audience through multi-media presentations and performances by the authors.

Festival

Phase 1 culminated in an international arts festival in September 2000 in Cambridge *Sounding the Depths*. Over the whole week, a total of some two thousand people attended the large variety of events on offer. There

Bible Society supports a number of interesting research projects. Here we offer a report of work in progress...

were performances of the works, which arose out of the “pod” groups; exhibitions; seminars on composition, popular culture and visual art; and film showings leading to a whole day on film and theology, co-sponsored by Fuller Theological Seminary. It included a service broadcast on Radio 4, and the world premiere of *Parthenogenesis*, arising out of a collaboration between James MacMillan, Michael Symmons Roberts and Rowan Williams, and broadcast on Radio 3. Other participants in the Festival included David Ford, Tom Wright, Victoria Rance, Graham Cray, Jonathan Clarke, Riding Lights Theatre Company, the Psalm Drummers and John Sentamu.

Phase 2 (2000–2005)

The support of Bible Society, together with other donors, and the enormous interest shown in TTA amongst people in many parts of the world has made it possible for TTA to continue beyond September 2000. A five-year continuation of the project is envisaged. Phase 2 will combine two main activities – university-based programmes and church-based programmes.

From October 2000, TTA’s academic work has been based at St Mary’s College, University of St Andrews. It is being undertaken in partnership with St Andrews’ Theology and Imagination project. Together, the two projects will comprise a new Institute for

Theology, Imagination and the Arts. An extensive programme of seminars, colloquia, publishing projects and lecture series is planned.

TTA’s Church-based work will be undertaken through Ridley Hall, Cambridge. Courses and resources will be provided:

- for ordinands in training at Ridley Hall: to equip future leaders of the Church with new languages and skills drawn from the world of the arts, so that congregations will be able to discover, explore and learn the Christian faith in fresh and relevant ways.
- for youth workers training at Ridley Hall (in collaboration with the Centre for Youth Ministry): to equip youth and community workers with new languages and skills drawn from the world of the arts, so that the young people will be able to discover, explore and learn the Christian faith in fresh and relevant ways.

For more information, see the TTA website – www.theolarts.org

Or contact Jeremy Begbie, at Ridley Hall, Cambridge CB3 9HG.

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For information on the activities of the new Institute for Theology, Imagination and the Arts, contact the Director, Professor Trevor Hart, St Mary’s College, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9JU.

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