



Indonesian Journal of Theology

Vol. 10, No. 1 (Juli 2021): 160-163

E-ISSN: [2339-0751](https://doi.org/10.46567/ijt.v10i1.230)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46567/ijt.v10i1.230>

RESENSI BUKU

Green, Chris E.W. *All Things Beautiful: An Aesthetic Christology*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021. x + 211

Through this theological yet strangely tender exposition of the Christian liturgical calendar, Pentecostal liturgical theologian Chris Green has constructed what he calls, “an ecumenical aesthetic Christology” (2, 5).

To best review this book, Green’s literary project warrants not only unpacking but placement within his broader theological work. While Green began and continues his ministerial career as a Classical Pentecostal pastor and theologian (presently Professor of Public Theology at Southeastern University [USA]; an Assemblies of God institution), his delivery platforms, engagements, and influence has steadily broadened over the past decade within more sacramental-oriented traditions. He has moreover been growing as both a published poet and talented paint artist (www.cewgreen.com). He is also Director for St Anthony Institute of Theology, Philosophy and Liturgics, and teaching pastor at Sanctuary Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma (USA) (ix).

Green attempts his ecumenical aims through centering the book’s 10 chapters around the church calendar; each chapter focused on either a liturgical season or feast day. Hence, besides the Introduction and Conclusion, his chapters proceed with Advent (ch. 1), Christmas (ch. 2), Epiphany and the first stretch of Ordinary Time (ch. 3), Ash Wednesday (ch. 4), Lent (ch. 5), Good Friday (ch. 6), Easter (ch. 7), Ascension Day (ch. 8), Pentecost (ch. 9), followed by the second longer season of Ordinary Time (ch. 10). In this manner, Green thus strives towards a Christology that “honors the Christian theological tradition” (2, 4). As amply illustrated throughout the book’s prose, he moreover exemplifies this ecumenical ethos through his consistent engagement with theological voices and spiritualities throughout Christian tradition including Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, Protestantism, and varied patristic and medieval era writers.

On one hand—especially if we keep in mind that aesthetical beauty comes through qualities such as symmetry, harmony, and well-timed rhythm—Green already achieves his aesthetic aims through the preceding themes. In manners *affectively*

convincing, he thus suggests the imperative role that practicing the Christian calendar plays not only within Christian formation but towards Christology. For I would argue with Green that the calendar, *if rightly practiced*, forcefully indoctrinates and habituates us within the “storied” life of Christian faith within the mission of God shown in Christ and experienced through His Spirit (3).

Green more compellingly constructs this aesthetic Christology by robustly placing each chapter’s liturgical calendar theme *in conversation* with literary and visual arts; though primarily the latter. In each chapter, he thus brings Christology and sacred time into conversation with the painting arts and film-making (2, 169). Yet Green generally nuances the latter, primarily engaging the work of legendary film director, Terence Malik, whose films substantially explore Christian theological themes in ways that make for stunningly beautiful choreography, sound, and image. Then within each chapter, he insightfully explicates how a discussed artwork aesthetically clarifies the Christological themes that that liturgical season or feast day readily exemplifies. For example, I am writing a few lines here on Christmas Day, and thus skimming through Green’s “Christmas” chapter. There, he chiefly reflects on Malik’s *Tree of Life* film, noting how its themes of loss, healing and redemption, powerfully intimate an approach to Christmas Day in ways stressing its often-overlooked message of that Christ comes not to deliver us out of this fleshly world, but rather, heal it and our flesh; that both may show forth the glory of God (25-28, 36-37).

I should point out four other unique features to Green’s unique Christology. First is how he innovatively uses the Christian calendar as a theological resource for constructing a theology of Christ; thereby positing its hermeneutical role within Christian tradition via an ecumenical reading of Scripture. Second, Green therefore convincingly demonstrates the “storied” character and aims of Christian liturgical time for forming believers within the storied life of Christ and God’s triune mission of redemption that the calendar narrates (3). Third, though he does not explicitly use the concept, Green’s *cultural-artifacts engaging* theological method well demonstrates the ancient *spermatikos logos* (“seed of the Word) doctrine. Hence, he strives to show how we might engage cultural artworks as theological resources. Though to be sure, throughout each chapter, Green consistently demonstrates cultural critique where cultural aesthetics either clearly or too often subtly form people in directions counter to the Christian story narrated through the calendar. Fourth, these features thus also convey a theological anthropology of human creativity, grounded in the cosmic-reaching, healing aims of Christ our redeemer (171-173).

I must admit I was surprised that this work is not quite the *academically rigorous* monograph I was anticipating; its literary style

falls far more within a more popular oriented devotional style; albeit targeted for fairly educated readers and/or with the capacity or interest towards engaging some scholarly theological discussion. Yet truth be told, readers shall find it deeply edifying, even with its oftentimes hard wood stoic-feeling. For what Green delivers us is moreover what I would call, a firm Christological realism. For example, through the book's final two pages, he notes how a "worthwhile Christology" should, "like good art," surprise us in ways that "leave us all at once disturbed and wondering" (173). He thus concludes through what he calls an "irreverent responsive prayer" to "irreverent and seemingly unresponsive God." On the final page Green thus extolls the wisdom of God though through the theme of lament as a seeming parody of Romans 11:33, "Oh the nonsense and madness of God . . . Your judgements disenchant us . . . and you ever live to confound our aspirations" (174).

I therefore also sense that Green has moreover striven to construct a Christology that is closer to "primary"-level theological experience rather than secondary-level theological reflection; though of course this work is both deeply immediately experiential and reflective. Hence, we could classify his book as indeed a devotionally-oriented "spiritual exercise," structured around the Christian calendar; from which it derives its placement within the systematic category of Christology. This approach itself, is innovative, long over-due, and helpful towards better bridging the doctrine of Christ to Christian worship and its liturgical practices of worship. Through his innovative aesthetically-tuned theological method, Green is also I believe, striving to "re-oralize" academic theologizing back within the more grassroots level of primary level theologizing and cultural engagement. And in the process, providing us methodological examples on how we might go about this; primarily through practicing the Christian calendar in ways that conversely foster hearing and seeing the redemptive work of Christ operating through the more mundane mediums of cultural engagement within the world we share with others—far beyond our sacred spaces and times of formal Christian worship.

One drawback to Green's prose that limits its immediate applicability for Majority World readers is that he thickly writes within and for the North American setting; particularly, the United States. Yet, I believe all readers, especially here in Southeast Asia, can still beneficially extrapolate he aesthetically tuned Christology towards theological engagement with local cultural arts. Hence, we can confidently tap on his inspiring exposition for conversely constructing Asian aesthetic Christologies; formed and emerging from "a spirited, searching conversation between theology and art," presuming the "inner kinship" between these facets through the Spirit of Christ who through our own creative labors—makes all things beautiful for our Father's glory (169, 170-173). I therefore

warmly recommend this sublime artwork for not only those involved in scholarly theological endeavors, but particularly for church ministry auctioneers; specifically, as an aid to preaching and liturgical planning throughout the year. And also, as I have already mentioned, general readers should find within Green's prose, much beauty and wisdom for renewing their soul before God; who makes all things beautiful—*in his time*.

Monte Lee Rice

Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Singapore