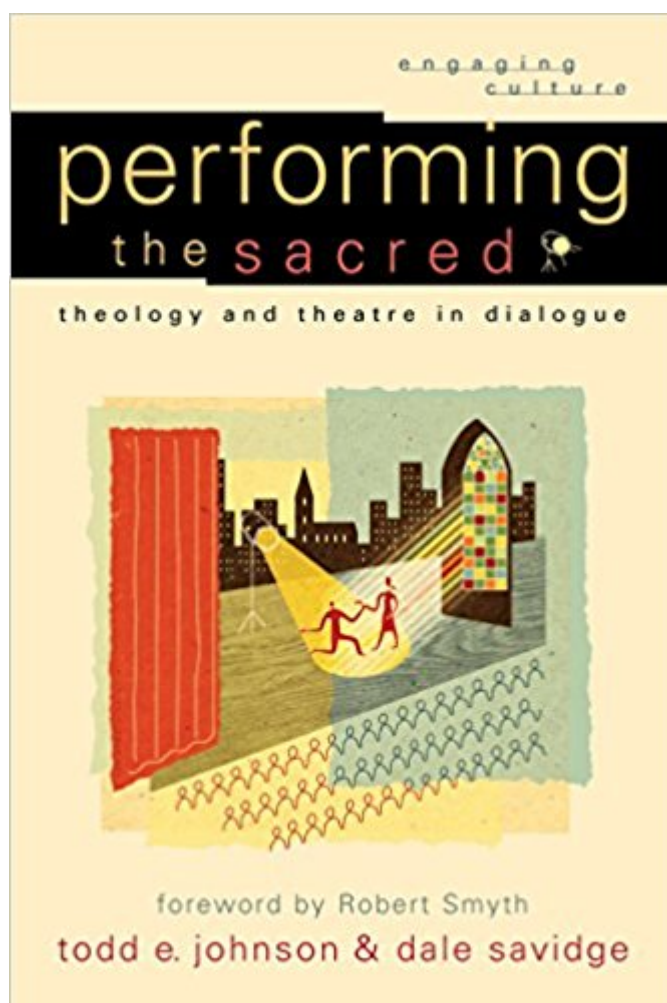


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Performing The Sacred (Engaging Culture): Theology And Theatre In Dialogue



Synopsis

Christian theatre has rich roots, from ancient Hebrew dramas to medieval plays, but where does it fit in today's media-saturated society? *Performing the Sacred* is a fascinating dialogue between a theologian and theatre artist, offering the first full-scale exploration of theatre and theology. The authors illuminate the importance of live performance in a virtual world, of preserving the ancient art form of storytelling by becoming the story. Theologically, theatre reflects Christianity's central doctrines--incarnation, community, and presence--enhancing the human creative experience and simultaneously engaging viewers on multiple levels. This Engaging Culture series title will be a key volume for those interested in theatre as well as drama practitioners, worship leaders, and culture makers.

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Customer Reviews

Purchased as a gift. Arrived in good condition Enthusiastically received by worship arts pastor

This is a fascinating exploration of the intersection of spirituality and theatre. Well written and pushing the boundaries.

Though this area of theology is growing and I wrestle with it all the times, I admire Johnson's novel attempt at making a lucid presentation

I have a friend who once asked an actor what his religion was, and the actor replied, "The theatre is my church." If you're the kind of person who is equally moved when attending either a church service or a serious play, this book is for you. Or, if you are like the actor and wonder why you GET MORE FROM a play than a church service, you'll definitely want to pick up this book. Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge have brought together a wonderful set of perspectives in *PERFORMING THE SACRED: THEOLOGY AND THEATRE IN DIALOGUE* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2009). This book is part of BakerAcademic's Engaging Culture series, which the series' editors describe as resources to "help Christians respond with theological discernment to our contemporary culture." Johnson is a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, while Savidge teaches theater at North Greenville University as he serves as executive director of Christians in Theatre Arts (CITA). The book is divided into four main sections. First Dale Savidge gives us a historical overview of the relationship between theatre and Christianity through the centuries. Second Todd E. Johnson looks at theological themes that are especially present in theatre (incarnation, community, and presence). Third Todd E. Johnson looks at why visual and recorded media will never completely win out over live theater. In this section, he makes some interesting observations from a theatre perspective on why house churches and emerging churches are thriving alongside mega churches and their video campuses. Four Dale Savidge looks at the common suspicions between actors and churches that leads to mutual alienation. In a final chapter the two discuss what the church can learn, and cannot learn, from theatre in communicating God's story to the world. This is a lively, interesting discussion of the interplay between the arts (whether visual or performing) and theology and should appeal to anyone interested in a fresh perspective on either. Theatre classes that include segments on history and religion might consider purchasing the book, while seminary classes on drama and the arts should definitely put it on the reading list. Advocates of house churches and emerging churches should also familiarize themselves with Johnson and Savidge's important argument.

'Performing the Sacred: theology and theatre in dialogue' is an excellent starting point for anyone

interested in looking for links between theatre and theology. In the book's introduction, co-authors, professors, and friends Todd E. Johnson and Dale Savidge contend that 'theology can be understood through the lens of theatre and that theatre can be understood through the lens of theology' (11). The main thrust of their argument is that the theatre embodies key aspects of the Christian faith: incarnation, community, and presence. Similar to the way actors inhabit the words of a script through speech and movement, Christ, the eternal Word, took on flesh and became the Word incarnate. The audience and actors, at least for the duration of the play, form a type of community--a truth that points to the communal nature of the Trinity. And, because theatre is traditionally understood to involve a live performance, the audience and actors are present to one another in a way that echoes God's presence in the world. The book is well-researched and contains a rich bibliography for those wishing to delve even more deeply into this growing field. Savidge and Johnson move beyond mere theory by referring to particular works of theatre throughout the book. The teaching spirit of both comes through in the book's systematic structure and sometimes conversational tone. There is also a pastoral quality present, particularly from Savidge. In a chapter entitled, 'The Christian at Work', Savidge writes about some of the struggles Christian playwrights and actors face (for example, questions of discernment about what to write or perform) and encourages them to remember that God is present in the face of challenges and decisions. In short, 'Performing the Sacred' is an engaging and understandable introduction to the ongoing conversation between theologians and theatre artists.

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