

*The Religious Art of Andy Warhol*. Jane Daggett Dillenger. New York: Continuum, 1998, 128 pp., with 80 full color plates and photographs, and notes, hardback.

"Warhol, the Pop artist, the creator of religious art? Extraordinary." That question from the preface hooked me, and Dillenger kept my interest from the first page to the last. Full of elegant photographs and prints, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol* is one of the more fascinating art books I've picked up in years.

Professor Emerita of Visual Arts and Theology at the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Jane Daggett Dillenger is well-qualified to tackle this unique portrayal of an unfamiliar side of Andy Warhol. Her prose is clean and engaging, not overly academic while still being thorough. Beginning with a short but informative overview of "the Pope of Pop" and the history of Abstract and Pop Art in general, Dillenger then examines the entire corpus of Warhol's "religious paintings," delving deeply into this quiet and religious side of Andy Warhol and presenting an aspect of his character seldom seen in the media. A minor criticism concerning content, while Dillenger does have some excellent quotes from the artist, I wish the selections were longer and more plentiful. However, in the endnotes, she does list sources for further reading.

Along with a straightforward description of each piece of art, Dillenger speculates unabashedly on what lay behind many of the mostly large-scale works; these speculations are in most cases acknowledged as such and are thoughtful and well-argued. A few times, however, Dillenger seems overly-enamored with Warhol and less critical, using phrases such as "the saintly simpleton side," "spiritually mature," "detached innocence and humility." "The enigma of Warhol's two-sided personality remains," she writes, "but with some knowledge of the spiritual side of the artist, our viewing of his art is given another dimension.... Warhol's beautiful, moving, exhilarating last works, a cycle of profoundly religious paintings by one of the great artists of the century," (p. 11).

But, by the end of Dillenger's biography of the last years of Andy Warhol, it becomes evident that the artist's religious work is more indicative of an anguished soul searching for some assurance of salvation and, at the same time, spiraling ever deeper into obsessive paranoia like a character from a Flannery O'Connor novel. In spite of this last grand flourish of religious artistic creativity, it appears Warhol died a confused soul filled with spiritual doubts, an unsettled faith, and little hope for anything beyond this life of fear, suffering, and deep existential angst.

Dillenger's elegant presentation and analysis of the religious art of Andy Warhol provides a hard lesson for us. There are artists among us who work in the shadows of our churches, in our cities, ignored by Christian communities, troubled individuals often difficult to understand and uncomfortable to be around. J. S. Bach, William Blake, Vincent van Gogh, Andy Warhol, how sad the Christian community marginalized them or left them alone, criticized their work in an unloving spirit, blindly shunned them out of fear or misunderstanding.

Where is our compassion? As Christians and Christian communities, we need to be a sanctuary of simplicity and caring for the artists around us, seeking *them* out, the lonely artists often exploited or manipulated by an uncaring media—*especially* those whose art exhibits a seeking after God, that displays a soul seeking salvation, some meaning in life, unconditional love.

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