

TriBakery Group: Christians & Kitsch #6

Compiled by Kirk Irwin

Scripture:

“Your word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.”

Psalm 119:11

“...He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written...Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.”

Luke 4:16b-17, 210

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”

Psalm 19:7-10

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

I John 1:1-3

Quotes:

“During the nineteenth century, the Bible became the center of a material Protestantism that depended on the physical senses to produce religious emotion. American printers and publishers created a book that was more than a compilation of canonical scriptures. Biblical commentaries, illustrations, family records, essays on biblical life, picture albums, temperance pledges, and theological treatises were added to ‘clarify’ the basic biblical text and satisfy family needs. Bound in leather and fastened with a golden clasp, family Bibles were displayed on parlor tables as signs of domestic piety and taste.”

Colleen McDannell, from Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America, as found on p 25 in A Profound Weakness: Christians & Kitsch

“Much of the reverence of the Bible in the 19th century was simply a basic respect for knowledge and the printed word. Association with the book meant association with knowledge. Simply owning, or even being in the presence of, books represented good ‘breeding’ and affluence, whether anyone ever read them or not. It is the same today for many people...I remember a large, heavy black book with gold decorations on the cover that always stood by itself on a small fancy table in my grandparents’ parlour in Innisfail, Alberta. I remember looking at it and being allowed to open it, but I don’t recollect ever seeing anyone actually reading it. The adults just called it ‘the family Bible’ and because they always told me to be careful of it, and because it was so big, I knew it must be very important.”

Betty Spackman, p26-27, A Profound Weakness: Christians and Kitsch

“The book as a receptacle of knowledge is as real a container ‘on the shelf’ as a tin of biscuits or a jar of coffee. It’s a possession to be stored as a resource or displayed as a decoration – a sign of social status, education and wealth – a cultural icon. Christians often have large collections of Bibles and Bible commentaries that may or may not give an indication of how much scripture they actually read, know or practice...Taken to the extreme, the book itself can become the thing worshipped. For many it is a sacred object and to treat it in any way that might be seen as disrespectful is considered sacrilegious and even spiritually dangerous. This is understandable considering that we set out our belief systems in the things we write, and the mutilating or burning of any book that enshrines people’s beliefs or freedoms, especially as a deliberate act of aggression or discrimination, is reprehensible.”

Betty Spackman, p27 & 30, A Profound Weakness: Christians and Kitsch

Questions: What place does the physical world...the matter which makes up this earth...play in our theology? Is the spiritual more important than the physical? What are the implications of the answer to the last questions? How much importance does the church place on the physical? As artists we place a lot of importance on the physical, how do we thoughtfully and graciously engage the misconceptions of the physical in the church? Where is the balance between a good understanding of the spiritual and the physical in the Christian worldview? How is the spiritual world reflected in the physical world? How is the physical world reflected in the spiritual? Other thoughts and comments?