



A More Beautiful Question: The Spiritual in Poetry and Art

Glenn Hughes

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As more and more people in North America and Europe have distanced themselves from mainstream religious traditions over the past centuries, a “crisis of faith” has emerged and garnered much attention. But Glenn Hughes, author of *A More Beautiful Question: The Spiritual in Poetry and Art*, contends that despite the withering popularity of faith-based worldviews, our times do not evince a decline in spirituality. One need only consider the search for “alternative” religious symbolisms, as well as the growth of groups espousing fundamentalist religious viewpoints, to recognize that spiritual concerns remain a vibrant part of life in Western culture.

Hughes offers the idea that the modern “crisis of faith” is not a matter of vanishing spiritual concerns and energy but rather of their disorientation, even as they remain pervasive forces in human affairs. And because art is the most effective medium for spiritual evocation, it is our most significant touchstone for examining this spiritual disorientation, just as it remains a primary source of inspiration for spiritual experience.

A More Beautiful Question is concerned with how art, and especially poetry, functions as a vehicle of spiritual expression in today’s modern cultures. The book considers the meeting points of art, poetry, religion, and philosophy, in part through examining the treatments of consciousness, transcendence, and art in the writings of twentieth-century philosophers Eric Voegelin and Bernard Lonergan. A major portion of *A More Beautiful Question* is devoted to detailed “case studies” of three influential modern poets: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, and T. S. Eliot. In these and its other chapters, the book examines the human need for artistic symbols that evoke the mystery of transcendence, the ways in which poetry and art illuminate the spiritual meanings of freedom, and the benefits of an individual’s loving study of great literature and art.

A More Beautiful Question has a distinctive aim—to clarify the spiritual functions of art and poetry in relation to contemporary confusion about transcendent reality—and it meets that goal in a manner accessible by the layperson as well as the scholar. By examining how the best art and poetry address our need for spiritual orientation, this book makes a valuable contribution to the philosophies of art, literature, and religion, and brings deserved attention to the significance of the “spiritual” in the study of these disciplines.

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