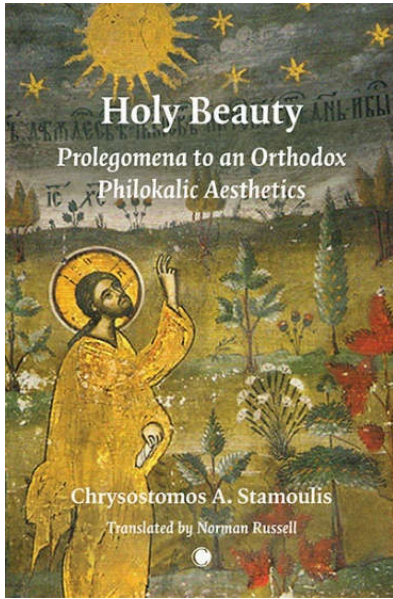


**Chrystomos A. Stamoulis. *Holy Beauty: Prolegomena to an Orthodox Philokalic Aesthetics*. Translated by Norman Russell. Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke & Co. 2022.**



*Reviewed by the Rev. S. C. Sharman, PhD*

Dr Chrystomos Stamoulis is the Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, where he has also served as Professor of Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology. He was educated at the University of Belgrade, Serbia (bachelor's degree), the University of Durham, UK (master's degree) and Aristotle University (bachelor's degree and doctor of philosophy). He is the author of a number of scholarly books and articles. Among them are *What Business has the Fox at the Bazaar? Essays on the Dialogue of Orthodoxy with Politics, Culture and the City* (2016) and *Love and Death: An Essay on the Incarnation* (2019). The translator, Norman Russell, is an honorary Research fellow of St Stephen's House, University of Oxford, and Professor of Patrology at the Istituto Teologico "Santa Eufemia di Calcedonia" Bologna.

The author of this excellent book sets himself the task of re-connecting beauty and holiness within the Orthodox tradition. His book consists of a translator's introduction, an author's preface and nine chapters in three parts. The author's preface is a valuable introduction to the whole book in which he sets forth his programme for his book. He defines 'philokalia' as 'the love of the beautiful (p xiii). Further, he discusses the connections between beauty, goodness, holiness and Orthodoxy, writing, "The truth of the matter, as revealed in the Church's liturgical life, paints a different picture, a reality that, without denying the liturgical and ascetic character of the arts within Orthodoxy,

constantly reveals the Church of Christ as a place of living experience, as the supreme realm of the encounter with the beauty that generates emotion, awakens the senses, and creates a powerful experience of the ecclesial event.' (p xiv) His nine chapters examines a number of Fathers and theologians including Kostas Zouraris, Father Alexander Schmemmann, Nilos Matsoukas, Dionysius the Areopagite, Nikos Gabriel Pentzikis, the Elder Sophrony of Essex and the Elder Porphyrios. Other Fathers and theologians who are discussed in this book are St Cyril of Alexandria, St John Damascene, St Silouan the Athonite, St Maximos the Confessor, St Gregory Palamas, George Seferis, a poet, and Zissimos Lorentzatos. T S Eliot appears on his pages with his poem *Portrait of a Lady*. (pp 161-2) The book concludes with a 'Who's who' and a Select Bibliography. The 'Who's who' usefully identifies the various writers who appear in the book.

The book is carefully and thoroughly argued. Dr Stamoulis examines each writer's views on beauty, goodness and holiness within the world of Orthodox theology and life. He is writing as an Orthodox thinker and his intended audience consists of Orthodox readers. He does concede that non-Orthodox might be interested in his work. As we read his analysis, we begin to find his own views. Orthodoxy enables a unity of beauty, goodness and holiness. He rejects views which would separate beauty from goodness and holiness. These views, he suggests, separate beauty from God. He frequently refers his readers to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ whose assumption of humanity enables an appreciation of beauty. He writes about church buildings and describes how a sacred building, built of the best materials and with the prayers of the builders, brings beauty and holiness together. A working knowledge of the theologians whom Stamoulis discusses is essential for comprehending fully the argument of this excellent book. It is not a book written for readers who do not have this background knowledge although it can be understood as an introduction to these authors. Nevertheless, this book will benefit readers who will read and reread the book. It is worth the effort.

This reviewer believes that he can illustrate the theme of this book, namely, the task of uniting beauty, goodness and holiness within Orthodoxy, by means of a story. In a Balkan nation, the parish church in a small village houses a treasured Icon of the Theotokos. The Icon has been in the church since time out of mind. The people of the village have forgotten its origin and the name of

the artist who wrote it. It is their Icon; they venerate it. They light candles in front of it and say their prayers near it. It is in an obscure corner of their church and has become darkened by age and candle smoke. Then the government removes the Icon and places it in the national art gallery. The curators clean the Icon removing the darkness of ages and the smoke of countless candles. It now hangs in a gallery with other Icons and paintings. Its beauty as a work of art is recognised; it is still an Icon but the understanding of its holiness which surrounded it in the Church is no longer recognised. Dr Stamoulis rejects the separation of beauty and holiness in the treatment of the Icon and urges that the Icon be returned to Its place in the Church where both Its beauty and holiness may be recognised.

*About the reviewer:* Father Stephen Sharman is a priest at St. Nicholas parish in Narol, Manitoba. He received his PhD from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in 2013. The title of his dissertation was *Visions of Light in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*.