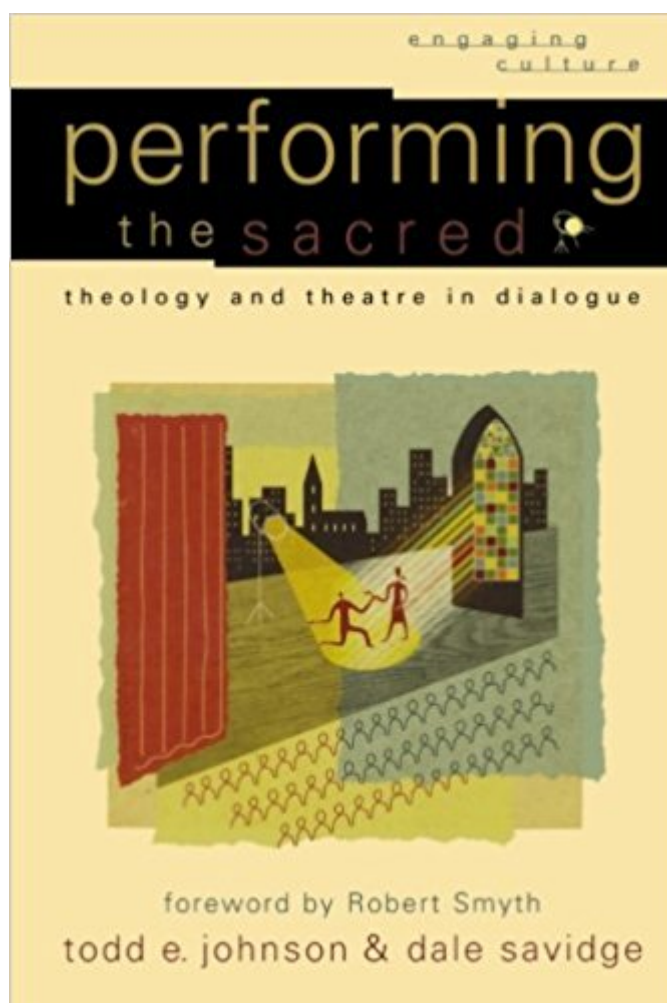


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# Performing The Sacred: Theology And Theatre In Dialogue (Engaging Culture)



## Synopsis

Christian theatre has rich roots, from ancient Hebrew dramas to medieval plays, but where does it fit in today's mediasaturated society? *Performing the Sacred* is a fascinating dialogue between a theologian and theatre artist, offering the first fullscale 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 doctrinesincarnation, community, and presenceenhancing 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Johnson and Savidge have given Christians a unique gift with *Performing the Sacred*. Their clear love of theatre and deep faith in Jesus intersect to reveal the wonders hidden in a live performance. They remind us that when theology and theatre meet the result is insight into what it means to be human and a beautiful doxology to our God."--David McFadzean, Hollywood producer/writer; cocreator of the television series *Home Improvement*"Performance theory, history, criticism, theology, and worship are all brought together in a refreshing new look at the old art of live theatre in *Performing the Sacred*. It is not only an entertaining read by itself but also a unique and

much-needed text for university theatre arts courses."--Gillette Elvgren, Regent University "We have been waiting years and years for theatre artists and Christian theologians to get back into serious dialogue, and there is hardly anyone better prepared to lead us than Todd Johnson and Dale Savidge. This book is a hugely significant conversation starter. Decades from now we will be saying that the conversation began with this book."--Jeff Barker, Northwestern College "The panoramic sweep of more than twenty centuries of theatre and theology is a tour de force. Christian playgoers, after reading this book, will come to understand and appreciate even more deeply the theological dynamics of incarnation, Trinity, and presence at the heart of theatre. Performing the Sacred deserves a standing ovation!"--Peter Gilmour, Institute of Pastoral Studies, Loyola University Chicago "A landmark book--the first full-length study that explores contemporary live theatre from the perspective and experience of both the theologian and the theatre artist. Performing the Sacred explores profound theological issues, but it never loses sight of the direct and immediate encounter between theatre artists and their audiences--and how lives change as a result of that real presence."--Peter L. Senkbeil, Concordia University, Irvine, California

Todd E. Johnson (Ph.D., University of Notre Dame) is the William K. and Delores S. Brehm Associate Professor of Worship, Theology, and the Arts at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is an ordained minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church and the editor of *The Conviction of Things Not Seen*. Dale Savidge (Ph.D., University of South Carolina) is the executive director and founding member of Christians in Theatre Arts (C.I.T.A.). He is professor of theatre and chair of the theatre arts department at North Greenville University and has traveled the world as a theatre artist.

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: Baker Academic, 2009). This book is part of Baker Academic'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. Fourth 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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